

*If You Meet the Buddha on the Road: Buddhism, Politics, and Violence.* By Michael Jerryson. Oxford University Press, 2018. 240 pages. \$115 cloth; ebook available.

Over the last twenty years, religious studies professor Michael Jerryson has edited and written several books that explore the complex relationship between religion and violence, making him one of the leading experts on this issue. In his book, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road*, Jerryson continues his examination of this subject in the specific context of Buddhism, something he had already done in works such as *Buddhist Warfare* (2010), *Buddhist Fury* (2011), and his recently published *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World* (2020). As he observes in the introduction to the book, “there is a pervasive mindset that Buddhists and Buddhism are representations of peace” (1). Many view the examples of violence in Buddhist countries like the ongoing genocide of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar as not representative of Buddhism, but rather the actions of some “bad Buddhists.” The main goal of *If You Meet the Buddha* is to offer an exhaustive examination of this fallacious belief, and to explore how Buddhists have historically articulated and justified war, suppressive regimes, and other types of violence (including gender discrimination). Jerryson accomplishes this by examining six different approaches to Buddhist understandings of violence.

Chapter 1 analyzes various doctrinal justifications of violence as found in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna scriptures. Chapter 2 surveys the history of Buddhist support for autocratic regimes that employ violence to legitimize their power, using as a case study the Thai monarchy under King Bhumibol. Chapter 3 explores current debates about the lack of female ordination in Theravāda countries in the context of gender discrimination as a form of social violence, as well as the physical violence inflicted on women who are fighting for gender equality in the Sangha.

Chapter 4 offers a study of the ways in which monks can justify and even operate within the confines of the military (as chaplains, for example). Chapter 5 slightly expands the scope of the book by investigating coping mechanisms of Buddhists and Muslims in areas where those traditions have had interreligious strife. Finally, chapter 6 scrutinizes the issue of blasphemy, in the context of Buddhist justification of violence as a response to what some consider disrespect of Buddhist doctrines, relics, and/or images.

While the various chapters offer interesting insights into the complex relationship between Buddhism and violence, it is probably the conclusion where Jerryson presents the most interesting insight of the book. In his discussion of the Burmese monk U Wirathu, Jerryson offers a different approach to the explanation of the intersection of religion and violence, one that goes beyond a study of doctrine or practice, and that

examines the role that authority and charisma play in justifying violence. (U Wirathu is the “Face Buddhist of Terror” according to *Time* magazine; he infamously incited violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority in Burma and became the voice of a radical and violent Buddhist nationalist discourse.) In Jerryson’s words, “the symbolic power of U Wirathu’s pronouncements is significantly enhanced because of the cultural reverence attached to his vocation as a Buddhist monk” (177). The legitimacy of his discourse is not based on scripture or traditional Buddhist practice, but on his appeal “to the more nebulous notion of a Buddhist cultural and political identity . . . a Burmese Buddhist identity” (177). For Jerryson, monks like Wirathu, “draw upon scriptures and rituals for their authority, but they become embodied authorities independent of these sources” (186). It is by adding this third aspect—charisma—that we can explain the impact that violent discourses like those of Wirathu can exert in Buddhist countries.

Ultimately, for Jerryson, if Buddhism is going to counter violent discourses like the ones found in Myanmar, Thailand, or Sri Lanka, it is not by appealing to scriptural orthodoxy or traditional orthopraxy. Rather it will occur by generating new discourses that use the cultural authority vested in the monastic community to find alternative and more inclusive views of Buddhist communities.

This is a good book to use in any undergraduate course that explores the topic of religion and violence, in general, and how this issue is understood in a Buddhist context, in particular. It will also engage a general audience wanting to learn more about the role that violence plays in lived Buddhism.

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*Envisioning a Tibetan Luminary: The Life of a Modern Bönpo Saint.* By William M. Gorvine. Oxford University Press, 2019. 328 pages. \$105.00 cloth; \$36.95 paper; ebook available.

The academic study of Tibetan religion to this point has focused almost exclusively on traditions that identify themselves to a large extent with Buddhism. In this book, William Gorvine offers a welcome and nuanced exploration of the Bön tradition, which calls itself the “indigenous” or “pre-Buddhist” religion of Tibet. Gorvine unpacks these claims as he examines the life and influence of Shardza Tashi Gyaltzen (1859–1936), the most important individual in the Bön lineage in the modern era. At the same time, he provides a window into the rich and underappreciated world of Bön literature. In this regard, the greatest contribution of *Envisioning a Tibetan Luminary* is enlarging our understanding of the expansive, and woefully understudied, Bön tradition,