

OA.1072

Aung San Suu Kyi, 'Liberty', the first of the five 2011 Reith Lectures on 'Securing Freedom', broadcast 28 June 2011, and 15 July 2011

'Whenever I was asked at the end of each stretch of house arrest how it felt to be free, I would answer that I felt no different, because my mind had always been free. I have spoken out often of the inner freedom that comes out from following a course in harmony with one's conscience. Isaiah Berlin warned against the dangers of the internalisation of freedom. He said: "Spiritual freedom, like moral victory, must be distinguished from a more fundamental sense of freedom, and a more ordinary sense of victory, otherwise there will be a danger of confusion in theory and justification of oppression in practice, in the name of liberty itself" [Liberty, p. 32].

'There is certainly a danger that the acceptance of spiritual freedom as a satisfactory substitute for all other freedoms could lead to passivity and resignation. But an inner sense of freedom can reinforce a practical drive for the more fundamental freedoms, in the form of human rights and rule of law. Buddhism teaches that the ultimate liberation is liberation from all desire. It could be argued, therefore, that the teachings of the Buddha are inimical to movements that are based on the desire for freedom in the form of human rights and political reform. However, when the Buddhist monks of Burma went on a metta – that is, lovingkindness – march in 2007, they were protesting against the sudden steep rise in the price of fuel that had led to a devastating rise in food prices. They were using the spiritual authority to move for the basic right of the people to affordable food. The belief in spiritual freedom does not have to mean an indifference to the practical need for the basic rights and freedoms that are generally seen as necessary that human beings may live like human beings.'