



**TURNING WHEEL**  
*Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship*

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# Fundamentalism



*Who's Calling Who  
"Fundamentalist"?*

*The Narrowed Mind*

*Fundamentalists I Have  
Known and Loved*

*Report from a  
Cult Survivor*

**Plus:**

*Albanian Resisters  
in Serbia*

*Aung San Suu Kyi's  
Statement upon Release  
from House Arrest*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

We Buddhists place a lot of emphasis on being open—to all opinions, to the air, the sounds around us, our emotions, our pain. Equanimity is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice—and one of its fruits. We try to “stay open” to people we disagree with. But the truth is, I often dismiss people whose views are radically, *fundamentally*, different from my own.

I listen occasionally to Rush Limbaugh, the premier of right-wing radio. I do it primarily to know what his listeners are saying. I’m fascinated by the fact that he has such a huge following. What are they getting from him?

They hate “liberals” (and these days, the word “liberal” packs as much punch “Communist” did a decade ago). They hate “femi-nazis.” As I “listen” (*am* I listening?), I feel smug. I’m *certain* I know better than they about the world and what we should do about our shared problems. But as I continue to listen, I get an eerie feeling: those “ignorant” listeners feel the same way about me and my opinions. They feel smug. They’re *certain* they know better than I...

Now and then, I drop my wall of We-Know-Better-Than-You, and see it with their eyes. I see why the housewife from rural Iowa thinks feminists are out to destroy her family life. I can see why the man from Idaho thinks the U.S. is in a Godless, immoral tailspin, and all we need to do is get back to Jesus. But what would it mean to *really* listen? I might have to let go of some cherished beliefs, and risk not being accepted by my group: the people I identify with.

Recently, I read an article called “A New Spirit Among Men” (*San Jose Mercury*, 7/19/95). An evangelical Christian organization, “The Promise Keepers,” has grown 400% each year over the last four years. Organizers expect to draw half a million men to gatherings in the U.S. this year. “I’m on my knees praying to God that my family not be divided with job stress and pressure to achieve the American Dream,” says a new recruit. Group leaders say they are tapping a “mass identity crisis” among men who feel “isolated and threatened by a society in transition.” Their goals? “We want men to be more ‘Christlike’ in their dealings with spouses, children, friends *and people of different races*. In fact, one of the seven promises the Promise Keepers make is to ‘reach beyond racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of Biblical unity.’”

Are these the same Christian “fundamentalists” I tend to criticize? Even if the reporter is putting a happy face on this movement, there’s *something* here I can understand, fundamentally agree with.

All this identifying is OK, but when push comes to shove, can I come to terms with those I really disagree with? A big part of Buddhist practice is compassion: stepping into everyone else’s shoes. But what if they refuse to step into mine? What are my limits? What would I do if someone’s religion called for the killing of all my friends? If my family was murdered before my eyes, let’s say?

“In a true dialogue, both sides are willing to change,” says Thich Nhat Han in his new book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. “...Truth can be received from outside of—not only within—our own group. If we do not believe that ...if we think we monopolize the truth and we still organize a dialogue, it is not authentic.”

Is Nhat Han talking only about Christians or Muslims or Jews who are coming from a basically peaceful, liberal, non-violent point of view—or is he including the Rush Limbaughs and Newt Gingrichs of the world?

Maybe there’s only so far we can go. A good Jewish friend of mine is married to a man who has fundamentalist Christian relatives. “We love you,” they tell her, “and we’re so sorry you’re going to hell.” That’s about as far as *they* can go.

I hope this issue of *Turning Wheel* pushes us all to go a bit further. ♦

—Denise Caignon



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Coming themes for *Turning Wheel*: Winter '95-'96: Family and extended family practice—What *is* family, anyway? Deadline: November 1, 1995. Spring '96: International Buddhism. Deadline: January 15, 1996.

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We, the undersigned, are committed to the protection of life,  
which is threatened in today's world by war, abortion, poverty, racism,  
the arms race, the death penalty and euthanasia.

We believe these issues are linked under a consistent ethic of life.

We challenge those working on all or some of these issues  
to maintain a cooperative spirit of peace, reconciliation and respect  
in protecting the unprotected.

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## LETTERS

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*Affection, Temptation, and Repentance*

Robert Aitken Roshi's article, "Shunning and Intervention" raises several disturbing questions to a Buddhist: first, in reference to his remarks about his mixed feelings when hugging students, one has to ask, what is the need to hug people? In particular, what is the need for a Zen teacher to hug his students?

Even in Western society, hugging people irrespective of one's closeness to them is a very recent phenomenon. It is virtually absent in the principal Buddhist cultures. There is no tradition of either the Sangha or Buddha hugging disciples. Hugging is tantamount to a statement like: "You are dear to me!" Is this a proper statement in a Buddhist context? Is this a sincere act or merely a socially demanded pose? "Dear" in what sense?

There is nothing in Buddhism demanding that teachers expose themselves to unnecessary temptations in a world beset by temptations. Rather, it is important to practice self-discipline so that temptation is minimized, not increased.

Perhaps the principal obsession in America today is sex—sex of every stripe and variation. There is little else on TV or in the movies except violence. It would be remarkable indeed for a man or a woman living in such a society not to be aware of its pervasiveness. Where is the sense in succumbing to this by hugging people when there is no call for it?

Another statement in his article is: "The truth is confessed, the past is repented, and all beings are liberated." How? This is Christian thinking, where God can forgive a sinner who confesses and repents. In Buddhism there is no god that can forgive anybody and one has to work out one's own karma. There is no "liberation" by the mere act of repentance.

—*Thein Wah*  
San Antonio, Texas

*The Long View: Aitken Roshi Responds*

Hugging friends of the other sex is most certainly a time-honored custom in those parts of North American culture that derive from southern Europe and Latin America. It may be a relatively recent phenomenon in other sectors, but how recent is relatively recent? I can remember observing my father and mother hugging family friends of the other sex when I was a boy, 70 years ago.

"You are all very dear to me," my late teacher Yamada Koun Roshi said to us in Hawai'i twenty years ago. He didn't hug us, because in Asian culture that isn't done, but the affection was there.

In my own cultural style, I too am affectionate with my students and friends. Sex is always in the wings of affection, hug or no hug. In a sangha context, it is important for me to acknowledge its presence and leave it be.

Regarding your second point: Repentance and confession have an honored place in our Buddhist traditions, and in perennial, secular processes of reconciliation as well. When I openly confess and repent my hurtful words and conduct, perhaps the air is cleared well enough for us to resolve our differences. God need not be involved.

Thich Nhat Hanh sets forth the traditional place of repentance and confession in Buddhist ceremonies. See *Old Path White Clouds*, (Berkeley: Parallax, 1991), p. 312.

The *zange* or *ch'an-hui* ("repentance") ceremonies are important elements of Mahayana Buddhism, and of Taoism as well. See any Japanese or Chinese dictionary. The *Zange Mon*, "Repentance Gatha," is traditionally a part of all Zen Buddhist services, Soto and Rinzai. (It may actually be derived from earlier Mahayana sources.) See D.T. Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 13.

—*Robert Aitken Roshi*  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

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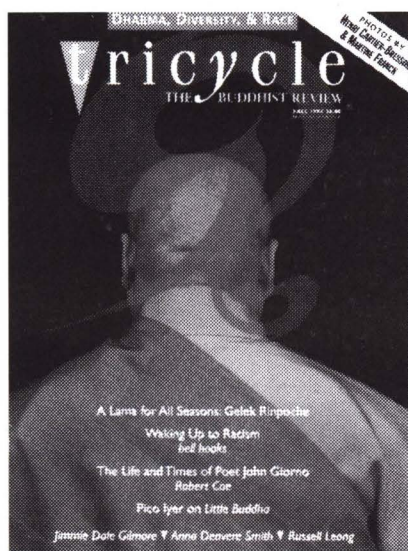
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## READINGS

### *Struggle in Sikkim*

People in Northern Sikkim, India are struggling to stop a destructive 3,000-megawatt hydro-electric project. At stake is not only a fragile ecosystem, but also the religious and cultural heritage of the peoples of Sikkim, particularly the Buddhist Bhutia-lepcha.

The Sikkim Himalayas form a horseshoe configuration of mountain ranges, rich in flora and fauna. The region has been classified by the World Wildlife Fund as a "biodiversity hotspot." Several endangered species occupy the area: the barking deer, Himalayan black bear, red panda, blue sheep, and a variety of mountain cats including the snow leopard.

The proposed Rathong-Chu Hydro-electric Power Project would include channeling the Ranthong-Chu river near the base of Mt. Kangchendzonga in Western Sikkim and constructing a power station near Yuksam. Yuksam is important to Sikkim, because it is surrounded by one of the state's last stretches of virgin forest. The proposed deforestation would result in the displacement of native peoples, land slides, pollution of the sacred water system, and could contribute to a rise in ambient temperatures. Several tribal organizations have filed a petition in the high court for a stay on the project and efforts are on to attract national and international publicity. Sikkimese Deputy Chief Minister Phur Tsering Lepcha has warned of the implications of the project: "The identity of the Sikkimese people cannot be bartered away for uncertain economic gains."

It is urgent that the international community express their concern and help to stop this devastating project.

✉ Write to: Chief Minister Po Gangtok, Sikkim India.  
For information write to: Vivian Kurz 109 Mowbray Dr.  
Kew Gardens, NY 11415.

### *Hate Crimes Against Muslims*

On April 19, the day of the Oklahoma bombing, many U.S. TV newscasters pointed to Islamic fundamentalists as the prime suspects. This inaccurate and biased reporting sparked a wave of violence against Muslims. In the three days after the bombing, over 222 attacks were reported against Muslims—ranging from spitting on women wearing shawls to shots fired at mosques, to a fake bomb thrown at a Muslim daycare center. These and other hate crimes against Muslims have become a very serious problem in the United States.

John Woods, professor of Middle Eastern History at the University of Chicago says, "Almost immediately after the collapse of Communism, Islam emerged as the new evil force in the world." The violence comes at a time when Islam is America's fastest growing faith. Islam is expected to overtake Judaism as the largest non-



Christian religion in the U.S. by the end of the decade.

Concerned Muslims have formed the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) to address the increasing misunderstanding and fear of the Muslim community.

Source: James Brooke, New York Times, Sept. 1995.

✍ For more information write to: CAIR, 1511 K Street N.W. Suite 807, Washington D.C. 20005.

### ***Update on the 4th Dhammayietra for Peace and Reconciliation in Cambodia***

“Peace begins with me. As a person believing in non-violence I *must* do the peaceful act. What I do will have an influence on others—my family, friends, then on to a wider circle. Our walk in itself will not bring peace. But our actions as individuals will. Through all our efforts peace will be coming very soon.” —One walker’s statement.

As the participants of the 4th Dhammayietra for Peace and Reconciliation in Cambodia walked silently through the countryside, they encountered the horrifying sounds of war in the distance. The pilgrimage set out from Poipet, a market town on the Cambodian/Thai border, at dawn on the 8th of May. That afternoon shells landed in Poipet, wounding nine people and killing two.

Each year the number of participants in the Dhammayietra has grown, as the urgency of the situation has increased. This year just under 700 Buddhist monks, nuns, and Cambodian laypeople began the three-week, 600-kilometer pilgrimage from the Thai border in the west to the Vietnamese border in the southeast. The Cambodian Dhammayietra walkers were also joined by 25 people from the Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life as well as a number of supporters from other countries in Asia and the West.

As the pilgrimage made its way towards Battambang, Cambodia’s second largest city and the capitol of the most war-torn province, they were met by tens of thousands of people carrying buckets of water, fragrant flowers, and incense, awaiting the water blessing of the pilgrims. “May your heart be as cool as this water” they prayed. “May we live in peace and happiness soon.” Alongside the thousands of people, there were a large number of soldiers who laid down their weapons, took off their shoes, and crouched by the side of the road, awaiting the blessing of the monks.

As the walk passed a military hospital, a young man standing between crutches on one leg placed his palms together in respect. “Last year I had hoped to see the Dhammayietra but I was sent to the jungle to fight. I lost my leg there to a mine. Now,” he said looking down at his bandaged stump, “I can see my first Dhammayietra.”

On June 1, on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, the pilgrims fanned out in a display of saffron and white for a final three-minute prayer of silence for the victims of all war. One last tree was planted as a symbol of peace.

Buddhist Monk Maha Ghosananda ended the Dhammayietra by reminding us all, “With the power of these steps, we will continue to cultivate peace in our hearts, in our homes, our schools, our communities, our villages, our country and in the whole world.”

✍ For more information on issues concerning Cambodia write to: Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation, PO Box 144 Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Source: Liz Bernstein, Yeshua Moser *We Will Cultivate Peace*.

### ***The UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women***

On August 30 about 20,000 women gathered to begin the U.N Fourth World Conference on Women NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) Forum in Huairou, China. It was evident that the Chinese government was trying to curtail the influence of the NGO portion of the conference by limiting visas, restricting Tibetan support groups, and locating the site an hour away from the Beijing Conference. Despite these difficulties and the effort it took many of the women to even get to the conference, the atmosphere was open and friendly.

Tova Green, a BPF Board Member and local representative at the NGO Conference, described each day as packed with interesting workshops and speakers. “By just sitting down for a cup of tea,” she said, “one could meet interesting women from all over the world.”

A number of topics were addressed throughout the conference including: Peace and Human Security, Education, Health, Youth, Environment, Spirituality and Religion, Science and Technology, Arts and Culture, Race and Ethnicity, and Human Rights. There were tents set up for each world region, as well as a tent for grassroots organizers, a healing tent, peace tent, and a diversity tent representing elderly, disabled and lesbian women. There were demonstrations throughout the conference, including a Tibetan Women in Exile protest, a Burmese Pro-Democracy demonstration, and a silent, candlelit vigil by Women in Black from all over the world, protesting war and violence against women.

Participants discussed the destructive practices of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Some spoke of how the World Bank was funding large dam projects which were flooding the land and displacing people. Other women spoke of how valuable agricultural land is being taken to grow export crops instead of food for the local people.

Tova experienced some revolutionary moments when women from Croatia and Serbia, Palestine and Israel came together to talk about mutual problems. “Women have gone through the same suffering no matter what country they’re from,” said one woman at the conference.

The conference was a celebration of openness and diversity. “It was wonderful to see women learning from women and to be part of an international women’s community,” said Tova Green. ♦



# FAMILY REUNION

by Patrick McMahon

The young girl with crossed legs and erect back, listening to the rumbled chanting, sits so close to the orange-robed, broad-faced men at the front of the Dharma Hall, that if she were any closer, she'd be in their laps.

Since my friend Mary told me about taking her seven-year-old daughter Laurel to hear the Gyuto monks, I've been thinking about the joys and dangers of sharing Buddhism with young people. On the one hand, I'm glad that Laurel is experiencing so young what I hold so dear. I'm reminded of my first meeting with a Japanese Zen master, and of discovering in him a relation thicker than blood, closer than family, more familiar than my own culture.

On the other hand, I have to admit to some jealousy. Why couldn't Laurel—and I—have found spiritual intimacy closer to home? I'm embarrassed that we've had to go so far for wisdom. What's wrong with us that we couldn't find it in our own families, neighborhoods, churches and schools? Having to go so far for basics is like going to the supermarket to buy a head of lettuce that's been trucked cross-state or continent, lettuce that could have been grown in a backyard. Materially and spiritually, such complex trafficking has the danger of alienating an individual or society from what's indigenous. I wouldn't want that to happen to Laurel. I'm afraid it's happened to me over the course of my fascination with Buddhism. My loyalties to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have too often been at the expense of my family of origin.

Recently, as a step toward correcting the imbalance, I attended the bi-annual reunion of my mother's side of the family. We Schnerres are a large clan, descended from German Catholic farmers. We converge from Oklahoma, Indiana, West Virginia and Arkansas—and this year California—for a week of food, fishing, and gossip. Over endless cups of coffee and limitless quantities of sour-dough biscuits, the adults tell the old stories and show the old photographs, restoring the family culture. The youngsters weave in and out, living the stories that years from now they'll share at their family reunions.

It's the kind of thing I imagine Americans do—and American Buddhists don't. It's certainly not had a place in *this* American Buddhist's life. There hasn't been enough of me for both family and sangha, and I've generally given sangha the first share. My reunions have been with Dharma brothers and sisters at meditation retreats.

This year, however, I reversed the priorities, passing up a summer retreat to attend the Schnerre reunion. Instead of brown rice and miso soup, I found myself eating sausage and gravy. Instead of sitting long hours on a black cushion watching my breath, I found myself sitting long hours on a porch hanging out. And instead of listening to dharma discourses on form and emptiness, I found myself conversing about marriage, children, and livelihood.

On reflection, I wonder if it's not more a matter of "because of" than "instead of." Perhaps it's *because* of the detour into brown rice, breath-watching, and dharma talks, that I can now eat sausage, chat, and submerge myself in domesticity. Twenty or thirty years ago I couldn't have done so. My family represented a mire from which I was struggling to free myself. It hosted diseases—alcoholism, emotional aridity, sibling rivalry, patriarchal dominance—from which I needed to sequester myself. But now, having experienced sangha relations

based on a desire for mutual liberation, I'm no longer so threatened by family closeness. I can enjoy my relations as folks who happen to share genes and history with me. My blood family introduces me into the larger family of all beings.

So what have I gained by this introduction? A muggy Midwest twilight comes to mind. Everyone is off to the

lake except my uncle, "Big Jack," his grandson, and my cousin, "Little Jack." I watch as Big Jack pushes Little Jack back and forth on a swing. I listen to their voices, rumbling and babbling. Fireflies wink their green lights in the air around us.

I recall a scene from 45 years ago, of my grandfather swinging me in the twilight, back and forth under the pines at the edge of the pasture. Fireflies spark high and low, near and far, stars come to earth. In the fading light his lean, slightly stooped frame resembles that of my uncle, and my blonde head and chubby legs resemble those of my cousin. But the resemblances go beyond individual features; they hang in the air around us, like the fireflies, illuminated one moment, dark the next. We are—grandfathers and grandsons, uncles and cousins—not so much solid bodies genetically linked, as twinkles in a galaxy of relations. In this galaxy, who am I not related to? What am I other than relationships?

From this vantage point, I review my ambivalence about Laurel and the Gyuto monks, and can't discern a strict line between indigenous and imported, Western and Eastern, family and sangha. What cause have I for jealousy? Laurel and her great Tibetan uncles, my grandfather and me, Big Jack and Little Jack, fireflies and stars, are just so much family. ❖

**Note:** The theme for the Winter issue of *Turning Wheel* is family. Deadline: November 1.

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*Instead of brown rice  
and miso soup, I found  
myself eating sausage  
and gravy.*

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# WISE USE V. THE GREEN MENACE

by Stephanie Kaza

"As the Cold War thaws, we may be entering an era in which government, industry, and the media substitute the Green Menace for the Red Menace," prophesied the board chair of Greenpeace, David Chatfield, in 1990. Two years later, environmentalists cheered as Bill Clinton and Al Gore took office, promising a brighter future for public lands and threatened species. But their efforts to support the Green agenda were undermined, not only by the Republican Congress, but also by the self-proclaimed anti-environmental Wise Use movement.

From a Wise Use perspective, the environmental movement is anti-private property and anti-people. "We're dealing with religious zealots who want to turn the country into a national park," declared Dave Parkhurst of Nevada Miners and Inspectors. Leaders of the movement represent their members as reasonable, democratic and populist. In contrast, they demonize environmentalists as "irrational people," "Marxist-Leftists," and "long-haired, filthy doper types." They resent regulations on behalf of non-human species and their habitats, insisting people should be free to do what they want with their own property. The broad coalition of Wise Use groups includes miners, loggers, developers, and property-rights advocates. The *Wise Use Agenda*, drawn up by Alan Gottlieb, would open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, allow mining in national parks, drastically amend the Endangered Species Act, and encourage motorized vehicle use in wilderness areas.

Who are these people and how effective are they? In *War Against the Greens*, David Helvarg documents the fundraising and lobbying efforts of Gottlieb *et al.* According to Helvarg's research, the anti-Greens are well-supported by corporate industry, and well-received by the right-wing media. Rush Limbaugh alone has introduced 15 million people to "anti-enviro" rhetoric laced with ridicule, resentment, and scientific misinformation.

Lobbyists for the movement have blocked grazing fee increases on public lands and derailed efforts to elevate the Environmental Protection Agency to a cabinet-level department. Even more alarming, in local debates, "anti-enviros" have used intimidation and physical violence, not unlike the anti-abortion tactics of Operation Rescue, to silence pro-environmental voices.

Committed as I am to environmental health and respectful relations with our plant and animal sangha, I am deeply concerned by the polarizing, dehumanizing rhetoric and actions of the anti-environmental Right. To address one of these groups as a Green Buddhist would surely double their ridicule. To their minds, Buddhism

would be yet another New Age promoter of paganism and nature worship, a serious threat to traditional Christian values of stewardship and dominion over the land. Ironically, the anti-environmental Right claims to be a victim of domination by the well educated, environmental elite. To them, environmentalists represent the new "Goliath" overpowering their grassroots "David." It is a sign of the strength of the environmental movement that such a counter-force has arisen. The frightening thing is that agreements are not negotiated in open dialogue, but are hammered out by force.

If there can be a Buddhist response to the hate-mongering Wise Use movement, it may be to actively promote non-violence as basic good manners—as a *citizen*, not as a Buddhist. There is a war brewing here, and it will be a challenge to American Buddhists to find ways to contain the enemy-making of the far Right. Spiritual practice may provide emotional and psychic support, but it will have to stay camouflaged in the political arena. The most important thing right now is to realize the seriousness of the struggle for control of not only the environmental agenda, but of the land itself. As economic conditions deteriorate, the pressures on the Earth's plant and animal communities will only increase. We need to be, not only informed, but deeply engaged in the debate about a sustainable future. Every voice counts. ❖

\*Quotes are from *War Against the Greens* by David Helvarg, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1994.

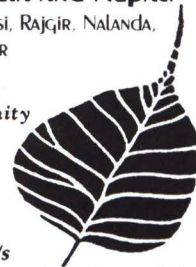
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of the Buddha. --Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh



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# DEVELOPING THE HEART-MIND

## *a Thai mae chii works with rape survivors and rapists*

Interview by Susan Moon

*I met mae chii [Thai for "female renunciate"] Saansanee at the INEB (International Network of Engaged Buddhists) conference in Thailand in February, 1995. She was one of about 30 Thai mae chii who attended, like a flock of birds in their fresh, white robes. It was very hot, and it cooled me off just to look at them. As a matter of fact, mae chii still can't be ordained, which is why they wear white rather than the brown the monks wear.*

*Saansanee brought with her to the conference two very young mae chii who had recently joined her "convent." Their presence exemplified Saansanee's commitment to helping women, both lay and renunciate, through the Dhamma. She's an engaged Buddhist if there ever was one.*

**Susan Moon:** What is the work you're doing here?

**Mae chii Saansanee:** Sathian Dhamma Center is for women who are interested in Dhamma. It's also a place for dealing with society's problems. One of our projects, "Thread of Relationship," is for mothers who have been raped or gang raped, and who became pregnant as a result.

At first, most wanted either to have an abortion—which is illegal in Thailand, and so a messy business—or they would give birth and abandon the baby at the hospital. But when they are referred to the center I encourage them to live in the present moment, not dwell on the past. By focusing on the present moment, a meaningful relationship can develop between mother and child. Any mistake need not be repeated or made worse by responding to the past in an unskillful or unwholesome way. These women were raped *once*. By dwelling on the physical rape, they psychologically rape themselves over and over. They should let that go and live in the present. They can do that through their relationship to their child, and through meaningful work, which the project also helps with.

The project has served over 200 women during the last 5 years. Through the success of this project, I've been able to push the Ministry of Public Health to start similar projects, run by the government, using this model.

**SM:** Is this unusual work for Thailand—working with women who've been raped?

Yes. There've been some government programs, but they're mostly just related to physical health. There are some shelters run by NGOs, but they're emergency oriented. They offer no emotional or spiritual help, and often, the women can only stay a month. In my program, I have three main conditions. First, the child will not be abandoned. This program is only for women who've made the decision to keep the child. Second, the woman agrees that she won't go back to whatever situation she was in that created the opportunity for rape. Third, the child will be raised to grow into an adult with morals, with values.

This program is long-term, though some women who have more resources leave earlier. A lot of the women enjoy working at the center—cooking for retreats, for instance. Some work at our nursery school. Some may stay until the child is two years old or even longer.

**SM:** Do some of the women become involved in Dhamma study?

Yes, it's a daily activity. If they can strengthen their own heart, they recover quickly. Instead of just receiving, they can also give back. They stop being dependent and begin to help others. Every morning, we have chanting and meditation, then a group meeting. If there are problems, we shouldn't blame others, but look inside, and realize

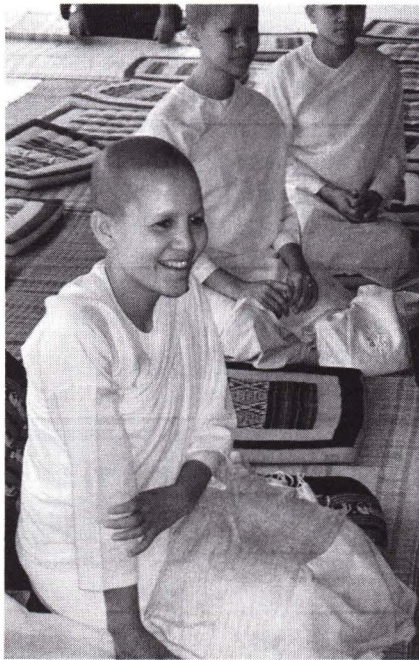
that each one of us is part of the problem. The place to start is with oneself. My objective is to get the women to stand on their own; we don't want to prop them up. If we just keep supporting them, when the support is gone, they'll fall down.

**SM:** How did you get started with the program?

Some people from the Social Welfare Department came to see me and told me the statistics on abandoned children. They wanted to know if mae chii could help. So the first year, I rented a house and did things in the usual government way. But it wasn't sustained helping, and it lacked a moral and spiritual component. The second year, I had a house built at the Dhamma center.

**SM:** Why did the government come to you for help?

I had been running a nursery school for children of workers' families. In the construction sites near



*Mae chii Saansanee and apprentices*



Bangkok, there are a lot of slum areas, and lots of kids. Nobody's there to look after them. It's a bad situation. I trained the teachers and found the funding. In my work, I use the natural approach with kids.

This is not so unusual, since the Wat is the traditional community center in Thailand. So there's an opportunity for mae chii to do something meaningful and useful.

**SM:** What is the "natural" approach?

One isn't trying to control or conquer nature, but work with it, adapt to nature. For example, just as in meditation we observe our own heart-mind (in Thai, "heart" and "mind" are the same word), I try to observe the heart-mind of the kids. If we can preserve the freshness, the natural joy and vitality of a child, that child will be strong, and be able to learn and cope with life. When you try to put something *into* the child, that child will have very little inner strength. We want to preserve what's *already* in the child.

**SM:** Do the women trust you more because you're a mae chii?

It helps, but what's important is that I'm a stable, grounded mae chii. They can feel that. If a mae chii lacks that—gets too emotional or wavers—then it's hard to trust her in a crisis. The mae chii lifestyle is very simple. We can find happiness and satisfaction in our lives, which is a good example for the women. A major reason women get into trouble is because they are tricked into the materialist value system. When they live with mae chii, they see that happiness isn't in material things. One can live in a simple way that is also much safer. Mae chii have the ability to demonstrate happiness.

**SM:** Are there other programs you're involved in?

I've gone to some reform homes, prisons for teenage male delinquents in Bangkok—some of whom are in there because of rape. And my main sponsor runs Thailand's leading boxing camp, which has a world champion who I teach meditation to. This man uses meditation in the corner between rounds! He is interested in giving something back to society, so I use him as a role model in the reform schools.

Some of the women from our center go to these reform schools after they've developed enough strength. They can explain to a room of 500 rapists what it's like to be raped, what it feels like. They've healed themselves enough to do that. That probably creates a much bigger impression than a boxing champion on those young men. Of course, the combination is even better.

**SM:** You were only 28 when you became a mae chii. Did you know you wanted to do work in the world then?

At first, I was concerned with looking into my own heart, watching the nature of greed and anger. The second year, I started to give some financial support to kids. Then in my seventh year as a mae chii, I really began to do the work and set up the center.

**SM:** How do meditation and this work fit together?

This work has been a test for me, to stay calm and not

get caught up in things. When one does this kind of work, problems develop. If we collide with those problems, we lose control. It's a way to see how much we've learned, how strong we are.

**SM:** Do you ever feel discouraged?

There are obstacles that come up. Sometimes one gets disappointed, and that's a sign that one's practice, one's Dhamma life, isn't steady. I know it's time to take a rest at that time. But if one's practice is steady, that won't happen. Even when it does, though, it's another way to learn about Dhamma and one's own heart.

**SM:** What gives you hope?

My guiding source is Dhamma, which has enriched me. All my work is gratitude to Dhamma. My earlier work generated wealth, but not much sharing. Now my work comes from peace inside, which generates more peace.

**SM:** Anything else you'd like readers to know?

We are borrowing life from nature. And life can be developed. We can progress, develop our mind, our serenity. Once you have reached a certain point in development, you cannot stop being useful to humanity. I have nine projects with nine different goals, but it's all one thing. It's really the same goal: developing the heart-mind through work.

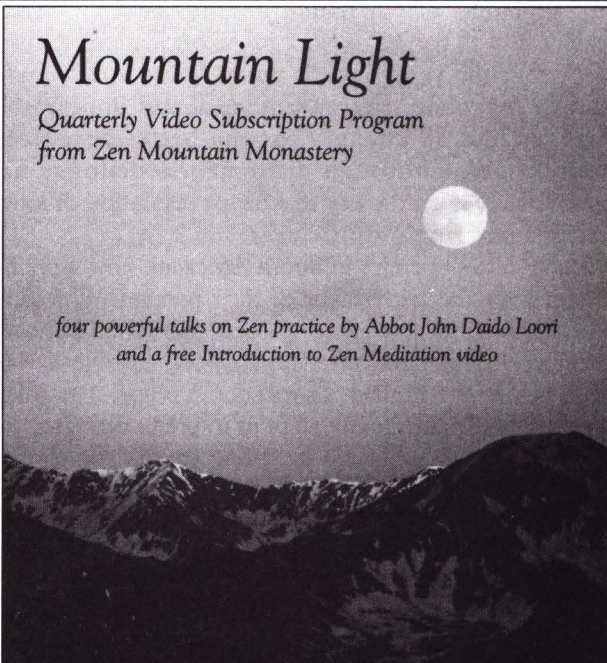
**SM:** How do you keep your robes so white?

Mindfulness. ❖

*Susan Moon is editor of Turning Wheel.*

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# WORDS FROM DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI

*on release from house arrest in Burma, and at the Women's Forum in Beijing*

**Statement of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, on her release from house arrest by the Burmese government, July 11, 1995, Rangoon, Burma**



*Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi* would be happy to help me in matters of personal welfare; if I wished, the authorities would continue to take care of security arrangements; he would like me to help towards achieving peace and stability in the country.

I appreciate deeply both the tone and content of the message. I have always believed that the future stability and happiness of our nation depends entirely on the readiness of all parties to work for reconciliation.

During the years I spent under house arrest, many parts of the world have undergone almost unbelievable change. And all changes for the better have been brought about through dialogue. So dialogue has undoubtedly been the key to a happy resolution of long-festered problems.

Once-bitter enemies in South Africa are now working together for the betterment of their peoples. Why can't we look forward to a similar process? We have to choose between dialogue and utter devastation. I would like to believe that the human instinct for survival, if nothing else, would eventually lead all of us to prefer dialogue.

You may ask, what are we going to talk about once we reach the negotiation table? The establishment of certain principles? The recognition of critical objectives to be achieved? Joint approaches to the ills besetting the country would be the main item on the agenda.

Extreme viewpoints are not confined to any particular group, and it is the responsibility of the leaders to control elements that threaten the spirit of conciliation. There is more in common between the authorities and us, the democratic forces in Burma, than existed between the black and white people of South Africa.

The majority of the people of Burma believe in the market economy and in democracy, as was amply

proved by the results of the elections of 1990. Those of you who read Burmese papers will know that it is the aim of the SLORC\* to return power to the people. This is exactly our aim as well.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge the authorities to release those of us who still remain in prison. I am happy to say that, in spite of all they have undergone, the forces of democracy in Burma remain strong and dedicated. For my part, I bear no resentment towards anybody for anything that happened during the last six years.

This statement can only end in one way: with an expression of sincere thanks to people all over the world, and especially to my countryfolk, who have done so much to strengthen my resolve and to effect my release.

\*SLORC is the present Burmese military government

**Excerpted from the opening Keynote Address, read on video to the NGO Forum on Women, August 31, 1995, Beijing, China**

It is a wonderful but daunting task that has fallen on me to say a few words to open this Forum, the greatest concourse of women (joined by a few brave men!) that has ever gathered on our planet.

For millennia, women have dedicated themselves to the task of nurturing and caring for the young and the old, striving for the conditions of peace that favor life as a whole. To this can be added the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, no war was ever started by women. But it is women and children who have always suffered most in situations of conflict. It is now time to apply the wisdom and experience gained in activities of peace over so many thousands of years. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, just and peaceful life for all.

If to the growing emancipation of women can be added the "peace dividend" for human development offered by the end of the Cold War (spending less on the war toys of grown men and much more on the urgent needs of humanity), then the next millennia will be an age the like of which has never been seen in human history. But there still remain many obstacles to be overcome before we can achieve this goal. And not least among these obstacles are intolerance and insecurity.

This year is the International Year for Tolerance. The United Nations has recognized that "tolerance, human rights, democracy and peace are closely related." My own experience during the years I have been engaged in the democracy movement in Burma has convinced me



of the need to emphasize the positive aspects of tolerance. It is not enough simply to “live and let live”: *genuine* tolerance requires an active effort to understand the point of view of others; it implies broad-mindedness and vision, as well as confidence in one’s own ability to meet new challenges without resorting to intransigence or violence. In fact, in societies where men are truly confident of their own worth, women are not merely “tolerated,” they are valued. Their opinions are listened to with respect, and they are given their rightful place in shaping the society in which they live.

There is an outmoded Burmese proverb still recited by some men who wish to deny that women too can play a part in bringing change to their society: “The dawn rises only when the rooster crows.” But Burmese people today are well aware of the scientific reason behind the rising of dawn and the falling of dusk. And the intelligent rooster surely realizes that it is because dawn comes that it crows and not the other way round. It crows to welcome the light that has come to relieve the darkness of night. It is not the prerogative of men alone to bring light to this world: women with their capacity for compassion and self-sacrifice, their courage and perseverance, have done much to dissipate the darkness of intolerance and despair.

There are no gender barriers that cannot be overcome. The relationship between men and women should, and can be, characterized not by patronizing behavior or exploitation, but by metta (lovingkindness), partnership and trust. We need mutual respect and understanding between men and women, not patriarchal domination and degradation, which are expressions of violence and engender counter-violence. We can learn from each other and help one another to moderate the “gender weaknesses” imposed on us by traditional or biological factors.

There is an age-old prejudice the world over that women talk too much. But is this really a weakness? Could it not in fact be a strength? Recent scientific research on the human brain has revealed that women are better at verbal skills while men tend towards physical action. Psychological research has shown, on the other hand, that disinformation engendered by men has far more damaging effect on its victims than feminine gossip. Surely these discoveries indicate that women have a most valuable contribution to make in situations of conflict, by leading the way to solutions based on dialogue rather than on viciousness or violence?

The last six years afforded me much time and food for thought. I have come to the conclusion that the human race is not divided into two opposing camps of good and evil. It is made up of those who are capable of learning and those who are incapable of doing so. Here I am speaking of learning as the process of absorbing those lessons of life that enable us to increase peace and happiness in our world. Women in their roles as mothers have

traditionally assumed the responsibility of teaching children values that will guide them throughout their lives. It is time we were given the full opportunity to use our natural teaching skills to contribute towards building a

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*There is an age-old prejudice that women talk too much. But is this really a weakness? Could it not in fact be a strength?*

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modern world that can withstand the tremendous challenges of the technological revolution which has in turn brought revolutionary changes in social values.

As we strive to teach others, we must have the humility to acknowledge that, we too, still have much to learn. And we must have the flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the world around us. Women who have been taught that modesty and pliancy are among the prized virtues of our gender are marvelously equipped for the learning process. But they must be given the opportunity to turn these often merely passive virtues into positive assets for the society in which they live.

These, then, are our common hopes that unite us—that as the shackles of intolerance fall from our limbs, we can together strive to remove the impediments to human development everywhere. The mechanisms by which this great task is to be achieved provided the proper focus of this great Forum. I feel sure that women throughout the world who, like me, cannot be with you, join me now in sending you all our prayers and good wishes for a joyful and productive meeting.

I thank you. ❖

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### The Christian Delivery Boy

Tim, the drugstore delivery boy, brings me relief from pain and sounder sleep—he needs neither. Jesus, smiling and slim, is his joy and weight-loss program: fifty pounds off for over a year.

I don’t begrudge him his excitement or his faith. But when he tells me I should listen to his Christian radio station—*They play a song with your name on it*—I tell him, positive and pleased, *I’m not a Christian*.

Just as positive he comes back, *You’re not a Christian, yet*. Sudden tightness in my chest tells me how mean I feel. I don’t want to separate myself from him, only from his vision of Jesus.

—Bill Abrams



# FUNDAMENTALISTS

## *I have known and loved*

by Sandy Eastoak

I move in mostly liberal circles. Many of my friends and colleagues make some pretty uncomplimentary remarks about fundamentalists, right wingers, and such. Maybe "not speaking against others" means others who are like *us*. Or maybe we can suspend this precept for political reasons. I don't know, I'm just fumbling through life myself.

Along the way, I'm homeschooling our children. I don't think they can get a good education in public schools. I don't think they can learn the truth, vital information, and compassion. Funny, but a lot of fundamentalists think this too, although we may disagree about what the truth and vital information are. We might even get into ugly fights about it. We do agree about compassion, however. And we agree that we put our kids first.

Periodically I cross paths with several homeschooling fundamentalists, and as long as you don't ask them about evolution, they seem like really nice folks. Since I'm a homeschooling, girl scout leader, organic garden kind of mom, their seeming like really nice folks has a certain impact on me. I mean, who would I rather visit with my kids for an afternoon? Really nice folks or politically correct folks? I may think it's important for my kids not to get confused about who to vote for and all, but maybe it's even more important that they not get confused about niceness.

I have never heard these fundamentalists speak of my liberal Buddhist friends with the venom with which my liberal Buddhist friends sometimes speak about *them*. Nor have I seen them cross me off their list when they find out I'm a Buddhist. (Some even reply, "Oh, my friend So-and-so is a Buddhist, too.") They may feel a little sad for the state of my soul, but they are surprisingly curious and open. They usually recognize that in today's messy world, people with real spiritual commitment have something very important in common, however divergent their beliefs.

The most challenging fundamentalist I've met is an American convert to Islam, who is so conservative that she dresses herself and her young daughters in the strictest head-covering, wrist- and ankle-concealing style. My deep affinity for goddess imagery, the sacred beauty of the female body, makes it very difficult to be open to her. Yet in conversation I am moved by her deep mystic intuition and her committed perceptions of

human suffering. In a society that accepts MTV and a thousand different kinds of pornography and violence, is hers the worst response?

Since my husband is from a Muslim country, I've had to consider fundamentalism outside the Christian right wing. I've had to consider what fundamentalism *means*, in and out of our own society. Fundamentalism is just a deliberate effort to get back to the basics of one's religion. In dogmatic periods in history, fundamentalism is a liberal force. In our time, it's a conservative force counterbalancing rapid disintegration of religious and moral behavior. In our society the disintegration is domestic and familiar; in the Middle East and elsewhere, it's imported and alien.

Few of the Buddhists I know were born to Buddhist families. For most American Buddhists, our practice is our own personal counterbalance to this disintegration. At the outset of our practice, we have something in common with fundamentalists. We share a need and a willingness to respond to the disorder and suffering of the world.

When I encounter a fundamentalist I may remember this commonality or I may forget. When I forget, I encounter a blind, dogmatic, or gullible person. When I remember, I encounter a person who has had very different experiences, with some amazing things to tell me. Like the outspoken Jehovah's Witness who, at the end of a long conversation about schools and how to save the environment, shyly told me about talking to trees.

Or like the charismatic Christian who carpools with my husband. At first we joked about him, but soon my husband observed, "As crazy as most of his beliefs seem to me, he *cares* about what's happening to the world. Most guys I work with are just into their house and their car and their next promotion. So it's easier to be with him." Some time later this man confided his efforts to practice love and forgiveness in his marriage and social and business relationships. He described times of prayer and "resting in the presence of God," and the challenge of distinguishing God's wisdom arising in his mind from "just his own silly imagination." In return, I was able to share experiences of metta and zazen.

Recently I spoke with a member of an evangelical congregation. Over the past twenty years his congregation has changed in a most important way: it now views itself as one answer, not *the* answer. This change was essential to him, as over the years he has seen the necessity of tolerance for everyone's views: "We're all seeking

*Fundamentalism is measuring the truth by one's beliefs, rather than one's beliefs by the truth.*



God in our best way, and none of us knows everything.” His personal relationship to God, approached through the terms of Christian salvation, has brought him to embrace all allies of whatever faith who seek to heal the family of living beings. This Christian fundamentalist understands very well the answer a famous Zen master gave to the question, “Are there differences among religions?”: “For those who have not realized their religion, there are differences. For those who have realized their religion, there are no differences.”

At this time in American Buddhism, it is unusual to experience sangha as including even all varieties of Buddhists. We’re struggling just to develop real commitment, love, and support for our immediate meditation group. Ultimately, we will embrace all beings as sangha. On the way, we will find ourselves embracing the fundamentalists who have realized their religion, who in *their* way relieve the suffering of others.

Family, peace, nature—these are the common grounds where we can most easily discover the similarity of our fears and our commitments to relieve suffering. When we can stay in the place of attention to the suffering of others, we can join hands, Buddhist liberal and Christian or Muslim fundamentalist, and work on the *real* problems. When we drift into political opinion—opinion based not on our own experience, but the ideas of our favorite publications—we quickly fly in each other’s faces. The difference is between the freedom to create unexpectedly the Pure Land—or bondage to someone else’s agenda.

Within Buddhism and within ourselves there is fundamentalism. Somewhere recently I read that fundamentalism is measuring the truth by one’s beliefs, rather than one’s beliefs by the truth. Shortly after, I was telling a liberal friend about the Ayurvedic view that aging is a mistake of intelligence. Rather than being excited by this astonishing thought, she waved it aside with her belief: “That isn’t very Buddhist, is it?” And I wondered, how many astonishing thoughts do I wave aside because they look contradictory to my current belief?

And I think about the Soka Gakkai Buddhists, the ones who chant for what they want. I was given a subscription to their newsletter, full of personal accounts akin to the good fortune of being born again to Jesus. There are also lectures on the Lotus Sutra, selected passages of which form the basis of their practice. I didn’t have the background to follow these lectures, so I bought a copy of the Lotus Sutra. Big surprise. A lot of what is chanted in Zen services derives directly or indirectly from the Lotus Sutra. And it is a work incomprehensible to the rational mind. It requires an attitude of profound faith.

This is in some ways the crux of our beef with fundamentalists. We liberals are not comfortable with faith. I have to speak for myself here. It seems I have deliber-

ately selected a practice that satisfies my rational cravings and doesn’t demand too much of my limited credulity. Some of us Zen converts get pretty uptight just about the bells and chanting and black zafus.

So I think one reason it is so difficult for us to be available to fundamentalists—whether Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist—is that they put *faith* right in the

*I have never heard these fundamentalists speak of my liberal Buddhist friends with the venom with which my liberal Buddhist friends sometimes speak about them.*

center spotlight of their lives. They let faith govern their religious, political, social and even leisure choices. And I think the reason they tend to be a little more open to us than we are to them is that our skepticism doesn’t threaten their faith, but their faith *does* threaten our skepticism. Skepticism is uncomfortable in the presence of faith in a way that faith is not uncomfortable in the presence of skepticism. Perhaps this is because skepticism rarely accomplishes anything, while sometimes faith moves mountains. Unfortunately, sometimes it also moves mobs, which is why many of us prefer to remain skeptics.

The threads of conflict between liberals and fundamentalists are complex and interwoven with contradiction. I make a fresh effort to see and hear each fundamentalist I encounter, hoping we can strengthen each other in our quest for a just, compassionate, spiritual world. I am heartened by Hakuin Ekaku Zenji, who 250 years ago encouraged diverse religious efforts, corresponded with followers of competing sects, and brushed beautiful, bold scrolls of the *nembutsu*. His counsel that differences in practice “lie only in the skill or clumsiness, the honesty or dishonesty of the person,” guides us even now. ♦

*Sandy Eastoak is a writer, artist, homeschooling mother, and editor of the recently published Dharma Family Treasures. She is a student of John Tarrant Roshi, as well as a fanatical environmentalist.*

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# THE NARROWED MIND

*a conversation about cults, militias, left wing fundamentalism, and more*

*"I believe I am the only one in Japan, or for that matter, in the whole wide world, who knows it [enlightenment]... Another important point to note is that several disciples of mine have left me due to their arrogance. This was a matter of great pity..."—from *Beyond Life and Death* by Shoko Asahara, leader of the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan, recently accused of murder and the release of poisonous sarin gas into the Tokyo subway system.*

## Interview by Denise Caignon

*The following is excerpted from a conversation with Sheila O'Donnell and Melody Ermachild. Sheila and Melody are private investigators whose research has required them to listen deeply to fundamentalists. They have both worked with Jonestown survivors and other cult members. Sheila works with environmental activists who are targeted by "Wise Use" and private militia groups. Melody's focus is death penalty clients, many of whom have been in street and prison gangs.*

*We covered a lot of ground in this conversation—from militias, to Jonestown, to the hard-core Left, to New Age groups. We found elements of fundamentalism nearly everywhere we looked—including in ourselves.*

### Tunnel vision

**Denise Caignon:** It's amazing how narrow the mind can become. I like to tell myself it wouldn't happen to me, that extreme tunnel vision. But I'm not so sure...

**Melody Ermachild:** I saw that narrowing of the mind when I visited my aunt and uncle recently. They're fundamentalist Christians in a small town in Texas. When I went to church with them, the whole sermon was devoted to hatred of gay people. The minister preached against sodomy and made a strange link to serial killers. He said, if you let these irresistible impulses take you over, Satan will *tell* you to have homosexual sex. And once Satan controls you like that, you'll become a serial killer, like Jeffrey Dahmer. Well, since I'm a private investigator, and I do Death Row work, I happen to be personally acquainted with a number of serial killers, and most of them are heterosexual; they killed women.

After the service, my aunt asked, "How did you like our sermon?" I said, "Well Aunt Thelma, you know we just don't feel that way about gay people. We are friends with quite a few, and I haven't noticed them to be more lustful than anyone else. They don't prey on other people." I asked if she'd ever met a gay person. She said yes. She's a nurse, and the only doctor who's ever befriended her at the hospital is a gay man. She told me he is so kind. She calls him at home and he prescribes my uncle's medication. They depend on him. It became clear as we

talked that she *completely* disconnected this one person from all the hatred in her church. I think this kind of cognitive dissonance happens a lot. People don't integrate a contradictory experience into their belief system.

**DC:** But it seems that if someone has enough positive experiences, they would break through the wall they've constructed. Wouldn't it help to get people together from opposing points of view? I read an article about women who organized a retreat for anti-abortion women and pro-choice women to talk about their differences.

**ME:** That's our task as activists—figuring out ways we can listen to each other. And people do change sometimes. I heard of another man who was in a militia group. His relative gave birth to a child with a cleft palate. A colleague in the militia, who he regarded as a friend, said, when we take over, those kind of children will be killed. They were racial purists. So this man left the group.

### Militias and the environmental movement

**DC:** How are militias fighting against environmentalism?  
**Sheila O'Donnell:** They've started to interrupt public discourse about environmental issues. People are being prevented from holding public meetings in some rural areas. For instance, there's a town in Washington, near the Canadian border, where a woman was trying to pull together an EPA-mandated meeting recently. She called the local school and asked to hold the meeting there. The school people said OK, but two days later she got a call back. They said, "Listen, you can hold the meeting here, we're not saying you can't. But as soon as we gave you the OK, we started getting phone calls from people who were telling us we'd never get a cent for another book in this school if we allow this meeting. They said we'd never get another school bond. If you hold this meeting, we'll be screwed." That's the kind of tactic the Wise Use movement uses. And they're finding a voice in the militias and vice versa.

**DC:** What exactly is the Wise Use movement?

**SO:** It's a construct of the mining, fishing, and timber industries. Their bottom line is that they should be allowed to do anything they want to their own land, or even on public land. They think it's a God-given right. They believe the government and the EPA has been taken over by environmentalists. Of course, if you ask an environmentalist if *they* think the EPA is on their side, they'll laugh in your face!

**ME:** Their whole philosophy is based on a Biblical quote, that God created the Earth for man [sic] to use. At my Aunt Thelma's church, I saw a children's service about this. The minister asked the children how we *use* different



animals. “How do we use sheep?” “Lamb chops!” the children cried out. “Cows? Hamburger! Trees? Houses!”  
**SO:** We do need to hear what they’re saying. The militias are being dismissed as a bunch of mindless, gun-toting wackos, but they have real grievances. The economy is in trouble, and morally, our country has lost its bearings. They’ve fallen for a perspective that answers a lot of their questions, *legitimate* questions. They aren’t so different from us—they’re carpenters, doctors, workers, the unemployed. They’re *us*.

Of course, if they really thought about it, they’d realize environmentalists aren’t the real enemy. It’s the corporations who are clear-cutting the forests and sending logs to Japan to be cut. *That’s* what’s destroying jobs in the timber industry. The reality is that timber resources are limited, yet they just don’t seem to see that, even though it’s so obvious. You can’t cut down a 2000-year-old tree and expect it to just pop up again!

Some people want the FBI to investigate the militias. But the government isn’t going to solve our problems. Militia people have the right to say what they want. It’s fear that drives us to call in the FBI. It bespeaks a world view where there is a cadre of criminals running the militias, and if you roust them out it’ll be OK. There *are* a handful of wackos in the militia, but it’s really a populist movement that speaks to human beings who are hurting. These are not Martians.

**ME:** I was listening to a country music radio station yesterday. I heard a lot of pain and confusion from unemployed people who were calling in. At one point, the DJ played a song, “I Must Be Wishing on Somebody Else’s Star.” People who join these kind of extremist groups think that *other* people are getting all the goodies, that they’re not getting any.

**DC:** You’ve read about “Jane Roe” [of *Roe v. Wade*], who recently “switched sides” and became a born-again Christian? She said the people she worked with in the abortion clinic didn’t care about her. Nobody ever asked how she was. She was going to work every day, seeing fetuses in the refrigerator, feeling unhappy. The fundamentalists who had an office next door were always opening their hearts to her, she said.

**SO:** That’s definitely something the right wing offers that the left does not. The anti-abortion people *do* open their hearts. They bake cookies, they involve themselves in your family. They embrace you.

*Left wing fundamentalism*

**ME:** I can see the temptation of a fundamentalist solution. I was once in a part of the left that got more and more narrow. We thought our point of view was “the

truth.” We had our enemy. Once you say, “This is The Way, this is The Truth,” you’ve lost touch with our basic human condition—which is essentially *not* knowing.

**DC:** So how did you get out of this narrow thinking?

**ME:** After the group collapsed in disagreement, I gradually teased out what was good and what was bad about the experience. I didn’t throw the baby out with the bath water. I’m still progressive, still call myself a leftist. But I always joke that I’m a recovering socialist. I try to look at things that are painful to see. For instance, I used to think China was wonderful, that this was a true peasant revolution. I didn’t want to look at the contradictions. I didn’t think of Tibet for a second, though I must have known something about it. I wasn’t religious, didn’t have

a spiritual practice, but I’m horrified now at the things I wouldn’t see.

**SO:** We on the left bought a package, a view of reality, that didn’t really exist. Much the way the militia people are doing now. We bought fast answers.

**ME:** When I raised questions, I’d be talked out of them by my leaders. People above me in the hierarchy would *seem* to be talking to me about

my doubts, but they’d make it clear it was my own inadequacies that were the problem. My bourgeois tendencies or selfishness. Then I would do the same thing to people beneath *me* in the hierarchy! After I left, I decided I’d never again put my life decisions in the hands of anyone else. And that’s made it hard to trust a Buddhist teacher!

*Jonestown*

**DC:** Both of you have worked with people who were in Jonestown. What can you say about how things reached such an extreme point in the People’s Temple?

**ME:** As you may know, 913 people died there. They had practiced drinking poison more than 30 times in the years preceding the actual event. Some of those times, Jones told them it really *was* cyanide. So they were in this suicide pact for a long time. Their thinking was so dualistic that there was nothing but “us” and “them”: people in the group, and those in the outside world. Their greatest enemies were the “defectors” who had left the group. When Congressman Leo Ryan came to investigate, several families at the core of the cult defected, and that triggered the end. When the core starts to go, that’s the ultimate threat.

But Jones essentially murdered people; it wasn’t really a mass suicide. There were 250 elderly people who were injected with cyanide, and about the same number of little children who were injected or made to drink it. The adults who did drink it were coerced. There were armed guards. Some people tried to run away, others were shot. And some of them were wishing for nothing but death—

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*The militias are dismissed as mindless, gun-toting wackos, but they have real grievances.*

*They’re carpenters, doctors, workers, the unemployed.*

*They’re us.*

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they were living in a concentration camp, with underground jail cells, beatings, and surrounded by water, snakes, and jaguars.

I interviewed many defectors, and people who escaped. I was shocked to find that they weren't very different from me. They were thoughtful, educated, and

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*Now, I'm sure McVeigh didn't say, "I know what I'm gonna do to make the world a better place. I'm gonna bomb a day care center."*

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progressive, many of them. They had a very idealistic idea of a better world they could build.

**DC:** Well, how *did* these intelligent, idealistic people get to that point?

**ME:** Every survivor says it's very gradual. Step by step, all outside air is sucked out until you're suffocating in an atmosphere of murder and suicide. You get to the point where a *doctor* mixed the poison for Jonestown! Or in Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, where ordinary citizens poisoned subway riders. We cannot deny that well-meaning seekers were taken in by Ashoka, a man spouting his rendition of Buddhist, Christian, and Yogic rhetoric.

**SO:** You start by scapegoating, picking a target. The world, the CIA, it doesn't matter. In a cult, if someone doesn't understand something, you don't explain. There's always a pat answer. I talked to a 13-year-old girl whose mother had joined the People's Temple. One of her first experiences was seeing elderly people beaten in public. She said to her mother, this is wrong. Her mother said, no it's not, these people need to be straightened out, because they had disobeyed "Father" [Jim Jones].

**ME:** The feeling was, it was for their own good. The best analogy I can think of is how we've lived with nuclear weapons all these years. We just marked the 50th anniversary of the Trinity test. How could people at Jonestown be in a suicide pact with Jones? We've *all* been in a suicide pact with a series of leaders for two generations. They could have pushed that button any time! We've given them power over whether we live or die, just like people did with Jones.

It's good to study the mind-control techniques used in Jonestown, or by the Branch Davidians, because they are potentially incipient in every sangha or monastery. Techniques like isolation from the world, being cut off from family and friends, having very little free time, sleep deprivation, nutritional deprivation, and giving up money. Anyone who has ever been on a retreat knows how you become very open. The question is, open to *what*? To interbeing, to the wonder of the moment? Or to the machinations of a leader? We have to remain discriminating. If someone says he's God, it's time to go.

And there's always a kernel of good in a cult. At Jonestown, it was the interracial utopia ideal: a multi-

generational, agricultural, socialist paradise. When people are in narrow-minded groups, they say, "Look how wonderful *most* of it is." You make excuses for the contradictions. If you're a leftist, you might say, "Well, gay people *are* oppressed in Cuba, but they've really reduced infant mortality, they have health care and education."

### Gray areas

**DC:** The older I get, the more life seems like a bunch of gray areas. Nothing's black and white anymore. Take Tibet—it's appalling what's happened there; it's cultural and literal genocide. The Chinese government is destroying a rich spiritual tradition. But a lot of people get on the Tibet bandwagon and say it was the perfect, enlightened culture, it had no problems. Yet if you look at it with any critical eye at all, there are some things to criticize. It was a feudal society that was very hierarchical. I stayed in a Tibetan monastery in India last year, and the young monks weren't given *any* spiritual guidance. They lived like indentured servants. They were scared to death of the Rinpoche and some of them were convinced they would go to hell. So I wonder why we human beings want to see things with no gray area. It isn't real.

**SO:** We're *all* looking for pat answers. We all want to belong to something. Cults or gangs or religious organizations offer a psychological home that may not exist elsewhere. For some people, it's the first time they feel they've belonged in their whole lives.

**ME:** In fighting the "other," you attribute your whole shadow to them. We may say the militias are hateful and racist and violent. So *we're* not racist and hateful and violent. We're the peaceful people, we're the nice people. We have to understand people whose ideas we don't like. As an investigator, I've gone deeply into the lives of killers. Both Sheila and I know what it would be like to be hired as Timothy McVeigh's [the man accused of bombing the Federal building in Oklahoma City] investigator. I know, having done it many times, what it's like to walk through the door of seeing it from *his* point of view. Now, I know McVeigh didn't ever say, "I know what I'm gonna do to make the world a better place, I'm gonna bomb a day care center." He didn't set out to do that. That's not how it happens. People are the result of what happens to them in life. McVeigh was in the Gulf War. The U.S. army ran over Iraqi soldiers with tanks and buried them alive in the sand, and McVeigh was one of the men who did that. I remember thinking at the time, those guys are going to come back and we'll have to live with the aftermath. Our country is full of the descendants of people who killed Native Americans, who beat the slaves. *This is us*. The key is not to project our shadow on the other, but to shed light on them.

When the Aum Shinrikyo sect gassed the Tokyo subway, I asked my teacher Mel Weitsman about it. He

*Continued on page 44*



# A TOUCH OF THE DIVINE

by Joe Rookard

It's been almost a month since I had a direct experience of what you might call "Christ Consciousness." It has altered fundamentally my perceptions about Christianity, and about my own Buddhist practice.

Until July 1, 1995, it had been more than 28 years since I had had any association with anything even remotely "Christian." I have been a practicing Buddhist for about eight years, initiated at various points in the Zen, Tibetan, and Theravadin traditions. Before that, I was somewhere in-between agnostic and atheist, a philosophical position reinforced by an undergraduate degree in philosophy in which I found myself mostly in agreement with Existentialists and Pragmatists.

Raised a Catholic, I rejected Christianity outright at the early age of fourteen. It was right in the middle of the Counterculture explosion and the growing Youth Movement, and at fourteen I was a young recruit to that movement. My anti-establishment ways—psychedelic drugs, sexual experimentation, the rock-and-roll of Jimi Hendrix, the Grateful Dead, and so on—led to a major rift with parents, teachers, police and virtually any other authority figures including, naturally, the priests at our local church.

At best, Christianity seemed to me a fantasy, a fruitless hope for eternal ego survival in a fairy tale Heaven or Hell. At its worst, it was an organized klan dedicated to protecting capitalist and European values. As the years passed, I exchanged barbs with right-to-lifers picketing in the streets of New York. As a newspaper reporter in Ohio in the late 70s, I was publicly accused in letters to the editor of un-Christian and un-godly biases. My crime: stories on discrimination, on the birth of the Moral Majority, and so on.

In my own mind, up until a month ago I was as far away from "Christianity" as you could get.

Then, in one night, everything changed.

A confluence of events and conditions in my life—a recent separation, a cross-country relocation, a troublesome run-in with noisy neighbors, problems with my job—all came together at a single point in a night of despondency and confusion. Sitting on my zabuton, I was unable even to sit quietly as tears turned into sobs of self-doubt and tribulation. I was on a precipice. I was unable even to sit quietly in meditation.

Now, this is the strange part. I started praying. I was spontaneously praying to "God," and the god that came to my mind at that moment was taking the form of Jesus Christ. I prayed to Christ as the Bodhisattva to deliver me from this incredible tribulation I was facing. I asked aloud for deliverance.

Soon, I was in my car, driving down from the hills above Laguna Beach to the coastline below. I just drove. I didn't know where I was going, nor why. But I drove on, repeating aloud, "Lord, just show me the way."

An hour later, I was at an Episcopalian church in nearby Corona Del Mar, praying in the front row of an empty church. Tears flowed as I prayed like a child for nothing in particular except maybe forgiveness for anger and the mess I had made out of my life. As I left the church, I was still crying, and I drove to a nearby beach to watch the setting sun. Slowly but discernibly, I was filled with a deep understanding, and a personal

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*Now, this is the strange part: I prayed to Christ as the Bodhisattva to deliver me from this incredible tribulation.*

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infusion of compassion for myself and for my situation. For lack of words, I call it a direct and sudden revelation of Divinity. It was deep, visceral, un-articulated. And real.

For the first time, I truly understood Ray Smith, Jack Kerouac's narrator in *The Dharma Bums* who, in a moment of realization, looked at the reflections of "celestial vapor" in a lake and proclaimed "God, I love you," and looked up to the sky and really meant it. "I have fallen in love with you, God. Take care of us all, one way or the other."

It was a moment of unbridled, unapproved, unqualified compassion. Partly as a result of my experience, that evening I was on the phone with a moving company to help me move out of Laguna Beach—that's another story in itself. And two days later, I was moving back to another town in Southern California.

One of my movers was a born-again Christian named "Larry." Suddenly I found myself sharing some of my recent experience with Larry, falling back on jargon that unnerved me even as I spoke the words about "God's love" and "deliverance from tribulation" and "the Lord touching me directly."

From what I was saying about "The Lord" etc., Larry assumed I was a born-again Christian too. We were sharing a sort of fellowship as the day progressed, and he began sharing with me inspirational moments, his own experiences (ex-hippie who used to hang out at Tim Leary's place right around the corner from where I was moving out of, etc.), and a heart as big as a desert sky on a winter night in Southern California.

Larry was clearly as holy, as enlightened, as any



Buddhist I have met, and I was stunned to find his simple, direct, personal religious experiences completely consistent and valid in the context of my own recent experience of "Divinity."

Not too long after my "Christ" experience, I spent time discussing it with my Theravadin teacher, with a Vedanta monk (a follower of the Hindu saint Ramakrishna), and with a good spiritual friend who is also an Episcopalian minister and ex-Rinzai practitioner. All three of these trusted spiritual guides assured me that my recent experience was a beautiful gift, a divine experience to be treasured but not clung to. And all three—including my Theravadin teacher—concurred that personal experiences of God such as those I experienced and those described and delivered through the ages by Jesus Christ are quite consistent with Buddhist practice.

What has surprised me most is that I had assumed, in my Buddhist practice, that the truth of enlightenment is some sort of neutral, impersonal state. In fact, the truth is that there is a compassionate, divine force—call it "God," or "Christ Consciousness," if you will—that can be accessed on a very personal level whether we are Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, agnostics or whatever. I have also rediscovered my Christian roots, and can see clearly for the first time in almost three decades that within Christianity, and within the persona of Jesus Christ as Bodhisattva, there is great

power and divinity of a nature that escapes the rational mind. This realization has rekindled a feeling of fellowship with Christians of all kinds—including born-again Christians whom I work with and live around.

Fundamentally, there is no argument between Buddhism and Christianity. They are two forms that share a focus on the Divine, though they differ on how to attain it. Within both Christian prayer and Buddhist meditation there is fertile common ground.

I continue to differ greatly with my "born-again" friends on issues of great concern: abortion, homosexuality, etc. But my recent experience has kindled a greater understanding of their deeper faith and practice. It has also kindled the possibility of a common land—the experience of Divinity, of compassion—that I hope can serve to bridge the distance between us.

In his essay "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," philosopher Alan Watts concluded:

*In the landscape of Spring there is neither better nor worse;  
The flowering branches grow naturally,  
some long, some short. ❖*

*Joe Rookard is a Buddhist practitioner who has studied under a variety of traditions, including Kerouac. He lives, oddly enough, in Orange County, CA.*

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# KEEP YOUR SWORD HONED

*report from an erstwhile cult member*

by Mary Douglas

*"In the highest teaching, one does not see a separate teacher;  
Next best is when one happily praises the teacher.  
Much worse is when one fears the teacher.  
But the worst by far is when one pays him." — Lao Tsu*

Although you may not believe that, as an intelligent and alert Buddhist, you could ever be taken in by a deceptive group, are you willing to take the chance of being wrong? As one who was financially, emotionally, and spiritually exploited by a central California cult, I write this article as a warning to others.

There are many spiritual leaders who will home in—like a shark to its prey—on a seeker's intense desire for spiritual growth and fear of "missing out on enlightenment." Groups that have formed around such leaders can be found in every geographical area. A cult could be just around the corner from you. No one claims to have reliable statistics, but U.S. cults are estimated to have from 3 million to 10 million members. And make no mistake about it: *Anyone* can be vulnerable to the allure of cults. We all want to be loved, to feel secure, and to live meaningful lives—and cults promise to deliver all that if you will only surrender to the leader.

When I joined the group, which I will refer to with the somewhat-disguised name of "Life in Enlightenment," or "L.I.E.," I thought I was taking my first step towards enlightenment. L.I.E. presented a rather unique situation, in that there were two leaders, one of whom claimed to have enlightened the other. An eclectic menu of spiritual teachings was presented, including Advaita Vedanta, Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism as exemplified by Milarepa, and Christianity as represented by Meister Eckhart. And although Ch'an Buddhist teachings discourage guru worship, the very teachings of the paradoxical Zen masters were used to deceive and manipulate members of this group into viewing the Guru as, literally, God.

The Guru used many classic mind-control techniques to subjugate and dominate members, including sleep deprivation, long work hours, ridicule, and ostracism. People were encouraged to work eighteen-to twenty-hour days, seven days a week, supposedly to help "spread the teachings of enlightenment." Schedules like this were not unusual for the disciples

who worked directly for the organization and were told they were most fortunate to have that spiritual opportunity. Disciples who worked regular jobs were expected to put in many hours doing "holy service" in the evenings and on weekends. While nominally you had complete freedom to say yes or no, in actuality you were expected to submit to any request, no matter how absurd. If you refused or begged off as too tired or busy, you were criticized and ostracized.

Whenever projects had to be done and redone at the whim of the leaders, which was often, the workers were encouraged to view it as a "spiritual learning experience." They also were told they must not be attached to the results of their work, for that would be "feeding the ego." No thought was given to the toll the leaders' whims were taking on the group financially and physically. (Besides working an insane schedule, disciples were cajoled into "donating" everything from a percentage of their gross income to their life savings to the Guru. In fact, some dying members were told to will their money and property to the Guru, or risk an exceedingly unpleasant reincarnation.) Shortly after a large construction project was completed, the 64-year-old man who had voluntarily served as chief engineer and builder died of a massive heart attack.

Steven Hassan's book, *Combatting Mind Control*, is an excellent source on the techniques of mind control used by destructive cults. He speaks of what was an often-used practice at L.I.E., wherein "people are often kept off balance, praised one minute and tongue-lashed the next. This misuse of behavior modification techniques—reward and punishment—fosters a feeling of dependency and helplessness. Loyalty and devotion are the most highly respected emotions of all. Members are not allowed to feel or express negative emotions, except towards outsiders. And members are taught never to feel for themselves but always to think of the group and never to complain. They are never to criticize a leader, but *criticize themselves instead.*" [emphasis mine]

So how *do* intelligent spiritual seekers, with the best intentions, become indoctrinated by deceptive "teachers" who take the utmost advantage of their vulnerability and naivete? Speaking from my experience, I can testify that cult leaders implement a cunningly subtle step-by-step process, using carefully crafted mind-control techniques.

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*People who claim to  
have reached the end point  
of spiritual evolution,  
to be "enlightened," are  
deluding themselves.*

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When I earnestly began my spiritual journey, I took to heart a guideline I read in a book: to the degree you can keep yourself open, to that degree will you grow spiritually. Looking back, I see I made a serious mistake in equating open-mindedness with a kind of naive innocence. In fact, vulnerability and naivete, unlearned by wisdom, lead one to disaster. In my newly broadened understanding, I see that wisdom and discrimination are necessary ingredients in the baking of

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*While we are ostensibly seeking truth through spiritual pursuits, we often are actually trying to flee from low self-esteem and unresolved emotional problems.*

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one's spiritual bread. Without them, the loaf does not rise—and one can easily be abused by cult leaders who have their own hidden agendas.

What leads people to get caught up in cults? In most instances it is the unconscious desire of the follower to abdicate self-responsibility and to entrust the running of his or her life to someone "wiser." We want security and are willing to do or believe anything to have some powerful authority figure looking out for us. We are afraid of life and desperately want to avoid feeling our fear. Witness the fact that millions on this planet look not to themselves for guidance but to a god figure, priests, gurus, and spiritual teachers. The result is that, in many cases, the blind lead the blind. So, like the deceptive gurus, we too have a hidden agenda. While we are ostensibly seeking the truth through spiritual pursuits, we often are actually trying to flee from low self-esteem and unresolved emotional problems.

The person who is running from himself is primed for indoctrination by a cult because he has these hidden-from-self emotional issues which a guru (or anyone who has even a cursory knowledge of psychology) can easily perceive. The guru easily captures the insecure person by promising salvation, eternal security, divine protection, and unconditional acceptance.

In my case, this is exactly what happened. A series of deaths in my family made me "easy pickings" for the unscrupulous group leaders. Caught at a most vulnerable moment in my life, emotionally stricken and bereaved, I was willing to listen to anyone who promised to relieve my pain. "Rely on me," says the guru, "and you will have no more pain or worries." *And no more need to take responsibility for yourself.*

Lack of self-esteem is at the core of surrendering to a guru, creating a predilection to look for an authority that one can trust more than oneself. When you add to this the guru's so-called "enlightenment," putting him "beyond the ego," while you are still labeled as "caught

in your ego," you have a recipe for disaster. Your logic, your practicality, your rational thinking—which would normally be used to protect you from deception—are sneered at by the guru as "egoic."

These so-called "spiritual" teachers exhort you to surrender to the guru who they claim has your best interests at heart. This they term "surrender to the Divine." If you resist, you are told that you are "in your head," resisting the will of God, on the path to damnation, and so on. You are locked into a no-win situation. If you leave, you miss out on enlightenment (and the guru has convinced you he is the *only* one who can deliver it). If you stay, you become a mindless slave.

False gurus blur the distinction between "surrender" and "submission," insisting the terms are synonymous. In reality, surrender is the high road of aligning yourself with eternal truth, which leads to freedom; whereas submission is the abdicating of personal responsibility, which leads to enslavement. Self-reliance is not looked on as a virtue in these groups, and whenever it begins to emerge, it is quickly squelched, often by humiliation carried out in front of the group. The message is not lost on the followers. One soon learns that questioning the authority brings swift punishment. Soon, the zombie-like followers give up all responsibility for themselves, constantly running to the guru for reassurance and allowing group leaders to resolve their every life issue. They have been reduced to veritable children, under the nightmarish control of the ultimate parental authority figure.

Who would stand for this kind of treatment? You would be surprised. As in all cults, the membership of L.I.E. drew on every segment of society for its membership, but the more intelligent and highly educated members were the ones who became important cogs in the wheel of hierarchy. They were seekers who had voraciously sought answers to life's important questions but remained unsatisfied. They wanted freedom from their fears, and the Guru promised that. Many of them were in periods of transition, having recently undergone major upheavals in their lives.

Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad give a clarion warning of the dangers of the guru-disciple relationship in their book, *The Guru Papers—Masks of Authoritarian Power*. They claim that "by holding gurus as perfect and thus beyond ordinary explanations, their presumed specialness can be used to justify anything. Some deeper, occult reason can always be ascribed to anything a guru does." Kramer and Alstad also make the potent argument that the very nature of the guru-disciple relationship is almost guaranteed to corrupt the guru. A well-intentioned person with charisma who begins as a mere "spiritual teacher" can quickly devolve into a power-mad leader.

I watched this happen over a few short years, as the main leader of L.I.E. was transformed from what appeared to be a sincere and unpretentious man into a



cruel and arrogant despot. As more and more followers arrived with open hearts and pocketbooks, the leaders became driven by greed.

Many factors contribute to the practically inevitable corruption of spiritual leaders/religious teachers. Often, their belief systems are irrational. The leaders are exposed to unceasing adulation from large numbers of followers for decades, which feeds their egos and enables them to believe they are gods. The guru has to appear as an infallible Knower-of-All-That-Is, especially if he claims to be enlightened (and if he wants to keep up with the competition from *other* gurus who proclaim their own infallibility and infinite wisdom). This leads to self-deception since the leader, being human and having foibles and weaknesses, cannot live without making some mistakes. So, when the inevitable occurs and their all-too-human weaknesses and faults surface, the gurus deny them, and enter into a path of self-deception, subterfuge, and lies. Being without peers who could offer a form of corrective guidance, the guru spirals down into a pit of self-created folly and increasingly bizarre behavior. As the all-too-frequent newspaper headlines demonstrate, some modern gurus have ended up as suicidal megalomaniacs who lead their followers to their deaths.

In spiritual pursuits, each of us must do the work of growing up and evolving into the being of light and love that is our true nature. It is inevitable that we will return to our Source, but each individual will return with their own self-learned knowledge and hard-earned wisdom. We each must accept complete responsibility for our own life if we are to grow spiritually. This does not mean we can't learn from someone who temporarily functions as a teacher of spiritual truths, but the warning is clear. Making the teacher into an authority figure hinders our evolution.

Further, it is imperative to see through the illusion that some people are "enlightened" and others are not. The belief that a human being can reach the end point of evolution and learning should be questioned. People who claim to have achieved total self-knowledge and to have finished the spiritual evolution process are deluding themselves. We are always learning and growing. This is the natural process of life.

How to do away with cults? The answer is to raise a generation of kids who trust themselves. The "how" of that is in itself fruit for a large volume. Cults attract people who are looking for parent-substitutes. If as children we had been raised to trust ourselves, we would be far less susceptible to authoritarian control. For the present-day hooked-on-authority generation, however, wisdom dictates doing the therapeutic work necessary to come to a clarity of mind so we will not be so cult-susceptible.

At one time I was a student of the Bible, and sincerely wish I had paid heed to the admonition in Matthew 10:16: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

In like manner, a discerning Buddhist might be advised to "keep your sword of discrimination keenly honed, and by your side at all times." ♦

*Mary Douglas is a writer and artist now living in Minnesota.*

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### In My Father's Struggles are Poems

**I**n my father's struggles are poems  
I will not write  
about the untold indignities  
to flesh and spirit.

He protected me when I was a child  
by changing our family name  
as Hitler herded German Jews like livestock  
and every day he was reminded  
he was a sheenie, a kike, a hymie,  
a jew bastard, the killer of Christ.

Now, I protect his memory.  
I say just this:  
my father's body grew old;  
organ by organ it died;  
but his fierce anger at the indignities  
humans inflict on each other  
and life inflicts on each of us did not.

When he could take no more,  
he told his dying body  
and the nurse and doctors  
who wanted to draw blood,  
"Enough! God dammit! No more!"

enough  
no more

Some went to the gas chambers  
joyfully singing praises to god.

My father went to his death  
teaching me love's silence.

—Elliot Roberts



# THE HEART OF FUNDAMENTALISM

by Tenzin Sherab

Why are people “fundamentalists”? *They* don’t see themselves that way. It’s a label we give to others whom we fundamentally disagree with. Fundamentalism is in *our* hearts—all our hearts. Once we recognize that, we can start to come to terms with it.

We all have a trace of de Sade, Genghis Khan, or Hitler in us. And all a touch of Mohammed, Socrates, or Avalokiteshvara. They merely express the extremes of our humanity. If we condemn someone for evil we are, in part, condemning ourselves.

Often, the people who most condemn a fundamentalist group are those who were once members, but have escaped its “clutches.” But what made them join in the first place? Not anger or hate, but the desire for love, devotion, and the search for a better world, a life more meaningful than the usual 9-to-5 drudgery.

“They brainwashed me,” former members sometimes say. “I was told to trust the leaders without question,” “I was told my money would build the new tomorrow.” The message is: Now that I’ve left, *I’m* all right, but the group I was part of is condemned.

But any group is a whole bunch of *Ps*. *I* was a member, *I* was the one who propagated those views, *I* was the one who believed, and they are *my* friends who are still members. Now *I’ve* changed. But why? And why are these, my erstwhile friends, now the enemy, dangerous fringe elements out to destroy society and everything I stand for?

Whenever I read an alarmist newspaper article, or hear some terrible first-hand account by a “victim” of fundamentalism, I try to answer four questions:

- Who’s labeling whom as fundamentalist, and why?
- Am *I* seen as fundamentalist by the people I’ve labeled as such?
- What am *I* going to do about *my* attitudes; am I simply going to condemn and grow more paranoid, or reach out compassionately and communicate?
- Why is it that “fundamentalism” produces such a *fundamental* reaction in me?

Fundamentalism is not something alien, “out there,” to be feared and guarded against. It is something that can well up within any of us, because it results from very human conditions: faith and fear.

In my experience—and I’ve been there, having been both a political and evangelical fundamentalist in my time—fundamentalism begins from a very deep and powerful dissatisfaction with life. Take my story. As a teenager, I perceived the way of the world as radically wrong. So wrong, I desperately wanted to change it, make it a better place to live. First, I turned towards God, then towards Marxism.

I was young. It was hard to get a job. The people I lived with and identified with were poor. The world was being polluted, not just by carbon monoxide, but by evil, by rich people. Everyone seemed to be against me. Nothing seemed to work for me. I increasingly searched for a more radical answer to my fears and frustrations.

Twice, I joined a small group of people who believed they held the right answer, the *only* answer.

Now, as members of these groups, we didn’t see ourselves as a great threat to the world. We saw the world as the great threat to us! We felt marginalized, laughed at, vilified, endangered. These feelings only served to push us further to the extreme and make us more insular and secretive.

It’s the same with members of the NRA (National Rifle Association).

They believe that Big Government threatens their whole way of life. To “Wise-Use” people (who believe in unrestricted exploitation of natural resources), environmentalists are evil extremists, fundamentalists out to destroy their whole way of life. Christian and Muslim “fundamentalists” sincerely believe the world is in the grip of the Devil and that everything they value is being torn down. To Christians, Muslims seem extreme; to Muslims, Christians, and the Western values they bring with them, seem the real threat.

So “fundamentalists” don’t see themselves as particularly extreme. Rather, they see the extent of the threat to themselves as so great, so powerful, that the only answer is an extreme one: a theological state, sectarian violence or holy war. We may not like it, but Libyan bombers or IRA terrorists blowing up civilians in London believe *they’re* the victims, that they’re forced to those actions because of the desperate plight of the Palestinians or Catholics in Northern Ireland. This way of thinking is also true of Marxists. They believe in revolution because they see it as the only answer to the terrible problems of poverty and class inequities.

So part of others’ “fundamentalism” is, in fact, a reflection, a mirror image, of our *own* fundamental

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*We may not like it, but Libyan bombers or IRA terrorists blowing up civilians in London believe they’re the victims, that they’re forced to those actions because of the desperate plight of the Palestinians or Catholics in Northern Ireland.*

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beliefs, for which we are as answerable as they. To my mind, we *all* need to make compromises. Christians must be prepared to compromise on their way of life. So must environmentalists, Buddhists, Muslims, the FBI. Part of the answer is to look at our own belief system and question how it is perceived by the people we are labeling.

And another part of the answer is to question precisely *why* we're labeling them. What right do we have to call anyone a "fundamentalist"? Is that the very problem—we've labeled people who differ from us, and, as part of that labeling process, we've decided they're evil, a terrible threat, to be condemned outright?

Fundamentalism frequently grows out of a feeling of being ignored and despised. It is often a call to arms by people worn down by years of oppression. We have to examine *our* role in wearing them down and in continuing their oppression, in not hearing their cries for help.

When the Boer people trekked across southern Africa in their wagon trains, if they were attacked by the Zulu, they would form their wagons into a circle called a *laager*. This "laager mentality" is at the heart of fundamentalism. "Fundamentalists" feel they're on a mission to build a holy land, a place of peace and contentment. They are visionaries, often escaping from some sort of hell. Just like the Lutherans and Pilgrims escaping religious persecution in Europe. They were "fundamentalists," too.

These visionaries see dangers all around them; they feel they're being attacked from all sides. To defend themselves, they resort to everything from sloganeering to slaughter. Look how the European settlers, usually deeply religious, set out to exterminate the Native Americans, because of the threat they were thought to pose. Fear and misunderstanding led to genocide.

For myself, emerging from my fundamentalist mentality was the result of two trends, one internal, the other external. Internally, I began to find peace, to become happier with the world as I saw it. I began to realize the world's problems would take a lot longer to solve, and perhaps weren't as immediately life-threatening as I'd once thought. This was all part of my move towards Buddhism. I felt less need for a vision and less threatened by the visions of others.

But also, I found understanding from the society around me. As a visionary, I needed to be offered a new, more compassionate vision. I needed to be involved, not swept aside. I began to talk to people, to explain my point of view, and to listen to others.

As I emerged from my own cocoon, I realized others could be loving and giving as well. I also had to learn patience. To some extent, I had to accept the defeat of my ideals. While I realized I had to accept compromise, it was the compassion of others that gave me the strength to emerge from fundamentalism, not as a twisted mutant Ninja Turtle, but as what, I hope, is a passably beautiful butterfly.

But many people don't want to give up their ideals. They feel so endangered, so disempowered, that they have no alternative but to fight back. As long as those in power continue to turn their backs on those without, they will have to face the frustrated explosions of fundamentalism. And now, as I count myself as one of those in power—I have a well-paid job in California, I'm one of the world's elite—I have to remember what it was like to be disenfranchised, and reach out to understand their position. Fundamentalism is a plight, a plea to be heard, not an evil to be destroyed.

What am *I* going to do about the impoverishment of Palestinian families? What am *I* going to do about the spiritual degeneration of society, and the pollution of the planet? What am *I* going to do about crime and the crisis of morality in the West, the violence on TV, and the ruthless indoctrination of the world into Western cultural values, so that multinational corporations may sell it more consumer goods? How am *I* going to reach out my hand to those who turn to Christian or Muslim "fundamentalism"? How am *I* going to change my life to accommodate theirs?

"Fundamentalists" are visionaries who feel their vision is in dire danger. We need to communicate our vision and listen to theirs. We need to compromise and not fear. We need to have compassion in our hearts and work with the compassion in theirs. ❖

*Tenzin Sherab (Tim Lewis) is a born-again Buddhist.*

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# A WIDENING RIVER:

## CONFESSIONS OF A FORMER FUNDAMENTALIST

by Lewis Woods

Looking back over my life from my current position as a practicing Buddhist, I discern the outlines of a meandering religious path that has been as central to my life as any of the great rivers have been to the civilizations that grew up on their banks. It's a river that has taken me from the mountains of an atheistic upbringing, through the foothills of belief-heavy fundamentalist Christianity and Orthodox Judaism, to the flood plains of relatively dogma-free North American Buddhism. And true to the nature of a river, it widens as it proceeds, making room for an increasing aliveness and diversity of influences.

At present, the width of the river allows me to acknowledge those traces of Christianity that are still with me; to continue to develop and redefine my relationship with Judaism; to explore re-nascent pagan traditions and Native American spiritual teachings; all the while devoting the bulk of my energies to the practice of engaged Buddhism.

But when the river first came into its own, on the steep slopes of my youth, it was extremely narrow and change happened fast. I sometimes wonder if this narrowness and simplicity weren't necessary conditions for the abrupt transition I made from a thoroughly secular, almost nihilistic hedonist to one who considers the religious life in some form or other to be his vocation. I strongly suspect that, were it not for the experiences that led me to fundamentalist Christianity some 14 years ago, I would not be a Buddhist now. After all, while fundamentalist Christianity, especially the more charismatic varieties, is dogmatic and logo-centric in the extreme, it does require of its adherents an initial breakthrough spiritual experience. Not unlike Zen students, charismatic Christians don't just sit around reading about the ocean. They jump in!

My first experience occurred in the winter of '81-'82. I had been out of high school for a little over a year, and had been spending a lot of time sitting atop the Berkeley Hills, trying in my early adult way to come up with a philosophy of life. I was already beginning to sense that my hedonistic lifestyle was not the only authentic alternative to the conventional career and family path that my upper-middle class, African American upbringing had prepared me for. But I had strong reservations about religion, reservations that had their roots in the severe bias of my secular education and upbringing.

And yet, my heart was starting to open. Out of some

mix of curiosity and attraction, I became one of those few people who invite the Jehovah's Witnesses in to explain their pamphlets. I also began reading the Bible and corresponding with a recently born-again friend, Tony. I opened his first reply expectantly, and as I read the line, "All you have to do is believe in your heart and you will be saved," a wave that seemed to signal the presence of an incredibly loving being entered my body. I sat there marveling as the wave descended to my feet and then ascended and left as quickly and spontaneously as it came. As things returned to normal, my first thoughts were that God Himself (sic) had confirmed the truth of the lines I had just read.

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*Not unlike Zen students, charismatic Christians don't just sit around reading about the ocean. They jump in!*

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About a month or so later, I was able to join Tony at a mid-week service in a small, Pentecostal church in the San Fernando Valley. Like most Pentecostal services, the sermon ended with an invitation to all who wanted to be saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit to come to the front of the church. For me, as a shy teenager, just going forward in front of all those strangers was a big first step. We gathered at the front of the church in a line, shoulder to shoulder with our backs to the congregation. The minister and his two assistants started on the far side of the line. Good, I thought, that will give me more time to get ready. So I prayed like everyone else in the line, but I also watched out of the corner of my eye and saw the minister laying his hands upon each person's head. The minister shouted some prayers and called on Jesus to come into the person's heart. Seconds later, the person would fall to the floor, in a sacramental gesture that signified a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself. In this death, the old, sinful, self-centered nature was crucified, and the individual transformed as he or she arose to partake of a new life in Christ.

By the time the minister got to me, I knew in my cocksure way that I was ready. I wanted to give my life to Jesus and accept Him into my heart. I wanted to die to myself, and be born again. But some part of me couldn't let go completely, and that little germ of self-consciousness, of holding back, prevented anything



from happening. After a couple minutes of fervent prayer and speaking in tongues with his hands on my head, the minister decided I wasn't ready and moved on to the next person in line.

That disappointment was just the push I needed. Within moments, a determination not to sit down until I, too, had been baptized in the Holy Spirit overcame any thoughts of giving up and returning to my seat. Before I knew it, I was gone. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "It was no longer I who lived but Christ who lived in me." I lost all sense of time and place, and the next thing I knew I was standing alone in the front of the church, hands upraised, moisture in my eyes and drying tears on my cheeks, loudly speaking in tongues. Meanwhile, the congregation had gone on with the rest of the service as if there were nothing unusual about my still being up at the front. Finally, I walked back to my seat, overflowing with joy, and sat down to the exclamations of "Hallelujah!" and "Praise the Lord!" of the people around me.

After the service ended, Tony and his friends invited me into a camper for a short prayer before going our separate ways. We held hands and each took a turn offering a prayer of thanks, and once again I was lost in a whirl of love and gratitude and joy. An hour went by in what felt like five minutes.

Other experiences followed these but none came with the same power and absorption, none were preceded by such a feeling of absolute surrender. But after that night, I was a different person. A whole world about which I had known next to nothing opened up. For the first time in my life I felt that all was well with the world in an ultimate sense, for a God who cared enough to give his life for me had everything under control. I had entered a place where the truth of the verse, "All things work together for good for those who love the Lord..." was something I understood in the very marrow of my bones.

The unfortunate part of the story is that this awakening to things spiritual was knocked off course by my feelings of loneliness and isolation. My yearning for community landed me in a multi-ethnic, mixed-class, independent, charismatic church, called Shiloh Christian Fellowship. At Shiloh, I felt a belonging I had never known before. The down side was that joining the church entailed a rather rapid transition from an experience of the love of God to the espousal of disempowering beliefs like the doctrine of original sin.

It wasn't long before I was convinced that non-Christians were on their way to hell and that most established Christian churches were either completely corrupt (the Catholic Church) or so watered down as to retain precious little of the Gospel's saving power (the mainline Protestant churches). My new church-going lifestyle with its prayer and Bible study groups, youth group meetings where I made new friends, and ecstatic

worship services served to keep me in the community and the faith for over four years.

One of the highlights of my years as a Christian came as I continued to deepen my involvement in the church. After an initial period in which new believers become established in the faith and demonstrate the depth of their convictions, they are invited to participate in a ritual known as presbytery. During presbytery, participants fast and pray in something like a three-day retreat. Three elders (not necessarily men) come from out of town—but from within the same lineage, as it were—and deliver direct personal prophecies (usually words of encouragement, but occasionally specific directives) to selected individuals. In the absence of any assurance of being chosen, a feeling of surrender to the will of God tends to arise which readies the participant to receive the Word. To this day I still reflect on the closing words of my prophecy: "I have called you to be a man of prayer in the house of the Lord and a seeker of the face of God..." In a sense these words have held true, as experiential religious pursuits have been an important part of my life ever since the watershed of my conversion.

My convictions remained strong until, two years into my involvement with the Christian fundamentalist movement, an earthquake changed the course of the river-bed of my life: my grandmother died. Nana hadn't even really been sick. Sure, she smoked and ate a lot of meat, but no one anticipated the massive stroke that left her in a coma for over two months. She died without once regaining consciousness; and worst of all for my faith, she died before accepting the Lord as her savior.

That was too much for me. I could not believe that my own grandmother was now in hell. Not Nana! OK, so she wasn't perfect, but how could a loving God send her to such a fate? Before I knew it I found myself in dangerous territory, questioning the teachings of my church and even the Bible itself. Initially, I kept the doubts wrapped tightly in a shell of fervent piety, for I feared losing my friends and community. But something had shifted internally. Steadily new doubts began to arise, doubts that didn't really surface and bear fruit until I left the community for an extended trip to Israel, where I was surrounded by a new group of friends who didn't care what I believed.

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I share these experiences, in part, because I am often struck by the difficulty those who have never "been there" have in understanding fundamentalist Christians. Sure, there are those who recognize that fundamentalist churches offer a level of community-feeling and fellowship that is appallingly hard to find in secular society. Some will even grant that fundamentalism may soothe some of the psychological wounds that many of us still carry from childhood. But what I seldom encounter is an appreciation of the fact that charismatic Christians are among the few groups in our postmodern world that



give priority to full-body, spontaneous spiritual experiences that entail a loss of the day-to-day sense of self that so locks us into a separateness where greed, hatred, and delusion reign supreme. They practice a spirituality that is *both* closed in belief and open to ecstatic transformations of the sense of self. Buddhists may be unique in proclaiming that there is no self to begin with, but they are in no way the only ones who enter the realm where selflessness ceases to be mere doctrine.

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*Charismatic Christians are among the few groups that give priority to full-body, spontaneous spiritual experiences*

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Now I will be the first to acknowledge that—like most Christian fundamentalists—I both clung to my experiences and failed to distinguish between them and the truth-claims they allegedly justified. Part of growing up for me involved making the mistake of joining a community in which the interpretation of spiritual experiences made moral absolutism, religious dogmatism, and political domination seem defensible.

My grandmother's death triggered a recovery process that enabled me to reclaim the power to resist routinely suspending disbelief in religious matters. The healthy

core of self-esteem I acquired in the early years of my life suffered mightily in my teenage years. But the love and fellowship I received from my community at Shiloh nursed it back to health. It was then able to reassert itself and empower me to bid farewell to the dehumanizing doctrines of original sin and eternal damnation, and to trust my own understanding (contrary to the Biblical counsel not to lean upon one's own understanding). Additionally, my philosophy studies in college helped me uncover my "original ignorance"—that liberating inability to know the ultimate truth that is akin to the beginner's mind of Zen.

I also share these experiences to suggest that, while Buddhists and fundamentalist Christians ascribe vastly different meanings to their respective spiritual experiences, these very experiences can serve as a basis upon which to build bridges of understanding between the two communities. Up in the ethereal realm of such doctrines as *anatta* and the Trinity, Buddhists and Christians seem to be floating down different rivers. But down on the ground, where experience is felt in the body, it becomes apparent that we are sometimes actually floating down the same river, riding on the same small raft. ♦

*Lewis Woods is your average African American Jewish Buddhist. He divides his time between working at BPF, teaching meditation in the S.F. county jails, and teaching Hebrew to young people and adults. He is also a co-founder of the Mahakala Sangha, a Dharma group with an outreach to African American men.*



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# NO ROOM FOR DOUBT

## *former fundamentalists in psychotherapy*

by Wilma Friesema, MFCC

Mary, a bright, attractive woman in her mid-thirties, sits across from me sobbing. "I'm so empty," she cries. "I don't know where I'm going, or what I'm doing, or whether I'm even capable of deciding that for myself. When I was an evangelical Christian, my sense of purpose was so clear. Now I only know I don't want to be THAT—an evangelical Christian. But who am I without that identity? What does it mean to be myself?"

Mary is not alone in her confusion. As a former fundamentalist, she gives voice to a pain expressed by many in similar circumstances—that of an impaired ability to know and trust themselves and their own inner direction. While a lack of inner direction is a concern I often encounter as a psychotherapist, for those taught to forego themselves in exchange for eternal life, the dilemma is particularly poignant. For ex-fundamentalists, to trust thoughts or perceptions that deviate from the religion's viewpoint evokes the threat of jeopardizing the very destination of their souls.

To briefly clarify, in using the word "fundamentalism" in this article, I am referring to *Christian* fundamentalism. But the term can be applied to all religious groups that believe in the inerrancy of their scriptures. Unlike groups that respect religious diversity, fundamentalists believe their teachings contain the "fundamental truth" on which all other aspects of life are predicated. Because of this absolute truth, there is no room for questioning the rightness of their beliefs. Others, who do not adhere to their teachings, are seen as "unbelievers," the "unsaved," or at its most extreme, the "enemies of God." Fundamentalists typically view their teachings as history with a moral, not as myth that embodies meaning.

Letting go of the dogmatic certainty inherent in fundamentalism is, at times, an overwhelming process for Mary. Having spent most of her adult life being systematically taught to look to an authority outside herself, she struggles to find her own way. Like many fundamentalists, Mary's initial involvement with the Church was based on a heartfelt desire to feel right with God, and as a response to her very human longing for wholeness and spiritual fulfillment. Mary's passionate conviction to serve the Lord was genuine and sincere.

While noble impulses led Mary into fundamentalism, the religion's tenets did not encourage a wholeness that included the acceptance and integration of disturbing aspects of human nature. Instead, the religious teachings promoted strict adherence to doctrine

as a means of *overcoming* that nature. Mary's complex impulses and emotions were something to be feared, and what was unacceptable had to be split off rather than explored and integrated. The result of this split, for Mary, was an inability to trust her feelings and perceptions; projection onto others of her unacceptable qualities; and a reliance on the Church's authority to

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*Now I only know I don't want to be  
THAT—an evangelical Christian.*

*But who am I without that identity?*

*What does it mean to be myself?*

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provide direction and personal definition. Her own inner direction could not be a reliable source of guidance and understanding.

Having been raised in a "Bible-centered" home myself, I intimately know of the sincerity and repression of fundamentalism, and the difficulty posed to those choosing a different way. For me, as an adult, sorting out the after-effects has been a complex, worthwhile endeavor—one which I imagine will never be fully completed. Even as I write this article, traces of fundamentalism linger. I notice an underlying desire to write "the perfect article," that mirrors the religious need to claim "The Right Way." My tendency to simplify the issue by speaking in terms of two camps: "Us, the non-fundamentalists" vs. "Them, the fundamentalists," reflects a mentality that views the world in terms of the saved and unsaved. Both attitudes negate the truth however, for I cannot write an article that "says it all," and fundamentalists are not "them"—they are my family, my neighbors, members of my community. The challenge in addressing fundamentalism, I am finding, is to describe processes that are destructive, while at the same time realizing that we all carry fundamentalist tendencies within.

One of the most destructive processes within fundamentalism is, paradoxically, one of the sources of its greatest appeal. The dogmatic certainty, the good/evil, right/wrong view of the world that reduces true understanding to judgmentalism, also provides an unambiguous sense of direction and righteousness. In a world that is increasingly complex, isolating, and filled with uncertainty, a "divine blueprint for life" can be very soothing. This blueprint, coupled with an emphasis on a final reward in the hereafter, diminishes angst



through the promise of an eternity free of suffering. The promise of redemption and future salvation becomes like the alcoholic fix which mollifies fears, perplexing emotions, and unpleasant realities.

The above description captures the experience of another client, Jennifer. As a young girl, Jennifer became a Jehovah's Witness as a way to cope with the chaos of her alcoholic family. She found that with her new faith everyday interactions and behaviors, even thoughts, took on new meaning. She was no longer living life for herself but for God. She became part of a larger community, the community of believers, which provided a sense of identity, continuity, and belonging. Jennifer described the Witnesses as "my family." For her, the Jehovah's Witnesses filled a void and gave her an experience of stability and purpose, while promising a better future life.

While Jennifer's strong ties and experience of community were generally beneficial, the picture became more complicated when aspects of herself emerged that did not fit into the ideology of her church. As a young woman, Jennifer became aware of being a lesbian and was forced by the Witnesses to choose between her religious faith and her sexuality. Since her sexuality was not a choice and she could no longer deny her orientation, she was "disfellowshipped" by the Witnesses and thrust out into the world of "unbelievers"—people she had been taught to distrust. The rejection was devastating.

Conflicts can also arise when the adherent begins to experience rustlings of discontent and doubt that pull him or her outside the parameters of the belief system. Either the doubt is kept hidden and an aspect of the self is split off; or there is fervent prayer and soul-searching to remove the doubt; or a confession is made, atonement is provided, and a renewed commitment is made to the faith. The doubt or discontent is not seen as having validity, but as a blotch or irritant to be removed.

Since doubt itself is rejected, the belief system need not expand to integrate the evolving awareness of the individual or society at large. Typically, fundamentalists do not consider perspectives that may threaten the status quo, but rather turn the dissenting voice back onto the dissenter with the injunction that he or she is "weak in the faith." The doubt then becomes *self* doubt, and trust in one's own perceptions is undermined.

The unacceptable feelings do not disappear however, but are repressed and often unconsciously projected onto others. The "cultural elite," for example, may become the scapegoat for immoral behavior, so the believer can then feel righteous and good. What remains unaddressed

are the unconscious fears; by displacing the problem outside of him or herself, the fundamentalist can avert or simplify difficult and complex feelings: if only the "other" would be "saved" then everything would be all right.

Such inflexibility, projection, and rigid adherence to the "word of the law" are the hallmarks of the fundamentalist mindset. Fundamentalism is a closed system, a paradigm of life that is complete unto itself. Clients often describe the experience as being sheltered, in a cocoon, or as one young man describes it, "It felt like I was living in a bubble, a Pentecostal bubble, from which I could see out but I couldn't really touch anything. Within the bubble were other believers, and I could have contact with them, but the atmosphere in the bubble was so rarefied that there seemed to be something insubstantial about them. There seemed to be a subtle frailty, a fear of all that I kept hidden. It was as if my doubts, irreverence, and sexuality were sharp points that could burst the bubble and had to be kept at bay. That was mostly achieved through spiritual threats or shaming, until I felt genuinely bad about myself and that there was something wrong with me, that *I* was the problem. I'm seeing this through adult eyes; back then I just felt bad."

In Christian fundamentalism, the common feeling that "something is wrong with me" is reinforced by the concept of original sin: all human beings are born into the world with a sinful nature, due to Adam and Eve's original sin. One's very nature, therefore, is a source of evil and must be overcome through the grace of God and through adherence to His teachings. If given free reign, our human impulses will lead to destructive, immoral behavior and ultimate damnation.

This belief in original sin supports the deep-seated shame and doubt with which many clients struggle in their internal, hidden world. This certainly was true for David, a former Baptist and son of a preacher. A gentle, soft-spoken man with a pleasing personality, David entered therapy with complaints of feeling depressed and ineffectual. It seemed life was something that was done to him, not something he actively participated in. He would try to meet the demands of work and family, but had very little motivation to engage in meaningful activities and relationships.

David grew up with a dynamic, charismatic father who ruled the family with an iron fist to ensure that his children were the models of good Christian behavior and obedience. As a child, David's willfulness was experienced as a threat and something to be broken through punishment (often corporal) or shaming. "Obedience was all that mattered," he confided to me. "The thinking was that if I learned to submit to the will of my parents, I would more readily submit to the will of God.

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*I was living in a Pentecostal bubble from which I could see out but I couldn't touch anything. My doubts, irreverence, my sexuality, were sharp points that could burst the bubble—and so had to be kept at bay.*

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There was no room to say ‘no,’ no possibility of questioning contradictory assumptions. It was the obedience that was right and valued, not what I was being obedient to. I basically couldn’t be trusted; I wasn’t supposed to rock the boat in any way. If I did I would get hit, which I was always told was ‘for my own good.’”

David’s childhood was marked by fear. He learned early on to monitor his father’s mood and to produce what was expected of him in order to reduce the beatings. Like any child, David naturally perceived the world from an egocentric viewpoint, and thus felt at fault and deserving of the abuse. The religion, with its concept of original sin, reinforced that conclusion. Though deep down David felt a tremendous amount of resentment and rage towards his father, he felt conflicted, frightened, and guilty about those feelings and saw them as part of his sinful nature. In his child’s mind, he was sure that the anger in his heart had something to do with his father’s attacks; it was his sinfulness that brought on the beatings.

It wasn’t until David recognized how the religion had been used as a justification for the abuse and a means of control that he began to express his anger and hurt without the accompanying fear of eternal damnation. As he worked through his abusive past and reactions to the religion itself, he also began to have an inkling of what a healthy religious practice might be for him: one that was not based in fear and the compulsion to control, but arose from his heart out of a sense of reverence and awe.

For former fundamentalists who were encouraged to depend on an external authority, the reclaiming of their own inner directives is not antithetical to spirituality or the religious experience. Rather, it provides the opportunity for a unique and authentic experience of spirituality that comes from, and connects them to, the deepest part of their being. Ironically, the very things they were taught to distrust the most—their subjectivity and humanity—can be the doorway into an experience of life that is profoundly moving, continually unfolding, and vitally creative.

To achieve this shift requires a deep level of trust and exploration into their own thoughts, perceptions, feelings—into their very being—as they allow their lived experience to inform them of their personal direction. Under such circumstances, the challenge is not to find *The Way* but *a way* to live that is authentic and true. As one former fundamentalist so eloquently stated, “To finally relate to myself with acceptance and compassion instead of distrust is one of the most profound spiritual experiences of all.” ❖

*Wilma Friesema is a psychotherapist in private practice. In addition to working with former fundamentalists in individual and group therapy, she also lectures on the various dimensions of the fundamentalist experience.*

## Dakini

In the distance  
I see a house  
in the woods lined  
with fire, the green  
tree crowns melting  
like old iron kettles  
and the trunks, naked  
women upside-down  
their legs loose  
in the winter sky.

Their heads down  
their arms plunged  
in the earth,  
they suck the dirt.  
Too many for too long  
stood on their feet  
to the preached dogmas,  
their arms to heaven  
pulling apart  
hearts and pelvises.

I like my legs in the air  
the salty syrup smell  
of my vagina carried in the wind.  
I like my elbows up to mud  
my hands on buried stones.  
I like my tongue  
in snake holes  
my teeth in roots and grass.  
I like my throat  
on the mole’s back.  
I like my bare feet on the sky.

—Kathleen Meagher



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# TAMING THE WILDFIRE

## *the anatomy of social hysteria*

by Fran Peavey

My partner Tova Green and I have been working in ex-Yugoslavia for the past three years. Everywhere we go, we ask, "What was the first thing you noticed that indicated your country was heading for trouble?" There are many root causes of the conflict, but we were most interested in how a people accustomed to living together could be made willing to go to war against each other. The most frequent answer of the people we spoke with was that political leaders began to blame the problems of the society on one group. The process was slow and involved many complex factors. In Serbia, it was the Croats and the Muslims who were "the other"—the cause of the problems. In Croatia it was the Serbs, and in Bosnia the Serbs targeted the Muslims. Political leaders blamed "the other" for the problems—particularly economic problems. Lies were spread, and guns were distributed. "If only we could get rid of those people we would be better off." This is the nationalistic logic of ethnic cleansing, of social hysteria, and of war.

When you have an "other" to blame a nation's troubles on, you create the conditions for social hysteria. Social hysteria is when a whole society acts in ways that no healthy person or group would act. It is when a society collectively, under stress, loses its balance. This sickness is deadly. It's like a wildfire: difficult to stop once it gets going and horribly destructive. And this fire can catch hold in any society; no people are immune.

I trace my interest in social hysteria back to my childhood, when I frequently accompanied my father on his trips around Idaho's Magic Valley. He supervised farms for a Dutch land company, and we would drive from farm to farm, talking together, eating potatoes freshly dug from the ground—raw, sliced with Dad's pocket knife and salted from the shaker he kept in the glove compartment for just such moments. Often he would get sad as we passed a group of low-lying army barracks just outside Paul, Idaho. He explained to me that these were the prisons, politely called "internment camps," where people of Japanese ancestry were held during World War II.



*Sandy Eastoak*

My father would invariably say something like, "When bad times come, people become frightened and do things they would never do under ordinary circumstances. Governments even do things against their own laws. In bad times, some people become more generous, think more about other people's needs as well as their own, act as leaders for sanity. Others become selfish and greedy, thinking only of themselves or their group. Some leaders lead in bad ways so they can maintain their

power. They have ideas that really hurt other people, especially those who are weak or outside the mainstream of society."

We have known serious social hysteria in the U.S.—lynching conducted by whole communities, the rounding up and imprisoning of 110,000 Japanese-Americans in World War II (over 60% of whom were U.S. citizens), the McCarthy period, ethnically targeted riots focused on blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, gays, or any disenfranchised group. After returning home from ex-Yugoslavia, I couldn't help noticing how the insecurity of U.S. citizens is being manipulated and social hysteria whipped up by demagogues and political opportunists. In the economic restructuring we are undergoing, services to the poorer sector are vanishing in a winner-take-all-economy.

We must face the possibility that a society in the early stages of social hysteria can resist the attack for only so long. When the system breaks down it becomes vulnerable to opportunistic infections; massive abuse and genocide are possible. As my father warned, in such times some people work only for the interests of their family, their company, or ethnic group, at any cost to the global or natural environment.

In ex-Yugoslavia it is called nationalism; identifying the narrow interest of one group with the interests of the whole country and targeting the "other" group's needs and goals as being against the interests of the country. In the U.S. we see nationalism in proposition 187, the targeting of women, welfare recipients, people of color, gay people, and environmentalists. I wonder if we would be having such social hysteria in the U.S. if the average person had access to the benefits of our



economic life. There is a lot of media hype about supposed acts of terrorism, initiated by the vulnerable poor (who suffer from the consequences of competitive capitalism). Does this hype distract us from fighting against the increasing concentration of the nation's wealth, which is more and more in the hands of the rich? We walk around in our tennis shoes as if nothing is happening around us—even though we can smell the stench of fear. The dynamic of inaction is reaching epidemic proportions.

Policies of nationalism turn neighbor against neighbor and build a climate of increasing suspicion and fear. Almost always, social hysteria is misplaced and for good reason. For instance, in ex-Yugoslavia, the International Monetary Fund ordered the government into economic restructuring (cutting back on social, education and health services). The global economic situation was beginning to sour. Rather than point the finger at the excessive borrowing of Tito, to the manipulations of the international monetary community in forcing "structural adjustment," the Serbs and the Croats began to focus social discontent on ethnic minorities, "the other." Ultimately the wildfire of social hysteria caught on with the less educated, the rural populations, the more economically marginalized. And so citizens were drawn into a war that no one knows how to stop.

Our social connection is very fragile. As we move toward the year 2000, the shadowy forces from deep within our societies are rising. The test for each individual is and will be, "Will we have the courage to work for justice fearlessly, nonviolently maintaining respect for life in each creature we encounter?" We must not let our fear of violence conquer our passion for change.

So what can we do to pour water on the wildfire of social hysteria?

**1. Immediately react to pronouncements of political leaders when they begin to scapegoat populations.** Write letters to editors of newspapers, write to the politician directly, to his/her supporters, have demonstrations. The key here is to stop the wildfire before it catches on as a popular idea. Ridicule is a useful tool since there is nothing politicians dislike more than not being taken seriously. Actively support public officials or institutions taking responsible positions. They will be enduring criticism and need to know that they have support.

**2. Humanize the issue.** Avoid talking about any group in abstract terms like "those people," "people like that" (even those you disagree with). Do this for

yourself, not just to help the poor "other." It is in each person's interest that society not create an atrocity event. When you see something that should be done to stand with "the other," DO IT. Don't wait for others. They will come when you set an example.

**3. Do not settle for information given to you by the media: keep channels of good information open.** There is no better illustration of this principle than the Gulf War, which was predicated on so much misinformation that it was hard to sort out the truth. Networking is key here. If you need real information, go and get it from someone with whom you have a relationship. Seek out alternative sources of information: the foreign press, the Internet, citizens from the culture involved, telephone hotlines, educational and

action organizations. Do not pass unfounded rumors without checking them out. Often misinformation is handed out by government offices, so develop personal sources of information that you trust. During the Gulf War friends gathered at my house at 5 o'clock every day with clippings, reports of actions, foreign newspapers, E-mail information.

**4. Wake yourself up while watching images on television.** Taking in frightening

information on TV can be an isolating and passive experience. The contrast of one's own comfortable home and life with that of the images selected from the target community sets up a dissonance that feeds hysteria. Remember, the media only reports the titillating, violent, and novel parts of the target communities' existence—not ordinary lives much like your own. In any situation where there is trouble, there are people working in the interests of peace. Television rarely shows these people. Your job is to find them, support them, do whatever you can. Even if you don't find such a group, as you look for them you will meet people and be in a position to start such activity yourself.

**5. Be gentle with yourself as you take in new information, grow and change.** In an area where fear or alienation is present, people can become so afraid of having been "wrong" yesterday that they cut themselves off from the chance of being more "right" tomorrow. Practice patience with yourself as well as with others. Remember that all the people you know, and you too, have been washed with the polluted water of racism, homophobia and so on. It is a life-long process to sort out the lies from reality. Real connections with people will help, but you will probably make mistakes in those relationships. Ask your friends to be patient and truthful with you.

**6. Make sure you have time to reflect, rest and connect with family, friends and nature.** Reflection

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*When you see something that should be done to stand with "the other," DO IT. Don't wait for others. They will come when you set an example.*

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helps sort out the truth from fear, rest combats despair, connection with family, friends and nature reminds us of the breadth and preciousness of life.

**7. Use conversations to change and activate your context:** (a) Ask people where they get their information rather than accept it uncritically; (b) Get people's thinking about the situation; (c) Ask people about their feelings and listen carefully. Honor the person's integrity by allowing them to cry, and to talk about their fear; (d) Always ask: "What can we do about this situation here, in our work place, organization or family?" "How do we want things to be? What needs to be done to move things toward the way we want them?" (e) Ask people, "What support do you need?" This is almost a magic phrase in de-escalating isolation and increasing calm. For instance, when fear of losing a job is running in a company, an antidote to hysteria is finding ways of supporting each other emotionally as well as practically.

**8. Support policies that give target groups dignity, security, and control of their lives.** When anti-Arab hysteria was high, neighbors in San Francisco set up a rotating guard for a Palestinian grocery store that had received threats. The fact that the guard was organized by Jews was especially meaningful. Sometimes this support must be underground; other times visibility is important as a challenge to perpetrators of the violence.

## Signs of Social Hysteria

No period of social hysteria is quite like another; but in such times there are certain predictable manifestations of the terror just below the surface. Some signs of social hysteria :

- an increase in random street violence against the target group;
- increased polarization in communities;
- yellow journalism, which fans the hysteria;
- political opportunism using hateful rhetoric to get votes or attention;
- a sense of urgency that we simply do not have the time to arrive at a national (or group) consensus—that decisions must be made quickly;
- social and/or legal constraints on dissent;
- legal, civil and human rights are ignored;
- the rise of vigilante groups;
- military and police abuse of target groups increases;
- rise in all-male groups with a macho focus, training and pseudo/military activities.

Give people who are targeted the best available information about the situation. They are the most motivated to figure out what to do to protect themselves. But this often requires a trusting relationship. One Japanese friend told me, "The Quakers told us not to go to the internment camps, that they would hide us but we didn't already know and trust them; so we did not do what they recommended."

**9. If you find yourself in a crowd involved in mass hysteria, move to the edge; always calculate an escape route.** Keep your group together so no one can be singled out. If the crowd starts running, or is fired upon by the police, run for the edge, then crouch down. Create open relations with the police if possible; at least talk with them respectfully. If the hysteria builds, calm your group, meditate, talk quietly, cry together, laugh, do almost anything that will allow the members to come back to themselves and move from a calm center. Music can often break up tension.

Challenge anyone proposing violence. Most often the people proposing violence are in cahoots with the police or hirelings of vested interests. In police riots, stay focused on helping the people around you; encourage others to do that too. If violence erupts "on your side," move away, focus on your goal. Wear strong shoes, carry a wet handkerchief (for tear gas).

Chants like "The whole world is watching!" or "Shame on you!" may discourage violence. Fear is your greatest enemy. Stay centered, keep your mind on your goals. In such moments life has meaning. There is an underground river of calm available to you. You can find it. Let nothing stop your work for change. The world is counting on you.

\* \* \*

The most powerful antidote to social hysteria is community: people knowing each other through time, acting together, with all their strengths and vulnerabilities. Human beings are the agar plate on which the bacteria of social hysteria grows—or fails to grow. Each of us helps create the environment in which history occurs. Since nonviolence is the most substantive change we can work for, as we work for change in a nonviolent way, we hold precious both the means to the specific goal as well as a less violent world.

In any frightening situation, the press is also suffering shock and unable to think flexibly. They often become narrowly focused on the dramatic phenomena and don't report the alternative forces moving. Complexity is lost. But always there are people working for nonviolence and calm. For example, hundreds of people heard about the bombing in Oklahoma City and came immediately to help: rescue workers and communications people came, choirs and performers, masseuses to help the rescue workers, counselors and pastors, and even cooks. Everyone can do something. In the Los Angeles uprising, an African-American



woman saw the beating of a white truck driver on television. She got in her car and went to the scene, stopped the beating and took the driver to the hospital. When people reach across isolation, new possibilities for creative change are born.

There are always people ready to act for decency and there are many more who will act when someone leads the way. In Tuzla, Bosnia, an ethnically mixed city, the mayor, himself a Muslim, went to a crowd which had begun menacing Serb shopkeepers after a particularly harrowing Serbian artillery attack. He looked out at the furious crowd and said, "Anybody who wants the house of a Tuzla Serb must take mine first." Often if one person sets the tone for the entire context, others find courage and decency for themselves.

Do not be afraid to act; you have many allies. The media will not be able to take its focus off the horror to tell about the alternative acts of decency. By acting against terror, you are the best antidote to social hysteria. Know you are never alone—but it may take a while to find the others who are agents of healing.

When my father and I drove past the site of the Japanese-American internment camp, he regularly gave me this advice: "Each generation has bad times while they are on the earth. Live so that you can be generous and courageous in bad times; you will have more fun with your friends and will feel better about yourself. Your community will benefit if you work for the common good rather than simply for your own interests. And bad times always do come to an end. When good times return, people remember who helped in the community and who didn't. Shame is not as much fun as pride."

Each moment of our lives is a destiny-creating moment, and each of us plays a part in creating the atmosphere we live in. We have the freedom to make choices that make a difference. Having taken action once, one is more inclined to act again. We met so many people in ex-Yugoslavia who wished they had taken the threat more seriously, spoken up and acted against the wildfire of social hysteria and ethnic hatred when they saw it building.

Life is always a balancing act—we need time to observe, and time to act; we need to be receptive as well as creative; choosing sometimes to accept the world as it is and at other times working to shape it. No matter what happens in history, it is important that we act from our healthiest, life-affirming self. Then, at least, when history moves on, we can be proud of ourselves for how we cared for life—all life, not just our group. And besides, as my father said, "It's more fun." ♦

*Fran Peavey is a social change worker active in international and local projects (in the San Francisco Bay area). She is the author of three books, and is also a comedian, the Atomic Comic, encouraging laughter at the global crises we find ourselves in. Born at a young age in Twin Falls, Idaho, Fran loves to garden and hum.*

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# PATIENCE AND PAIN IN COLOMBIA'S DIRTY WAR

by Merrill Collett

During the 1980s, I often traveled to Colombia to report for several newspapers and magazines on the bloody events taking place there. During these trips, I was astonished to discover how many Colombians managed to rise above their country's endemic violence to reach what seemed to me a very true level of living. As I pursued the news in Colombia, I tried to understand this elusive quality that attracted me so much. Eventually I found it in Zen practice.

Since Colombians helped me find my path, it was with gratitude that I returned to Colombia this summer on a different kind of reporting assignment. My mission was to take a look at the newly established Peace Brigades International (PBI) project in Colombia and to assess its efforts in protecting threatened human rights workers. [See sidebar on next page.]

I went as a member of a PBI delegation consisting of four Canadians, a German living in Virginia, an American raised in Colombia, and two residents of the San Francisco Bay Area. We arrived in Bogota on a Friday night in June. Saturday morning was spent getting to know each other and the Bogota PBI staff. PBI also has a team in the oil capital of Barrancabermeja, which we visited in the second half of our trip. All together, PBI has eight foreign nationals from Europe and North America based in Colombia. Knowing how difficult it is to penetrate the Colombian labyrinth, I was impressed by what they've managed to accomplish. In only ten months, PBI has firmly established the first-ever permanent international human rights presence in Colombia. Coincidentally, the Colombian human rights movement has been gaining in authority and influence over the last several years, so there's a very positive convergence of domestic and international forces determined to do something about the violence.

The statistics are numbing. In this nation of 34 million people, 30,000 people are murdered every year. Colombia is nearly four times more murderous than the three next-most violent countries in the world, according to the U.N. Drug violence and other crimes claim many victims. But about one-third of the violent deaths are political. Of these, about two-thirds are caused by state security forces and right-wing paramilitary groups, which

often work closely together. Typically, the victims are not members of the country's four guerrilla groups, who are too well-armed and skillful to make easy targets, but rather trade unionists, progressive clerics, reformist politicians, and human rights workers. There are also "social cleansing" squads that murder gays and street people.

So with all this violence, I was very happy to see Father Javier Giraldo still alive and active. This soft-spoken Jesuit is the cornerstone of the Catholic Church's human rights work in Colombia. Wearing his trademark gray suit, blue crew-neck sweater, and polished penny loafers, he appeared unchanged from when I met him in 1985.

Also unchanged, he told us, are the trends I was tracking back then. Now there are open, well-armed paramilitary groups in all parts of Colombia. They specialize in rounding up villagers and shooting them *en masse*. A well-documented record links paramilitary massacres and assassinations of progressive politicians to the military. Local base commanders provide training, cover, intelligence, and sometimes direction. Some cases have gone to court, but since the military are judged only by military courts

(for any crime: if your sister is raped by an off-duty soldier, he will be tried by a military court), the perpetrators always get off scot-free.

This system, the *fuero militar*, is the institutional pillar sustaining Colombia's dirty war. Since the United States gives more military aid to Colombia than to any other nation in this hemisphere, we can definitely have some influence in the matter.

What it means to be the surviving loved one of a dirty-war victim was brought home to us when we met with Gloria Herney Galindez, the general secretary of the Association of the Families of the Disappeared and Detained (ASFADES). Gloria's partner was "disappeared" for a year and turned up in an unmarked grave. That was eight years ago. Since then, this slight, 27-year-old woman with deep eyes and deep patience, has been an indefatigable organizer against the 200 disappearances every year. Most of the people she works with are poor and uneducated (50 percent are illiterate), but ASFADES, with nine branches around the country, has become an important legislative lobby seeking to abolish the *fuero militar*.

Another woman of singular strength and patient authority is Sister Nohemi Palencia, who heads the

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*The statistics are numbing.*

*In this nation of 34 million, 30,000 people are murdered every year.*

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church's Pastoral Social committee in the city of Villavicencio, in the great plains region of Meta. We talked with her in Bogota because she and other Meta human rights workers have recently been forced to flee under threat by paramilitary groups. ("To be for human rights is to be a subversive," she told us.) Threats must be taken seriously. There have been 31 massacres in Meta.

In Bogota, the Meta human rights group has been taking its case to foreign embassies, and they've been getting a sympathetic ear. This "internationalization" is a strategy that is meeting with some success. The government worries about trade sanctions. As a major exporter of coal, oil, coffee, flowers, and bananas, "Colombia cannot remain isolated from the globalization of development opportunities for having failed to meet basic commitments to fundamental rights," according to President Ernesto Samper, speaking on National Human Rights Day last year. So PBI's world-wide connections through its Emergency Response Network have good leverage in Colombia. PBI, by the way, provides physical accompaniment for both Gloria Herney and the members of the Meta human rights group.

I got a feel for PBI's work at the grassroots level when we flew down from the cool, green Bogota savannah to hot, humid Barrancabermeja, on the bank of the 1,000-mile-long Magdalena River. "Barranca," population 200,000, is dominated by its oil refinery and has a fifty-year history of trade union and leftist struggles. There are concentrations of guerrillas nearby, as well as paramilitary groups eradicating suspected guerrilla supporters.

We traveled from Barranca by bus to visit the town of Sabana de Torres, which is encircled by villages under the direct control of right-wing paramilitary groups. Sabana was put on the current map of violence when the town's newly elected mayor was murdered in 1987 and the assassin confessed that he'd been contracted by the local military commander. (I reported that story for the *Washington Post*.) The violence against reform-minded politicians goes on. Last April, Wilson Caceres, a grassroots civic leader who was running for mayor with broad support, disappeared and is almost certainly dead. We spoke with his wife. Laboring under a load of fatigue and sadness, all she could manage to say was: "Please come to my aid. Help me find out what happened to my husband because it is terrible to live in this anguish."

Her grief is unforgettable, but I come away from this trip with a good deal of hope. There are many Colombians who refuse to be beaten down by state-sponsored torture, disappearance, and death; now PBI links them to people of goodwill around the world. ♦

*Merrill Collett is a writer and a resident of the San Francisco Zen Center.*

## Peace Brigades International Colombia Project Seeks Volunteers

Peace Brigades International was founded in Canada in 1981 by former followers of Gandhi and veterans of nonviolent social movements from three continents. It adheres to non-violence, faith-based social action, and scrupulous respect for the peoples of the countries in which it works. (PBI only goes to countries when invited by national organizations.)

Its principal method of work is "accompaniment," a very Buddhist kind of peace practice. PBI volunteers accompany unarmed civilians or groups who are targets of violence because of the work they are doing to achieve peace and change. PBI also publicizes their work abroad to provide a shield of international concern.

When the threat of violence looms, PBI activates its world-wide "Emergency Response Network" of thousands of individuals willing to send a fax, telex, or letter to officials in the country where the threat is occurring. These messages break down the isolation of local activists and their PBI allies and can actually save lives. ("International protection is the only kind that works," one threatened Colombian lawyer told a PBI team member.) As a third area of work, PBI conducts peace education workshops and trainings.

PBI has sent volunteer teams to El Salvador, the Middle East, Austria, and Southeast Asia. It currently has teams in Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Native American communities, and in Colombia, where it has been working with four non-governmental organizations in Bogota and Barrancabermeja since last October. Colombia Project team members come from North America and Europe.

The PBI Colombia Project is seeking qualified applicants, at least 25 years old, for an immediate opening, with training to take place Nov. 3-10 in Syracuse, New York. Applicants don't need an extensive knowledge of Colombia, but they do need fluency in Spanish, an understanding of active nonviolence, cultural sensitivity, and the capacity to analyze Colombia's complex conflicts and deal with high levels of stress. PBI provides all living and work expenses, including health insurance, travel to and from Colombia, a small stipend, and the cost of training. The commitment is for one year.

Those interested should contact: John Lindsay-Poland, 1167 Hayes Street #2, San Francisco, CA 94117, tel: (415) 864-7549.



# DEAR SWALLOW

## *Albanians resisting non-violently in Serbia*

by Tova Green

We were sitting in a small cafe in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo (in Serbia), with a group of Albanian women. One woman, an elementary school principal who had been telling me about the stress they live under, quoted a children's poem: "Dear swallow, when you come to our country in spring you may be shot." Then she asked me: "Should we fight?" Until now the Albanians in Serbia have not responded violently. They have documented the abuses of the Serbs, resisted serving in the Serbian army, continued to keep their language and culture alive. They take pride in their non-violence. I said, "I respect you for not fighting. But if I were you I would ask the same question."

This was the fourth trip to the Balkans I have taken with my partner Fran Peavey over the last two-and-a-half years. On our first trip we brought "bundles of love" to refugee women from people in the U.S. and Australia. Last year we brought a group of women performers and artists from California and Malaysia to work in refugee camps and perform in cities. This time, Fran and I were bringing only ourselves. We had planned to offer workshops in Pacrac and Belgrade; otherwise we had no agenda. We simply wanted to learn what impact the war was continuing to have on Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian friends in the anti-war movement and on those working with refugees. And in Kosovo, we wanted to see another facet of the war.

Kosovo is the southernmost part of Serbia, which was semi-autonomous until the Serbian government annexed it five years ago. Its population is about 90% Albanian and 10% Serbian; some Gypsies also live there. Five years ago the Kosovo parliament was dissolved, and Albanian doctors, professors, skilled workers and government workers were fired from their jobs. Schools were segregated. The Serbian police began to search Albanian homes (looking for arms), and to detain and beat Albanian citizens. They prevented Albanians from meeting in public places. Friends in Belgrade told us that if we went to Kosovo, we should have a letter from the police in Belgrade saying why we were going; if we

stayed in the main hotel we would be followed by the police. They also said that Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo were not interested in dialogue and we should not go there to befriend both sides or create opportunities for Albanians and Serbs to talk together.

On each of our trips to the former Yugoslavia, Fran and I have resolved to see all sides of the conflict, not to buy into the media's negative portrayal of the Serbs, and to try to understand the historical, political and psychological causes of the war. We both espouse non-violence in our lives. Through Vipassana meditation, despair and empowerment work and connection with the Interhelp network, and serving on the board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, my commitment to work for a peaceful and just world has deepened. I believe that violence only leads to more violence. Still, on this trip, especially in Kosovo, it was difficult to stay open and unprejudiced.

We were eager to go to Kosovo because we had heard that the Balkan war might spread there when the fighting in Bosnia comes to an end. We had heard that the Albanians in Kosovo were resisting the Serbian oppression non-violently. We wanted to see this for ourselves.

During the two days and three nights we spent in Pristina, we were immersed in Albanian culture. I admired the courage of the people we met, and appreciated their willingness to trust us. They saw us as emissaries, people who could take their little-known story to a world from which they are cut off. Some of the stories we heard were so painful, there were times when I found myself shutting down. When, at the Council for Human Rights, they brought out a photo album documenting atrocities committed by the Serbian police, I had to close my eyes. I could not look at the color photos of bruised and cut bodies. I tried to breathe and stay open.

We were invited to attend a meeting of local women concerned about health and education. Two people from Doctors without Borders were there too. They were working on a pilot program to address the problem of scabies and lice among schoolchildren. The school was segregated, one part Serbian, one part Albanian. Since there were too many Albanian children



*Eighth grade Albanian students in Pristina. Next year they will not be able to attend school in their own language.*



for the classroom space available, they went to school in four shifts, beginning at 7:30 a.m. and ending at 8:30 p.m. Albanian children were not allowed to use the public areas of the school, including the auditorium and gym. We visited an eighth grade English classroom which was sparsely furnished. The students stood up when we were introduced to them. One student said, "We are very sad, because next year we will have no school to go to. We will have to study in basements and garages." After eighth grade there are no schools for children who want to study in the Albanian language, so underground schools have been created. This reminded me of the Freedom Schools in the American South in the 60s. Later we met a young woman, a medical student who also has to study in makeshift spaces with unpaid professors. She has no lab space, no access to the hospital to practice her skills.

Three women we met had been struggling for several years to open a women's health center. One of them, a pediatrician, had been fired from her job by the Serbian authorities. She still treats children without getting paid. She said that, until the Serbs exerted their control in Kosovo five years ago, she spent her time working, studying to expand her skills, and being with her family. Now she is a radical, devoted to improving conditions for Albanian women and children. The struggle of these women is about to bear fruit; they proudly took us to see the center, which was almost ready to open. They had painted the rooms themselves, and had received equipment for a pediatric examining room, a gynecological examining room, a counseling office and a reception area from ECHO, the European Community Health Organization. They are waiting only for a license from the government, which has been very difficult to get.

On our last night in Pristina, we went with some Albanian friends to hear a well-known Albanian folksinger at a cafe. We sat near the mandolin and synthesizer players, who were warming up with familiar tunes. Then the singer, a sinuous woman dressed in black, began to sing. This singer used to perform on Kosovo radio and television until five years ago. Many songs had complicated rhythms, and the singer moved as if she were dancing. Our Albanian friends knew every song, and translated for us. The words were sad, some of the melodies haunting, some surprisingly gay. There were not many people in the cafe, although the singer was magnificent and it was a Friday night. A friend's mother was crying; our friend explained that she grieved because so few people were there listening to their music. During a break, the singer came to our table and answered our questions. She said she had learned these songs from her mother, although she has a trained voice. She cannot make a living singing Albanian songs now because she is not allowed to perform in concert halls. Sometimes she sings popular music, including Serbian songs, to make some money,


but afterwards she feels sick for days.

The people we met in Pristina live with a sense of imminent danger. They meet in Albanian cafes, aware that the police could interrupt their meetings and force them to disperse. Some of them have been in prison for their beliefs. Some of them cannot get passports. Despite this, they are eager to communicate with those who want to hear their stories. They write poetry, novels and essays, paint, compose and play music, teach their children Albanian language and culture.

The night we returned from the former Yugoslavia, Fran and I went out for dinner in Oakland. We were struck by the diversity of the people in the restaurant: Asian, African-American and Euro-Americans all sitting together. We appreciated the opportunities we have to know and work with people whose race, religion, and ethnicity is different from our own. Our experiences in the former Yugoslavia have made me more aware of the fragility of relationships between people of different races. It has strengthened my commitment to nourish friendships that bridge differences and to work to help people from different backgrounds understand and value one another. ♦

*Tova Green, BPF Board President, is co-author of Insight and Action: How to Discover and Support a Life of Integrity and Commitment to Change. For information about Kosovo, write to Crabgrass, 3181 Mission St., #30, San Francisco, CA 94110.*

# Jizo

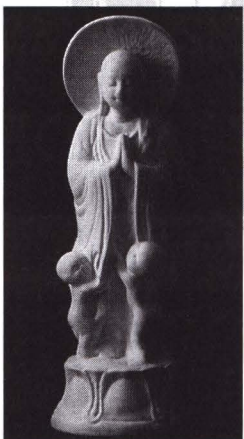


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## *The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian*

by Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast,  
Conversations edited by Nelson Foster  
Triumph Books, 1994, \$17.95

### Reviewed by David Grant

Zen Roshi Robert Aitken and Benedictine brother David Steindl-Rast have invited us to join them for a week in an isolated cabin in the Kohala Mountains of Hawai'i. Our role is similar to that of the only other person there, Brother Kieran O'Malley, who records their talks and cooks their meals. Without electricity, phone, flush toilet, visitors or further news of the three-day-old Gulf War, we eavesdrop on their tender and profound religious intimacies.

Although eschewing the competitive terms "dharma combat" and "spiritual warfare," they consistently and cooperatively challenge each other—for our sakes, as well as their own. "Conversations" is too modest a description for this fully-realized encounter between two adepts. Sharing the ground with them, as they themselves explore it, is a privilege unparalleled.

Topics extend beyond the subtitle. Aitken stresses the cultural relativity of religions and notes the different emphases of Buddhism and Christianity: enlightenment and salvation. "They don't mean exactly the same thing," he says. Regarding the "validity of religious experience," both lay the question to rest. It's a matter of personal affinity, notes Brother David with some apology: "For a very long time, Christians were obsessed with their uniqueness, the rightness of Christian faith and the errors of all other traditions. I think that was a kind of tribal mentality inherited from the Hebrew tribes and maintained in the Church until very recently—until the Second Vatican Council or later." It is the less accomplished who insist on difference, he says, those who "prefer the static aspect over the dynamic, favoring this or that path over being on the way."

Both men agree that the "original experience" is always blissful, even if under painful circumstances, and includes an overwhelming sense of belonging with all other beings. Furthermore, they find that a "turnabout experience" impels one towards an imperative to act.

When it comes to translating the deepest existential insights into everyday living, they agree that life's dramas are complex and always ambiguous. Knowing when and how to engage in social action is not easy. "When the mind is truly at rest," Aitken counsels, "the options will be reduced naturally, and the real choices loom up before us like great gates. Then you can decide: 'I will do this. I won't do that.'" Brother David points out that all decisions are made easier in light of the Benedictine "practice of the presence of death," the final arbiter.

There's a freshness about these two old guys that makes me trust them utterly. Speaking about "sensitivity," for instance, Aitken says: "I think any human quality can be transformed into an asset for practice." Brother David rejoins: "...the more energy there is, the better. I'd much rather accept [a candidate for the monkhood] who makes lots of mistakes but has a lot of energy that could be channeled in the right direction." "And what is sensitivity but energy?" agrees Aitken. They honor equally the wholeness of the human psyche and the oneness of all beings (even "imaginary beings" as in the discussion about unicorns and marriage—one delight among many better left for discovery).

Given popular perceptions of the difference between Buddhism and Christianity, some readers might be surprised to find theological distinctions so fine and subtle. Most of the time, Aitken and Steindl-Rast find parallels for various concepts in each religion, though the bottom line is expressed by Brother David: "We've already agreed that the experience from which the Buddhist and Christian traditions both come is the one, ultimate human experience, not two different experiences. But the metaphysics of these two traditions, the way they speak about the experience and understand it, are diametrically opposed." He goes on to say that he has "no problem identifying differences between the two traditions, but I'd have an enormous problem accepting differences that were opposed instead of complementary."

Disagreements, then, are merely means towards finding complementarities. The Zen man gently admonishes the Benedictine for hearing the "sound of the universe." That's too abstract for Aitken who hears the "sound of the thrush." The discussion of the strengths and "traps" of each religion leads to a complex analysis of monism, dualism and trinitarianism . . . and this leads to a debate about the "Multicentered Self and the Cosmic Christ."

In reading through these efforts to reach understanding beyond metaphysics, the reader shares in the work of the endeavor. After I turn the last page, I think I am leaving with an armload of earned, not received, wisdom. But then the dialectic sneaks up and lets me know that there is no "closing" of this book. The dialogue continues. Furthermore, as Brother David says, "It isn't primarily through our own merits, but rather . . . it's a gift, that we accomplish anything." This humbling realization is itself a gift for which I am deeply thankful and satisfied.

Editor Nelson Foster has thoughtfully appended a ten-page "Bibliography of Buddhist-Christian Conversations and Studies" as well as a thorough index for those who like to browse topics. Gassho and hosannah, irrespective of persuasion, to Nelson Foster for having distilled this memorable week into seventeen chapters of essential dialogue from the "ground of being." ❖

*In January, BPF Board member David Grant will begin work as the coordinator of non-violent education and training for the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the Netherlands.*



*Jerusalem Moonlight: An American Zen Teacher Walks the Path of His Ancestors*

by Norman Fischer

Clear Glass Press, 1995, \$16

Reviewed by Tova Green

"Time is mixed up. The past, the present, the future...it's not so well organized as it looks." (*Jerusalem Moonlight*, p. 8). The same could be said of place. Norman Fischer wrote this unusual book on airplanes, in his room at Green Gulch Farm, at hotels in Israel and Japan. It is a glimpse into Fischer's personal experience of place and family, as if he were inviting the reader to open his journal and peruse it. Vignettes from his 1987 trip to Israel with his father and brother—told from the unique perspective of a Zen priest who owns his Jewish roots—are interspersed with stories of his Zen community, a moving piece about his mother's death, a few poems.

In recent years, many American Buddhists of Jewish background have been interested in exploring the connections between the two religions, and this book is a contribution to the ongoing dialogue. Fischer, installed as Abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center in February 1995, from his earliest childhood "never doubted my own blood membership in the [Jewish] lineage."

Fischer investigates the parallels and differences between Judaism and Buddhism. These were some of the passages I found the most interesting, as a practicing Jew and student of meditation. Fischer discusses meditation in Judaism and Buddhism: "Meditation is not a special state. It's an aspect of mind all the time that can be emphasized or heightened at certain times, by chance, or intentionally. It involves a focusing or a clearing of the mind onto a single point and then finally no point at all. This kind of clearing out, or attention, is called 'kavanah' in Hebrew, and has always been the main point of prayer in Judaism..."

Throughout the book, Fischer explores the theme of reconciliation. He looks at whether a rapprochement is possible between Jews and Arabs, or between members of the San Francisco Zen Center community and their past Abbot, Richard Zentatsu Baker. Reaching out to make peace is a challenge in both situations. He draws from his Zen experience here: "Reconciliation, which is after all, the main point of Zen practice, is to freely move in, not to get caught in, the opposing forces in our life. It means to embrace all stories, and have the nerve to act on that. There's a great risk involved. In the end I think peace may be more dangerous than war." (p. 99)

At times *Jerusalem Moonlight* is hard to follow, as when the moon moves in and out of clouds. For example, in one place, Fischer skips from Alcatraz Island to the Israel Museum with no transition. There is a puzzling four-page excerpt from *Fodor's Israel 1987 Travel Guide* about Arabs

and Jews. I wondered why Fischer didn't paraphrase it and tell us what about it interests him. Some readers may feel excluded by the sprinkling of Hebrew words that are not translated (there is no glossary).

Despite these reservations, I found *Jerusalem Moonlight* to be a fascinating book. I appreciate Fischer's insights into racism, reconciliation, and religion. The descriptions of places and people Fischer encountered on his travels are vivid and clearly drawn. And throughout, Fischer's compassion for the Israeli Jews and his desire to understand and not judge them is compelling. The book begins, interestingly, with a visit to the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, whose ability to transcend divisions is a model for all of us who are trying to create understanding in a world where there is much hatred and distrust of those different from ourselves. ❖

*Tova Green, a member of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco, has been a student of Vipassana meditation for over twenty years.*

*Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains*

by Tenshin Reb Anderson, edited by Susan Moon

San Francisco Zen Center, 1995, \$10

Reviewed by Leslie Boies

Every day in Zen temples and monasteries around the world, Buddhist practitioners chant the Heart Sutra. The line that always calls to me most sweetly is, "With nothing to attain, a Bodhisattva depends on prajna paramita and the mind is no hindrance." Ah, when "the mind is no hindrance"! The words point to a way of being I dimly remember and long for even as I stubbornly continue to lug around all sorts of opinions, preferences, desires, and interpretations that weigh me down. My mind is quite adept at being a hindrance, so adept it even thinks it can *do* something to *stop* being a hindrance.

Of course, help in seeing the workings of my own mind is always right at hand—I'm just not always grateful for the form the help comes in: a disappointment, a conflict with a coworker, an expectation not met, the loss of a friendship. But in reading the recently published collection of Dharma talks by Tenshin Reb Anderson, *Warm Smiles from Cold Mountains*, I was able to slow down and stop long enough to taste and appreciate my life, just as it is. More than anything, this is a book that encourages us to be friendly with whatever happens in our lives, however painful or unpleasant it may be; for it is there, in that intimacy, that we realize our deep, spontaneous, dynamic connection with all beings and can truly act to benefit them. "What is the Buddha's work in the middle of the cold? Have a dialogue with the cold, a dialogue with emptiness. Stare at the cold, stare at the not-you. If you look at it long enough, it will look back at you. The cold mountains will smile."



The talks themselves are dialogues with the cold, with the “not-you.” Originally given in either the chilly mountain air of Tassajara Zen Mountain Center or the cool coastal fog of Green Gulch Farm during Tenshin Roshi’s tenure as abbot of San Francisco Zen Center (1986-1995), they have the flavor of conversations occurring around a fire. Over and over, with the help of stories, poetry, sutras, and songs, we experience this fire, the fire of Suchness. We are reminded of how completely ungraspable and uncontrollable it is—and how totally available. Something in us responds and we feel lighter.

We hear about the German woman studying Zen in Japan who said to the person next to her as she bowed during a ceremony, “I don’t know what I’m doing down here but the rest of me does.” We hear about Rujing, Dogen Zenji’s teacher, who upon being installed as abbot in a monastery, looked at the statue of Buddha on the altar and said, “A poison dart in my eye,” and walked on. We hear about the zealous monk in the early days of Tassajara who vowed to go through the whole practice period wearing nothing but a T-shirt under his thin robe—and then spent most of December sesshin in his sleeping bag in his room. All these beings are no other than ourself.

Mostly, Reb encourages us to do the most difficult practice of all—“to be thoroughly and completely ourselves. So that by fully acknowledging and expressing our limited individuality we totally transcend it.” It is from such a practice that we learn to trust the inconceivability of what we call life and our ability to take care of it, not by ourselves, but in concert with all sentient beings.

Having been a resident at Green Gulch and a monk at Tassajara, it’s difficult for me to read these chapters without hearing Reb’s calm, steady voice or seeing him sitting upright on his cushion facing a zendo full of fellow practitioners. I wonder how the book will strike readers who don’t have the benefit of this sense of immediacy. Does the Dharma which he embodies for so many people with his dynamic presence and his complete devotion to practice come through? I can’t help but think it does. It might have been helpful to include partial transcriptions of the question and answer sessions which follow each talk to give readers a taste of the dramatic and illuminating exchanges which can occur with students. But the talks selected for this collection are among his most accessible and least abstract. What will probably be most helpful is to simply sit for awhile before reading a chapter. Enter the silence and stillness of your own body. Listen to what it is telling you. You already have the teaching. Keep it well. ♦

*Leslie Boies practices Zen and is active in San Francisco Zen Center’s Dismantling Racism Task Force. She lived at Green Gulch Farm from 1991 to 1994. Currently she lives in Berkeley and is Assistant Program Coordinator for E.S.L. at Loma Vista Adult School.*

## ENGAGED BUDDHIST NEWS

### Buddhist AIDS Project

The Buddhist AIDS project (BAP) is a small inter-sangha group that provides referrals to Buddhist resources and events for anyone living with HIV, including family, friends and caregivers. BAP will be publishing a compilation of articles on integrating Buddhist practice and living with HIV, and an information manual on time-of-death care from a Buddhist perspective. BAP operates a 24-hour voicemail information and referral service with up-to-date listings of Dharma events and new resources. Call BAP at (415) 522-7473 or write: 555 John Muir Dr., #803, San Francisco, CA 94132.

### Sacramento BPF

Over the last year, Sacramento BPF has been involved in monthly death penalty vigils on the steps of the California State Capitol. BPF has joined a variety of other religious, peace and justice organizations for this ongoing project. Other projects include a Prison Outreach Program and “Take Dharma to the Streets,” a public meditation offering dharma to a variety of people.

### East Bay BPF

East Bay BPF is working on the campaign to free Dewayne Holmes, a young community activist who has been convicted of a crime he did not commit. In 1991, Dewayne was one of the Crips gang who organized a truce between rival gangs in Los Angeles, putting an end to 20 years of inner city warfare. He helped direct their energies towards social issues affecting the community. Dewayne also organized against police brutality. A year later he was arrested for allegedly stealing \$10 and sentenced to 10 years in prison, more time than most spouse batterers, rapists and white-collar felons. The case was an obvious “travesty of justice” and the judge denied an appeal for a new trial. The East Bay BPF is collecting donations to help free Dewayne Holmes. For more information call Sally Nelson at (510) 548-3867. ♦

### Chanting Appliances

In the Western world our veins  
pulse at the speed of light.  
This is not the sound  
of valleys and streams  
yet, the Buddha must be here.

The computer hums a secret mantra.  
The electric fan blesses the room equally.

—Bill Cooper



## COORDINATOR'S REPORT

A Franciscan monk wearing jeans and a weathered cowboy hat spread the strands of barb wire and invited me to cross the line. Until that moment I hadn't known what I would do, but a welcoming sweep of his hand led me through the fence to trespass on the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. Beyond the fence was vast desert, bounded by mountains and clear blue skies—perfect for walking meditation—until it was time to surrender to the Nye County sheriff. That was a month ago, in August's full heat, when 300 people of all faiths joined the August Desert Witness commemorating the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I wish I had space to relate the tales of nuclear survivors who bore witness in Nevada: *hibakusha* from Hiroshima, nuclear veterans from the South Pacific, Western Shoshone whose land was stolen for test sites, "downwinders" (people who were unwittingly exposed to radiation) from Nevada, Washington, and Utah. And the rest of us, growing up with the real fear of nuclear annihilation carried in our mothers' milk and imprinted on our souls.

For this one week, the atomic bomb was living history again, and the door of self reflection for individuals and for whole nations opened just a crack. People under pressure are capable of great heroism and nobility; they are also capable of great delusion and violence. The lines between such human qualities are not always so clear.

These days I've been reading several histories of the Bomb's nightmarish birth. My understanding of historical fact, strategy, and policy is not very sophisticated, but each book I've been through takes one side. Those arguing for the historical necessity of using the Bomb always argue from particularities of the war in the Pacific. They always dismiss strategies of moral persuasion or military demonstration. Nor do they consider the psychological consequences of atomic weapons, consequences that have haunted all our dreams for half a century.

The other side (with whom I am generally in sympathy) is usually cloaked in righteousness. They often neglect to see in themselves/ourselves/myself the one who is capable of calling on these weapons. They don't seem to understand that once begun, it was almost inevitable that the Bomb would be used. Listening to these sides debated on the radio, I've heard little graciousness or room to say, "I don't know."

I think the teachings of Dharma call for all-sidedness and repentance, a view that encompasses the most awful work of greed, hatred, and delusion, and moves to liberation from that very killing ground within us. The Dharma encourages us to say, "I don't know," and to recognize that *not knowing* in another. This is a difficult

practice, but necessary for rooting out the us/them mind that provides the leverage for war and conflict.

It's also important to note failures and successes and to keep on going regardless of the outcome. Despite our best efforts in Nevada and the efforts of thousands around the world in parallel convocations, the French have begun nuclear testing again in the South Pacific, a precious meeting place of earth, water, and sky that has already been poisoned a thousand times by nuclear weapons. The tests themselves have set off violent demonstrations in Tahiti and around the world. We urge the French government to cancel the remaining tests. It's never too late to cherish all life.

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Moving out of summer into fall, BPF is coming into as full a time as I can remember. The first BASE program just ended this week. We are excited about how BASE has come together as its own community, and as a program that can take root in other places. Participants worked hard at their service tasks and with each other, forging a new and conscious intensity of practice right square in the world. We bow to all the BASE volunteers, and offer special thanks to BASE Coordinator Diana Winston and Mentors Maylie Scott and Donald Rothberg. After taking one or two deep breaths, planning sessions are beginning for another Bay Area group. But we are very interested in hearing from people elsewhere who could use some support and ideas about starting BASE on their own home ground.

Next week Thich Nhat Hanh begins a series of retreats and talks around the country. Thay's work always broadens and deepens the practice of engaged Buddhism in the U.S. and helps us clarify just where we can make our best effort to save all life. Here in the Bay Area, there will be a number of events during October and November—training in "strategic questioning" with Fran Peavey and Tova Green, a workshop with Santikaro Bhikkhu using dharma tools to investigate our "American" identity, a community building "Harvest" of words, music, and theater.

Finally, my column in the last *Turning Wheel* marked the 50th birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi, entering her sixth year of house arrest in Burma. Most of you know by now that Suu has been released from her confinement and is carefully taking her place as the leading voice for human rights in Burma and around the world. The possibility of democracy in Burma is still fragile, though our hopes are stronger. But we should remember that, despite the tangled complexities of SLORC's reasoning and regime, our letters, faxes, and concerns directed to SLORC through every international channel had this wonderful effect: Aung San Suu Kyi is free. Fearlessness and concerted, mindful action can move mountains—and even change minds. ❖

—Alan Senauke



**Narrow Mind** (continued from page 18)

said it comes from dualistic thinking. You set up good and bad, us and them, and you are so sure you're right that you become able to do terrible things.

*Means and ends*

**DC:** I was approached by the Moonies in the mid-70s. They were very friendly and enthusiastic. If I had not had friends and support, I might have gone with them. I know someone who *did* spend time with the Moonies, and recently I was speaking with someone else who was with Rajneesh in Oregon. Neither person spoke very negatively about their experience. They acknowledged that there was some pressure, but they spoke more about the positive aspects.

**ME:** When I look back on my time in the left-wing group, I want to integrate it. I'm not ashamed of that experience, but I try to see what was distorted—that our view was the only right view. Did we think we were going to take over the country, or what? That's what happened with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia—people with that kind of thinking were able to take power, and look what happened—twelve-year-olds with guns killing everyone.

**DC:** The ends justify the means?

**ME:** When you think dualistically, the ends *do* justify the means.

**DC:** Like when some people in the anti-abortion movement applauded the killing of the "abortion doctor" a few years ago. They said it was justified because of all the babies he killed.

**ME:** They even said it was worth it to kill the doctor if they saved *one* baby. The context for that kind of act is the mass movement around it. Even though most people in the anti-abortion movement don't advocate killing someone, there's still the hateful atmosphere they create.

**DC:** People who commit violent acts must feel they've been pushed past some moral limit. I'm basically non-violent, but I find *myself* crossing a threshold when I hear about, say, rape camps in Bosnia. I find myself agreeing with the NATO bombing campaign there. So some of the people we might not agree with have a threshold, too. They think they need guns, that they have to be ready to kill people. They think abortion is morally reprehensible, to the extent that I think rape camps are immoral. What about Hitler? What about those 6 million Jews killed? Should that have been allowed to go on? I don't think I would have been a pacifist during World War II.

**ME:** It's hard to be pacifist. Kaz Tanahashi, who's involved in the anti-nuke movement, said at the BPF Institute that we Buddhists often try to talk ourselves into equanimity about world problems. But if it's true what environmentalists are saying, that time is short for

saving the planet, maybe something more urgent should come into Buddhism. What would urgency do for us, in terms of taking more action? But how do we guard against fundamentalist qualities that might take us over?

**SO:** There was an article in the *New Yorker* recently about an event in India, after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. There was a lot of hostility toward Sikhs at the time. One day, there was one Sikh on a bus that got stopped by the army. A woman on the bus hid that Sikh under her skirts, and when the army got on and said they were looking for Sikhs, everyone said, "There are no Sikhs here." So he escaped. Because this one woman stood up for what was right, everyone else followed suit.

**ME:** This is the kind of thing we should study. How people stand up and say, we're not going to be hateful.

*New Age fundamentalism?*

**ME:** Maybe fundamentalism of every stripe is on the rise. I've run into New Age fundamentalism, too, where people

say, "Well, those of us who've really *worked* on ourselves, *we're* going to survive." It's like the Christian idea of the Rapture, where only people who've been saved by Jesus will survive Armageddon.

**SO:** Some environmentalists have concluded that, because human beings are at the base of the environmental problem, it wouldn't be so bad if a lot of people died.

**DC:** When you follow any viewpoint to its logical conclusion, it's hard not to take an extreme position. Take animal rights. I absolutely believe we shouldn't be using animals to test cosmetics—putting mascara in rabbit's eyes. But I don't think I can throw out all animal testing. Maybe certain human diseases can't be cured without it. I guess I'm taking a pretty human-centric point of view, placing human life above that of a rat.

**ME:** I share your view on that. Whenever I find myself thinking, "either/or," it's a clue to me that my thinking is off somehow.

**DC:** But I also have respect for that animal rights position. You can call it a narrowing, but it also has a certain integrity. The Jains, a religious sect in India, wear masks so they don't inhale gnats, because they don't want to kill anything. That may be extreme, but they're really putting their lives where their beliefs are. It's the same with people who liberate rats from labs. Their position is, either you believe *all* life is equally valuable, or you don't.

**ME:** This is where Buddhism can help us—to hold many complicated ideas at once. To say, *all* this is true. The 10,000 views. And knowing that so many paradoxical things are simultaneously true, we become less narrow. Less fundamentalist. ♦

*Denise Caignon is Associate Editor of Turning Wheel.*

*If it's true that time is short for saving the planet, maybe something more urgent should come into Buddhism.*



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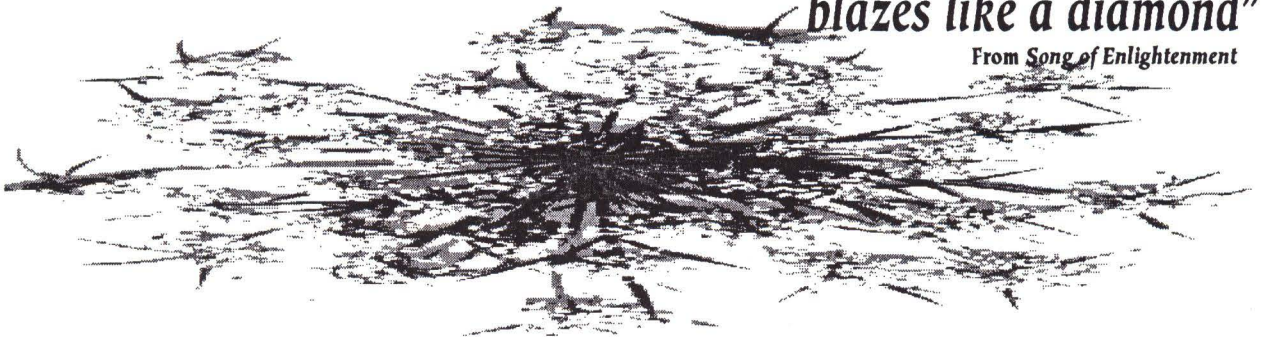
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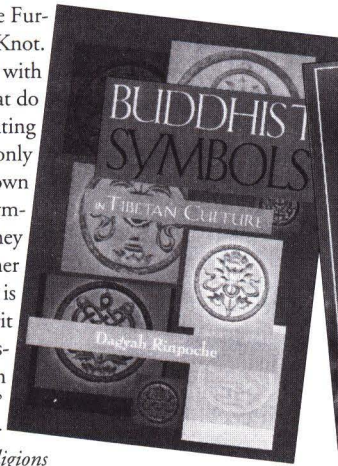
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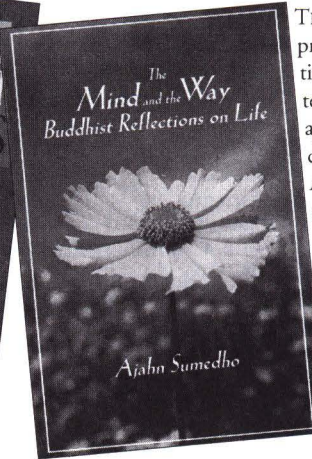


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**October 27-29**

**Taking Self & Others Across:**

A Zen-in-Action retreat with Maylie Scott & Alan Senauke.

At Green Gulch Zen Center, Muir Beach.

For registration and details call (415) 383-3134.

**Sunday, November 5 - 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM**

**Seeing With A Dharma Eye:**

A workshop with Santikaro Bhikkhu—a U.S.-born Theravadin monk and disciple of the late Buddhadasa Bikkhu.

At the Berkeley Zen Center. Call BPF for details.

**Sunday, November 12 - 7:00 PM**

**A Harvest of Words & Music:**

A Celebration & Benefit Performance for BPF with Ruth Zaporah, Fran Peavey, Naomi Newman, Canyon Sam, Susan Moon, Blue Flame Stringband (with Alan Senauke, Suzy & Eric Thompson), and others.

At St. John's Presbyterian Church, Berkeley.

*For information about any of these events: please contact the BPF National Office: Tel. (510) 525-8596; Fax. (510) 525-7973; and e-mail: [bpf@igc.apc.org](mailto:bpf@igc.apc.org)*

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