



# TURNING WHEEL

*Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship*

*Fall 1997 \$4.00*



BUDDHIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP  
P.O. BOX 3470  
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## BUDDHISTS IN THE CITY

*Plus: H.H. The Dalai Lama talks with  
gay and lesbian Buddhists.*



## FROM THE EDITOR

I live in the city of Berkeley. I know it's a city because there are sidewalks with dog shit on them, buildings tall enough to have elevators, a subway system, air pollution, fellow humans living on the street. For years I've been saying that I want to move to the country, and I haven't done it. What do I mean by "the country?" I think of weather, sky, moon, mud, frogs, dark and lonesome nights.

But we city dwellers project a lot on the country. We think the country is peaceful. When we go to the country we are on vacation, so we forget that people in the country get stressed out, too. And here's another myth: that there are more suffering beings in the city than in the country, and that activists should stay in the city. A friend who has lived much in the country scolded me for this. We need activists everywhere. There are plenty of suffering beings in "the country," species to be saved, rivers, farmers, ecosystems. You can do the work of engaged Buddhism anywhere. "Wherever you go, there you are."

Still, there's more stimulation, more speed, in the city. We human beings bump into each other more often in the city. So it's worth considering how we might slow down the pace a bit in the city. Besides meditation, there's walking. Walk to the store. It's not just good for the ecosystem, it's good for your mental health. And you can find nature in the city—notice the weeds in vacant lots.

The city and the country have a lot in common: suffering beings are living out their lives in both places. In both places there is wildness, the unexpected, the uncontrolled. The country has floods and mosquitoes. The city has crime and traffic jams. Our thighs are pressed against the thighs of strangers on the subway. A siren wakes us in the night. My son was in an accident this summer. Riding his bike in city traffic he was hit by a bus, and his leg was badly injured. Now he is all right, but it could have been otherwise.

In between the city and the country is the suburb, a constructed environment that aims to eliminate all unpleasantness. In a gated community, we fool ourselves that we are in control, that we can keep out danger, vermin. Everything that's growing has been planted by humans. Parking is convenient. Only birds come uninvited. (Shakyamuni Buddha's father, too, tried to keep his son inside the gated community of the palace.) There's nothing wrong with convenience, but it's important to remember that we don't actually control the universe.

In the city, when I meet fear, suffering, danger, it's a kind of wilderness, like a jungle full of poison snakes, fishing in bad weather, crossing a glacier after caribou. Of course we try to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe from harm. In our better moments we try to keep *all* beings safe from harm, but it's a losing battle. So let my hunter-gatherer self open ears and eyes, tune in to the present moment. Let me be a martial artist, a warrior, a mountaineer. Here is a mother and her children on the corner, asking for money, here is a long line at the post office and I'm late for an appointment, here is a bus belching poison fumes into my face, here's a fight on the sidewalk outside the office window while I'm trying to concentrate on my work. And here's my co-worker, a hunter-gatherer, bringing me a cup of coffee from the corner deli. ♦ —*Susan Moon*

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To our readers: Please note new phone and fax numbers at right.  
And BPF Members: Please use centerfold ballot to confirm new Board members.

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>Welcome to a *Turning Wheel* child!  
Born on August 21, to *TW* associate editor Denise Caignon  
and her husband Tim Lewis:  
Chiara Lucia (Clear Light!) Marie Caignon Lewis. Hurray!

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Coming themes for *Turning Wheel*:

Winter '97-'98—**Health and Health Care**, Deadline—October 6.

Spring '98—**Weapons**, Deadline—January 5.



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# C O N T E N T S

## REGULAR DEPARTMENTS

- Letters/5
- Readings/7
- Buddhist Activists in History/10
- Family Practice Column/11
- Ecology Column/12
- What You Can Do/34
- BASE, Chapter & Activist News/35
- Director's Report/36
- Announcements and Classifieds/37

## BUDDHISTS ON CITIES

- City Children Have a Right to Play, *by Melody Ermachild Chavis*/13
- City Practice and Bush Practice, *by Kuya Minogue*/15
- Profile of a Peace Commissioner, *by Tova Green*/17
- Old City Magic, *by David Schneider*/18
- Journey to the Heart of Town, *by Cassandra Sagan Bell*/20

## THE SUNYATA GENERATION

- Jake Martin and Josh Schrei talk together about growing up in a Zen Center/21

## The Dalai Lama Meets with Gay and Lesbian Leaders/25

Responsibility and Victimhood, *by Karin Meyers*/35

Thich Nhat Hanh on Love/28

## REVIEWS

- Marianne Dresser on Pema Chodron/30
- Barbara Hirshkowitz on Jarvis Masters/31
- Susan Phillips on *Voices from Inside*, a prison video/32
- Margaret Howe and Gary Pace on *Unarmed Bodyguards*/33

## POEMS

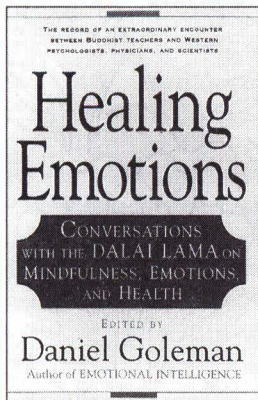
- Robert Brutman/16
- Shannon Hickey/30



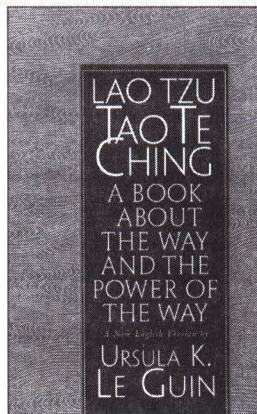
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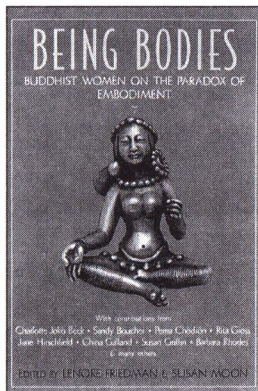
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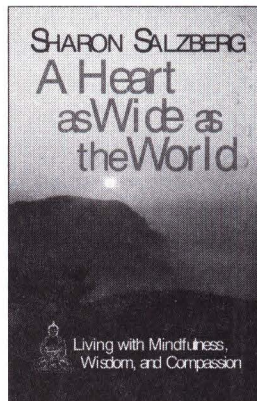
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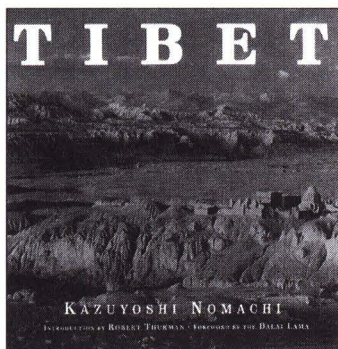
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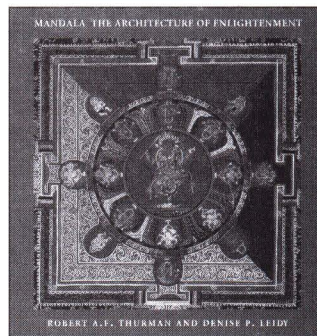
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# LETTERS

Inspired by the article "Think Like Water" in the Spring issue, I joined with the Dhammayiitra (peace walk) in the south of Thailand, 450 kilometers around Songkhla Lake. The people on the walk had very fresh energy, and I know they would like to hear about Fran Peavey's experience cleaning up the Ganges.

—*Supaporn Pongpruk, Songkhla, Thailand*

I'm deeply moved by Mushim Ikeda-Nash's first family practice column. I have a real hunger for connection with other parents who are working actively to integrate sacredness and spirituality into their family life. I love both what she has to say and how she says it: "To give birth to and raise a child, to undertake a marriage commitment, is to...open ourselves to the knowledge that what life has given to us will be taken away, we don't know when." I look forward to her future columns.

—*Cleo, Twin Oaks, Virginia*

### For Survivors of Sexual Misconduct

Sexual abuse of children, adolescents, and adults by religious figures and teachers of all denominations is a growing concern, and many Buddhist groups are developing policies for student-teacher sexual boundaries and for dealing with sexual-misconduct allegations. I am seeking case examples of such religious sexual abuse for a research project and book. If any of your readers are survivors of Buddhist teacher-student sexual abuse and would be willing to share their stories with me, please have them write or call me collect. All will be handled in a compassionate, confidential manner.

—*Nanette de Fuentes, Ph.D., Licenced Psychologist  
1809 Verdugo Blvd. #260, Glendale, CA 91208  
(818) 790-0628*

### The Dalai Lama and Homosexuality

Controversy arose recently over comments His Holiness the Dalai Lama made about sexual misconduct. Gay people were upset that traditional Tibetan teachings proscribe many activities common among us (and heterosexuals). As a lesbian Buddhist, I encourage gay people not to be too upset about these remarks. Naturally, His Holiness would espouse traditional teachings—that is his training. He has never claimed to be infallible—neither did Buddha. His Holiness has been open to our concerns and willing to learn from us. He certainly does not condone discrimination or violence. In general, I think we need to take sexual advice from celibate monks with a large grain of salt. As Buddha advised: we must find out for ourselves what's true for us. I say sexual misconduct boils down to deceit, betrayal, coercion or exploitation.

—*Shannon Hickey, Berkeley, California*

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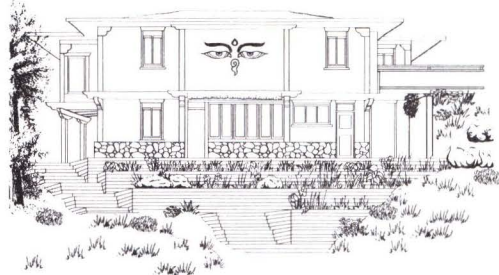
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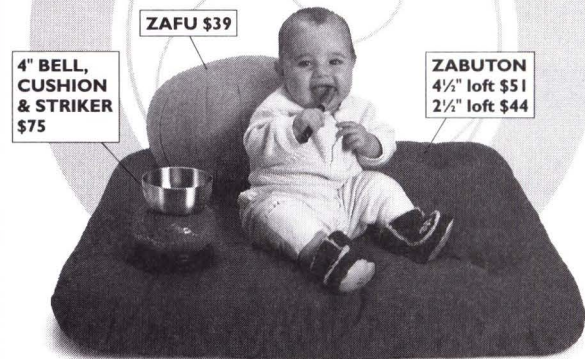
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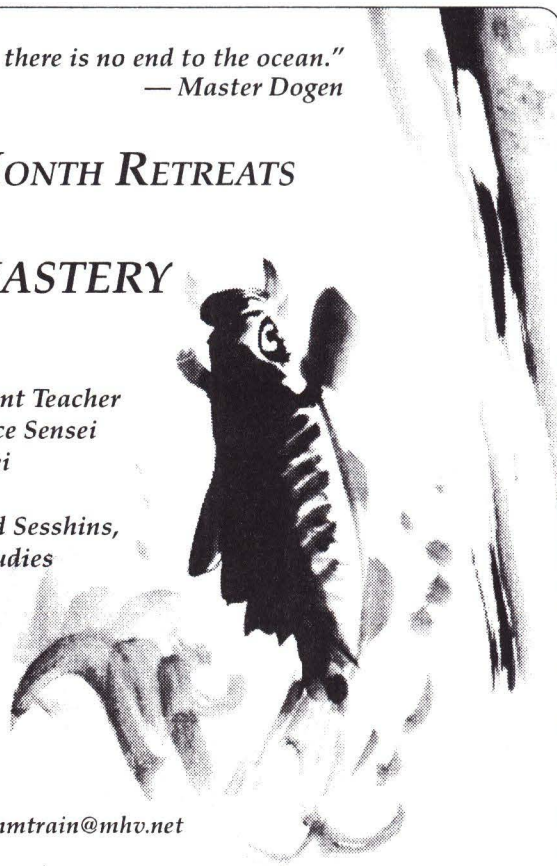
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— Master Dogen*

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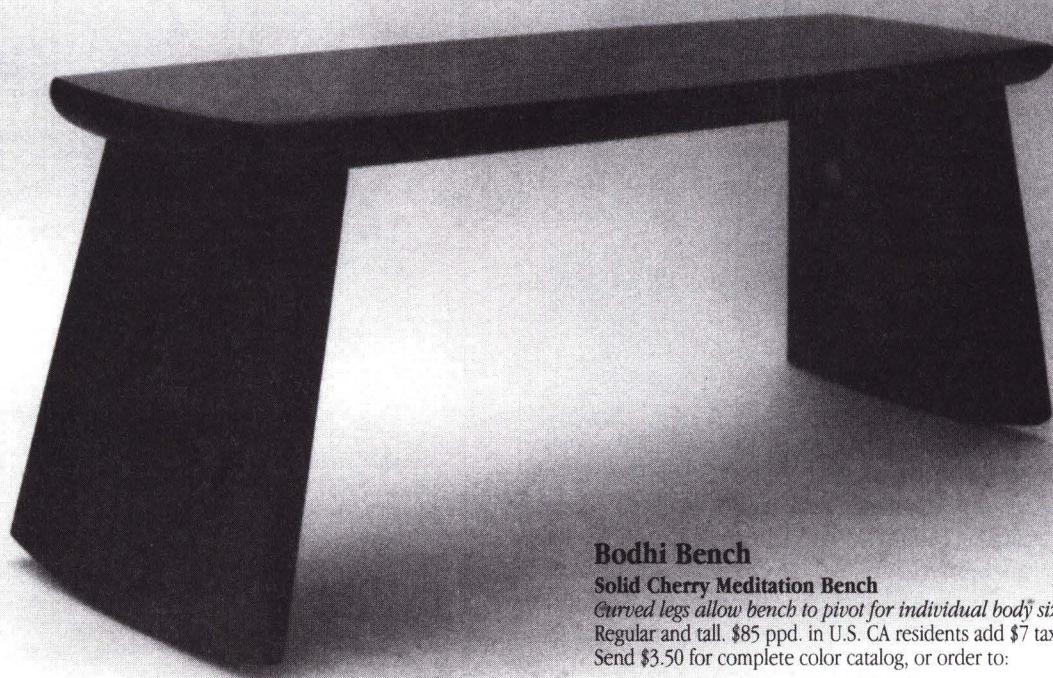
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# READINGS

## *Buddhist Economics at Schumacher College*

From January 11-31 1998, A.T. Ariyaratne and Sulak Sivaraksa will teach a three-week residential course looking at how the insights of Buddhism can be applied to social activism, particularly in the area of developing a saner and more humane economic system. Both teachers have extensive experience working in rural development in their own countries (Sri Lanka and Siam/Thailand) and will draw on this experience to outline strategies for enlightened social change.

It was E.F. Schumacher who, in his book *Small is Beautiful*, first discussed how Buddhist teachings can shed light on the psychology of desire and the motivating forces of economic activity, and Schumacher College takes its name from this inspirational figure. Located on a rural estate in southwest England, the college offers courses that explore the foundations of a more sustainable world view. It attracts course participants from all over the world. Buddhist Economics will be the first course at the College explicitly to link Buddhism and economic issues, and also will be the first time that these two renowned activists have taught together.

For further information, contact: The Administrator, Schumacher College, The Old Postern, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6EA, UK. Tel: 44-1803-865934; Fax: 44-1803-866899.

## *New Legislation Afoot: Freedom from Religious Persecution Act*

In May of this year, Senator Arlen Specter and Representative Frank Wolf—both Republicans—sponsored legislation that would stop U.S. loans to governments that persecute people because of their religion. If passed, the bill would bring pressure to bear on the Chinese government for its repression of Tibetan Buddhists, as well as on other governments, such as Iran for its persecution of Baha'is. The "Freedom from Religious Persecution Act" would also mandate Washington's opposition to international loans and would prohibit exports that might be used as instruments of oppression. The bill defines persecution as killing, rape, imprisonment, abduction, torture, enslavement, or forced mass resettlement.

To show support for the bill, write your Senator or Representative: U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510; U.S. House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515. For current status of the bill in Congress, call Senator Specter's office at 202-225-3121.

## *U.S. Apparel Makers: Business as Usual in Burma*

Despite continued martial law in Burma, several U.S. apparel companies and clothing retailers—including Ralph Lauren, Warnaco, J.Crew, Lee, Arrow Shirts,

J.C. Penney, and Sears—were increasing their production in Burma throughout the last year. Between 1992 and 1996, Burma's apparel exports to the U.S. increased 330 percent. In the first two months of 1997 alone, there was a 50 percent increase over the year before. This business represents 65 percent of Burma's total worldwide apparel exports.


Human rights activists have successfully pressured a number of other apparel companies—including Levi Strauss, Liz Claiborne, Disney, Eddie Bauer, Macy's, OshKosh B'Gosh, and Reebok—to pull out of Burma.

As part of its effort to bring public attention to U.S. trade with Burma, the National Labor Committee announces a National Day of Conscience to End Sweatshops on October 4 of this year. The Day of Conscience is being co-sponsored by the United Methodist Church Women's Division, UNITE, People of Faith Network, Congressman Bernie Sanders, and other organizations.

For more information about the Day of Conscience, and about how you can help stop the companies who are doing business in Burma, contact the National Labor Committee, 275 7th Ave., New York, NY 10001. Tel: 212-242-3002. Fax: 212-242-3821.

## *Tooth Relic and Slave Labor in Burma*

For the past two years, Burma has been the scene of an inauspicious extravaganza. In 1994, the People's



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Republic of China lent SLORC, the military government of Burma, a tooth relic purported to come from the Buddha himself. The tooth, accompanied by a vast entourage from Beijing, was displayed throughout Burma. Ironically, the Chinese government is an avowed enemy of Buddhism, and is currently working to destroy the Buddhist culture of Tibet.

SLORC is currently using primarily forced prison labor to enshrine a replica of the relic in a pagoda in Mandalay. Prisoners are allowed no rest time, and work seven days a week in hot and humid conditions. In addition to the prisoners, every Mandalay resident must provide someone in the household to labor for no pay.

### *Walking Schoolbuses*

Back in the old days, lots of seven- and eight-year-old kids used to walk to school. But since the 1970s, according to a study by the British Policy Studies Institute, there's been a big decline in the number of school-age kids hoofing it to school—from 80 percent to only 9 percent.

With growing parental concern about abduction and molestation, more parents routinely drive their children even short distances to school. The result: More traffic, fewer pedestrians on city streets, low air quality.

A new movement is "afoot" today that could turn this trend around. It started among British and Australian parents, who were concerned that driving their children

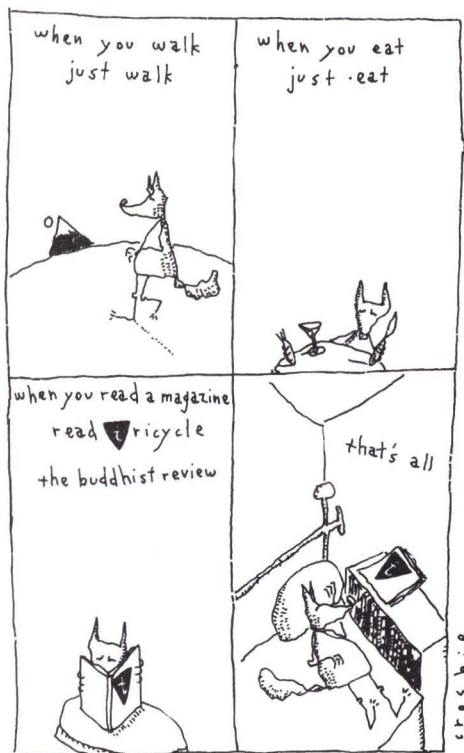
to school was causing both pollution and social isolation. They developed networks of walking families and neighbors to accompany their children to school.

Thinking along similar lines, members of the Greenest City Project in Toronto, Ontario, have developed the Safe Routes to School Program, which includes a "walking school bus": parent "bus drivers" take turns walking their own and neighbors' kids to school. Both the kids and parents enjoy one another's company, and parents have the satisfaction of leaving their cars at home.

For more information about the Safe Routes to School program, contact: Greenest City, 238 Queen Street West, Lower Level, Toronto ON M5V 1Z, Canada. Tel: 4-6-977-7626. Fax: 416-392-6650.

### *Check out the Fellowship of Reconciliation!*

As BPF members we stand in the shadows of two solid traditions—that of engaged Buddhists the world over working on behalf of all beings; and that of other spiritually-based nonviolence activists and organizations such as Dorothy Day, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) who have sprung from their own spiritual roots. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship is one of the religious peace fellowships of the FOR, an interfaith, pacifist organization which has been on the forefront of nonviolent social change movements the world over for most of this century. Made up of peace fellowships from



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Islamic, Buddhist, and Jewish faiths, and many different Christian denominations, the FOR is the organization which brought Thich Nhat Hanh to the U.S. during the Vietnam War.

Begun during the First World War, FOR has remained true to its position that violence in any form only begets more violence, and has worked against militarism, war, and racial and economic injustice for eight decades. For people of all faiths who are committed to nonviolence, FOR is a hold on sanity in these times of so much conflict.

FOR's bimonthly *Fellowship* magazine is a rich source of articles on both the theory and practice of active non-violence as well as information about local groups and peace fellowships. BPF members are strongly encouraged to explore our connection to the FOR. Working together, we can be so much stronger. Write FOR at P.O. Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960. 914/358-4601.

### ***IFOR Campaign for Decade of Nonviolence***

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), a branch of FOR, is organizing a campaign to persuade the United Nations to declare a Decade for the Culture of Nonviolence. IFOR, along with most living Nobel Peace Prize laureates, has generated and signed an appeal for a U.N. resolution, which would apply to the first decade of the new millennium (2000-2010). The year 2000 is slated as a year for nonviolence education. If the resolution passes, IFOR will be spearheading its implementation—for example, it will organize and present nonviolence educational programs around the world, which will include textbooks and multimedia training materials. IFOR hopes that the resolution will be voted on by the U.N. General Assembly in October, 1997.

For more information, contact IFOR, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, The Netherlands. Tel: 31-72-512-30-14. Fax: 31-72-515-11-02.

### ***Call for Release of Buddhist Leaders in Vietnam***

In June, Buddhists from 20 countries in Asia, the U.S., and Europe attending the 8th International Conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, called on the Vietnamese Government to release detained leaders of the independent Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV).

INEB has supported a number of humanitarian and educational projects in Vietnam. A Buddhist delegation from Vietnam was invited to attend, but their visa was refused by the Vietnamese authorities. Vietnam was represented by UBCV overseas spokesman Mr. Vo Van Ai, Director of the International Buddhist Information Bureau and President of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights.

An Open Letter, signed by 50 Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay-Buddhist delegates, was sent to the Secretary

General of the Vietnamese Communist Party Mr. Do Muoi, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, and SRV National Assembly President Nong Duc Manh, expressing deep concern about the serious violations of religious freedom against the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

From the Open Letter: "In Vietnam today, the traditional Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UVBC) is banned, its pagodas are confiscated, and its network of educational, social and cultural institutions are closed down. Monks, nuns and lay-Buddhists have suffered torture, detention and intimidation, and today virtually all the UBCV leadership is in prison or under house arrest. Moreover, repression against the 'Buddhist Youth Movement' has reached such a pitch that 200 leaders of this 300,000-strong educational movement are preparing to immolate themselves in protest."

Signatories to the Open Letter insisted that the Government of Vietnam take the following steps: immediately and unconditionally release all Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay-persons detained on account of their nonviolent religious beliefs; guarantee the right to existence of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and restore its freedom of religious activity; cease the campaign to disband the Buddhist Youth Movement; and restore all property confiscated from the UBCV by the authorities. ❖

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# KING ASHOKA

by Diane Patenaude Ames

It was the third century B.C. The war elephants of the invincible King Ashoka were thundering into the kingdom of Kalinga (now Orissa, in southeast India). By the time the campaign was over, the country would be in ruins, more than a hundred thousand Kalingans would be dead, a hundred and fifty thousand more would be marched off to become serfs on government lands in wild frontier regions, and Ashoka would be undisputed lord of what Indians considered the world. If the story had ended there, he would have gone down in history as just another of the mass murderers that men call great.

But it did not end there. Within a few years, Ashoka made a public announcement, still recorded in one of his famous rock carvings, that his heart was filled with remorse over the fate of Kalinga and that he had given up wars of conquest. He even declared a softening of official policy towards India's aboriginal tribes, long the victims of genocide at the hands of India's supposedly civilized states. The world was amazed, but the Sangha was not. For Ashoka had converted to Buddhism.

For the rest of his life, Ashoka governed according to what he considered Buddhist principles, abolishing judicial torture, mitigating the harsh criminal code in

other ways, and setting up a system of subsidized health care by establishing free public hospitals and dispensaries of herbal medicine throughout his empire. He also promoted prosperity by improving roads and setting up all sorts of facilities for travelers—moves surely not unconnected with the popularity of Buddhism among India's merchant classes. He sponsored Buddhist schools and monasteries and sent out Buddhist missionaries who spread the Dharma as far as Sri Lanka, yet he always followed a policy of religious tolerance. In keeping with the Buddhist ideal of compassion to animals, he founded veterinary hospitals, forbade animal sacrifices, and did more than any other single Indian to promote vegetarianism as a religious ideal. He also encouraged Indian aristocrats to substitute religious pilgrimages for their huge hunting expeditions, which must have been devastating Indian wilderness areas. These measures undoubtedly did much to save Indian wildlife from Indian royal courts, which, by their own accounts, had been well on their way to hunting down, purchasing for their tables, or trampling away the habitat of all of the game animals on the subcontinent before Ashoka came along.

While historians may debate how consistently some of Ashoka's policies were actually carried out, his attempt to infuse Buddhist ideas into local political thinking was a success. His reign is still considered a model of humane rule in South and Southeast Asia today. ❖

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# EARTH TAKES US BACK

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

*Earth brings us into life  
and nourishes us.*

*Earth takes us back again.*

*Birth and death are present in every moment.*

I taped this gatha next to my kitchen sink, above the compost bucket, last autumn. I spend hours standing at the sink, so it seemed natural for me to base my spiritual practice at this spot. I thought that if I could really perceive, in the soap suds, vegetable peelings, fruit rinds, and coffee grinds, that "birth and death are present in every moment," maybe I could apply that to human life as well. My father died unexpectedly in his sleep at the age of 71 in April 1996; my son Joshua and I were visiting and I found the body the next morning. My mother was in the hospital at the time, due to her long struggle with lymphoma. It was a shock to us all. I began to grieve in earnest in September, when my mornings were quiet after Joshua went back to school. Like sitting meditation, grieving was hard and active work, I discovered. And also like meditation, grieving was a process of extreme vulnerability, revelation and completion.

Although I intellectually accepted impermanence, my life changed completely in the stunned moment

*"Maybe he's just in a deep sleep and if we go  
out for a long walk, he'll wake up."*

when I touched my father's hand the morning after he died. It was dark blue, stiffened by rigor mortis, and felt icy to my touch; there was no reason to call hysterically for help. I told my dad I loved him, then went to the living room and did walking meditation for fifteen minutes or so, breathing deeply. I realized that although I was a daughter who had lost a father, I was a mother as well, and that my sleeping seven-year-old's response to Grandpa's death would depend largely on my own. Just as I had provided emotional and physical nourishment for my child, through the placenta before birth, and through my breastmilk afterward, my spiritual practice would now be his main source of strength and comfort. As I gently rubbed his back to wake him up, I knew that he would provide strength and comfort for me, also. My father was his beloved Grandpa, rather than an abusive and paranoid old man who had filled the basement and garage with giant wads of gas station paper towels, clothing from thrift shops, broken tools, rocks, plastic bags, magazines. Through my love,

Joshua would conquer his fear; through Josh's love, I could overcome my anger.

"Something important has happened," I said. "Grandpa died last night."

He moaned, buried his head under the covers, and said brokenly, "Maybe he's just in a deep sleep and if we go out for a long walk, he'll wake up."

"No," I said. "Grandpa really is dead, not asleep." I told him it was completely up to him whether he wanted to look at the body, and that I would be with him every minute.

We hugged each other, then went upstairs and ate breakfast quietly. The house was charged with a profound silence, as though an enormous storm had just passed. Some hours later, when the funeral home men carried my father's body out of the house, Josh accompanied them like an honor guard, holding a toy samurai sword that once belonged to my brother. "This is the last time we will see Grandpa in his earthly form," he said.

Forty-nine days later, my husband Chris, Josh, and I, together with a few close friends, climbed at low tide over slippery, mussel-encrusted rocks to a remote northern California beach, and scattered a portion of my father's ashes in a tidepool filled with jade-green anemones and orange and purple sea stars. The heavy white powder of bone and teeth fragments swirled smokily in the cold water. We chanted the Heart Sutra, and left before the tide came back in. ❖



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# COUNTRY DRIVING OR CITY WALKING?

by Stephanie Kaza

When my ten-year-old niece came to visit me in California, she couldn't resist the urge to clean. From her suburban apartment-dweller perspective, she thought our country cabin looked "shacky." The pool-turned-pond was disgusting, the compost toilet barely approachable. Friends from Berkeley, in contrast, see the place as a refuge, an idyllic spot by the warbling creek, embraced by statuesque firs. How serene! How pastoral! How rare and delightful!

Recently we interviewed a young woman about subletting the place while we return to Vermont for six months. She had always dreamed of living in the country, close to nature and in touch with the seasons. Ah, the dream so many share... We felt it our obligation to temper her romantic ideas with the facts of living with wood rats, raccoons, and yellow jackets. We wanted to know: Are you prepared to deal with floods? fires? Do you really want to live with the Wild and Awesome?

Last year in Vermont, we rented a sunny upstairs apartment in the old run-down section of Burlington. We had the offer of a fine rambly house in the country, but we opted for the city. Why? The main reason was to avoid enslavement to car commuting. But we also wanted to load the odds against winter isolation and cabin fever blues. Living in the city seemed like a better bet. We were lucky in finding psychic space through access to public lands—the bike path and waterfront along the lake, and nearby organic gardens. In our city apartment we revel in the five-minute hop to the co-op, the 15-minute drop-off at the airport. The hardest thing about living in the city is letting go of our attachments to living in the country!

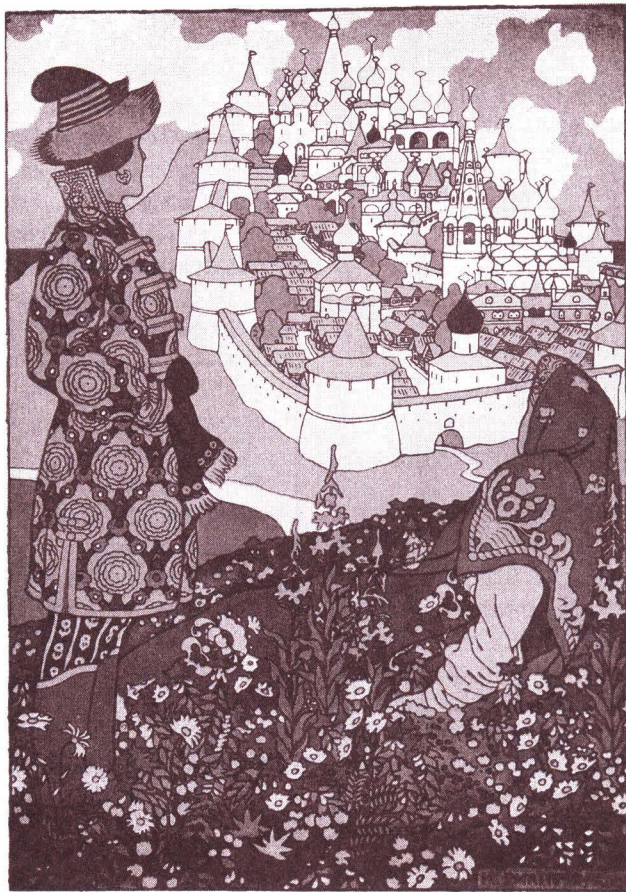
Ecological Buddhism is about busting up preconceived ideas and looking directly at reality—same as all

*The hardest thing about living in the city is letting go of our attachments to living in the country!*

forms of Buddhism. City/country myths are overripe for just such an exercise. Sure, we have great sightings of mink, coyote, heron, and kingfisher at Dry Creek, but it takes two hours to get to the airport. Sure it's a charming, Thoreauvian lifestyle, but we are completely dependent on the car for all supplies. Contact with Buddhist community? It's over an hour's drive to Green Gulch Zen Center. In Burlington I walk a mile to the weekly sitting I attend.

One driving force behind the generic urge to flee the city for the country is the desire for freedom—i.e. freedom to "do your own thing"—whether it's building a second home, growing dope, writing a memoir, or living off the land. I suspect this is yet another version of American individualism, our primary cultural conditioning. Getting out of the city is then synonymous with not having to deal with other people. But a) you *do* have to deal with other people in the country (neighbors who want to liquidate their forest assets, for example) and b) dealing with people is at the core of Buddhist practice. It's not that hard to be kind to deer and butterflies, but noisy neighbors and their dogs? Much harder.

Several chroniclers of Buddhism in America have pointed out that of the Three Jewels, Americans seem far more interested in the Buddha and the Dharma than in the Sangha. Hearing the teachings, sitting in meditation—these are much more appealing than going to community meetings or resolving center conflicts. I wonder if living in the city is more conducive to sangha-building. Choosing a community over isolation is a radical act in the context of American social norms. Why not take on the challenge as Buddhist ecological practice? Might clean up some old ways of thinking as well as some neglected neighborhoods. ❖



I. Bilibin, 1905

# CITY CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO PLAY

by Melody Ermachild Chavis

I think of people who are struggling to reclaim earth that lies unloved in cities as dear comrades. All over America, cities own unused land, much of it vacant lots seized for non-payment of taxes. New York City alone owns about 20,000 vacant lots. Though much urban land is overwhelmingly blighted, most cities are reluctant to designate it as open space, on the outside chance that a taxpaying developer will come along with a building project. Yet people need land for playgrounds and gardens and parks, and everywhere urban greeners are popping up like crabgrass between the cracks in cement, to till city soil and turn children loose to run and play.

I volunteer with a youth group that grows food on vacant lots where the soil is full of broken glass. No matter how many buckets of shards we collect, every shovelful of earth is still laced with shiny bits of shattered bottles. It turns out no harm comes of this; we wear gloves, and none of us has been cut. Tender roots feel their way gently around sharp edges, and the plants prosper. Chard thriving in glass-laced soil is the urban equivalent of a lotus growing in mud. Our children, too, can grow whole if properly nurtured, even in a tough environment.

I am always looking for examples of this kind of success, so I jumped at an invitation to meet a group of community activists in the South Bronx who had, with the help of the Trust For Public Land, won permanent ownership of a dangerously blighted vacant lot for a playground for their children.

Although some 2000 children live in the Mount Hope neighborhood of the South Bronx, the nearest playground was long blocks away, until their new playground on Creston Avenue was built. Before, the children could play only inside their apartments, or take their chances out on the dangerous sidewalks or in the streets.

Mount Hope's Creston Avenue playground is a joyful splash of color, with its bright new play structures swarming with active children, and wooden beds planted with flowers. The playground is surrounded on three sides with six-story apartment buildings, and its fenced fourth side has a view of a busy intersection where idle drinkers lounge along the sidewalk near a weed-choked, garbage-strewn, abandoned lot across the street.

"That's what our playground lot was like before,"

said Lorraine Williamson, another mother at the table, pointing, "only even worse. Here, two old buildings had burned down, and there was even more garbage, and rats."

On a hot summer day, Lorraine and I sat with Diane Marine at a brand-new picnic table in the skimpy shade of a fledgling tree. Diane, a vivacious blonde grandmother who is a member of the Board of Directors of the Mount Hope Organization, told me it hadn't been easy to win land for the children. Speaking in her emphatic New Yorker's accent, Diane said, "Let me make you understand one thing: New York City does not give up land! To get them to give *us*—poor people in the Bronx—some *land—that* was amazing!"

*"To get New York City to give us—poor people in the Bronx—some land—that was amazing!"*

Our group of mothers and grandmothers was watching as a dozen small boys and girls earnestly wielded rakes and shovels. Tim Rutgers, a member of the Trust For Public Land's Playground Initiative staff, was showing the children how to level the soil and pave a corner of their play area with cobblestones he had salvaged for reuse early that morning from a Parks Department dumpsite at the edge of the East River.

Within minutes of Tim's arrival in his loaded van, a small crowd of adults and children had gathered to help. That's the community spirit the Mount Hope Organization, a multi-racial group, has built over thirteen years of tackling issues such as crime and cleanliness together. In summer, when there are no school lunches, they blocked the street to feed hungry children. They knew they wanted the vacant lot in their midst for a playground, but they lacked funds and access to the land.

The Trust for Public Land negotiated with the city for permanent use of the land and helped find grants. TPL added its own simple criteria, asking the group to open the playground to the public, and to include children in the planning and decision-making.

City personnel knew they could not just clean a lot, plunk down some play equipment and go away, leaving it to revert to vandalized, broken-glass-strewn drug-dealers' turf. The City needed a strong partner like TPL to bring in some essential ingredients: community stewardship and private funding.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company provided the lead grant, and eventually \$200,000 was raised

for the playground. Thus, the playground was created by an effective four-way partnership between a community group, an environmental non-profit, government, and corporate funders.

Watching the crew of young masons working on their cobblestone paving project, Diane Marine explained proudly, "These children feel they own this place. They live right here and they all worked when we cleared the rubbish off our land."

Ten-year-old Jeanette Vargas lives in the building next door and is a constant user of the playground. "Our family's lived here since my grandmother came from Puerto Rico when she was 17 years old," Jeanette said proudly. She showed me the places where rats had nested. The rats had had to be poisoned, and Jeanette held her nose to show how terrible it had been to wait for the smell to abate.

Every paradise needs a guardian of the gate. At the Creston Avenue playground it's Anna Nasario, a 60-year-old grandmother of nine. A dedicated volunteer who lives next door, Mrs. Nasario opens the playground in the morning and locks it at night. Only children under the age of 12 and their caretakers can come in, and Anna Nasario warns away anyone who could pose a menace to the dozens of children playing under her watchful eye. A short, solid woman, she seems perfect for the job: fully bilingual, acquainted with everyone on the block, she combines the undisputed authority of the matriarch of a large family with the kind eye of a beloved grandmother. Mrs. Nasario supervises the playground with her cell phone in hand, and if necessary, she is ready to use it to call the local precinct station.

When a thin old man, unsteady on his feet and holding a bottle wrapped in a brown sack, tentatively approached the gate, Mrs. Nasario stopped him in his tracks with the Spanish equivalent of "Don't even think about it!"

Anna Nasario's job, as she sees it, is to create a new culture on this block in which everyone recognizes that the little children's space is inviolable. It hasn't been easy. She has had to contend with a crack-addicted mother who tried to send her children out to play unsupervised. The woman also threw garbage, including even dirty disposable diapers, out of her windows into the playground. Anna Nasario reasoned with her, and finally called in an officer who warned the wayward mother. Since then, this family's respect for the play space has improved.

Older kids want to come in, but they can't, Mrs. Nasario says firmly. "The one thing that could kill this place is drugs. If they want to smoke dope and swear, they can go up the street."

Then there is the task of educating hundreds of children about how to use the new play equipment safely.

A little boy managed to get his small bike up onto the play structure while Anna's back was turned, but the moment she saw him, she scolded him, and he quickly took it down and rolled his bike towards the gate. A sign lists what's not allowed: No drugs, alcohol, bikes, dogs, cooking, loud radios, littering, ball playing, fighting. The list was agreed on after community meetings that included the children. The no-bikes rule poses a dilemma, since a bike cannot be left unattended for even a moment on the busy sidewalk outside the gate for fear of its being stolen. Committee members are considering putting a bike rack inside the fence.

Installation of a water spigot with a separate meter has proven to be complicated, so meanwhile the neighbors carry water for the plants from their apartments, and Anna Nasario hooks up a hose from a basement to cool off the children on the hottest summer days. It makes Anna laugh that her hardest task is to coax children to leave when closing time comes. "I start telling them ahead of time, but they don't want to go."

Betty Turner, an energetic African American mother whose apartment is at the rear of the playground, has chaired the playground committee, in addition to working a full-time job for over two years, during all of the planning and work that the project required. "It's been a long haul, but worth it," she said. "The hardest part was waiting—for the funding, for construction to start. The kids were impatient. 'It's coming—it's coming,' we would tell them."

Betty Turner said the Mount Hope playground committee "has not overcome. We are overcoming. We are still striving."

"This is the first thing I've ever worked on, our first creation," Diane Marine said. "You have doubts in the back of your mind. 'Will it ever come to be?' But you throw those away. I heard Betty [Turner] say a hundred times how good it feels to give back to the community, but I didn't really know what she meant until now."

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child declares that children have a right to play. Mount Hope's children now have a place to do just that. ♦

Portions of this article appeared in *Land and People*, the Journal of the Trust For Public Land. For more information about TPL's Playground Initiative, and how you can help, contact The Trust for Public Land at (415) 495-4014.

*Melody Ermachild Chavis' engaged Buddhist memoir, Altars In The Street (Bell Tower/Crown), weaves together her work as an investigator helping inmates on California's Death Row, and her own Berkeley, California neighborhood's courageous efforts to revive hope and sustain community.*

*A sign lists what's not allowed:  
No drugs, alcohol, bikes, dogs,  
cooking, loud radios, littering,  
ball playing, fighting.*

# CITY PRACTICE & BUSH PRACTICE

by Kuya Minogue

We have just finished our first two-week retreat at Amazenji, a Zen training center for women in British Columbia. During the first week, a hailstorm took down the tent zendo as we were sitting in it, so we had to pitch it deeper in the woods where the trees provided a windbreak. Mosquitoes and black flies then became a major challenge. Mosquitoes prefer the

*When women inquire about coming for retreat, I tell them we have mosquitoes, black flies, bears, wolves, moose and lynx, but no indoor plumbing. I never hear from most city people again.*

woods because it's cooler there and the wind blows less. *Bzzzzz. Bzzzzz. Bzzzzz. Lunch!* Sometimes they swarmed so thickly that we could hardly see what we were doing through the mosquito-net hats we wore as we worked. It became impossible to get into the zendo with the traditional slow monk-walk. We took turns unzipping the tent while the next person dove head-first through the door into the zendo.

At first we tried not to kill mosquitoes as we sat, but they made zazen impossible. Bare hands tenderly brushed the stinging Buddhas from eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, but we couldn't brush them from mind. After a long discussion, we decided to kill the mosquitoes in the zendo before we sat, so each sitting began with our own killing frenzy. Our judgments about local ranchers, who were gunning for a cougar that had been killing their sheep, faded away. *Slap. Swipe. Squash.* Dharma talks turned to the preciousness of life, and the tough decisions the precept against taking life brings to us.

Morning temple clean-up included gathering all the mosquito corpses and placing them on the altar in an empty incense bowl. At midday service, we performed our version of a Buddhist animal funeral for the mosquitoes.

"A myriad of Buddhas have left their bodies. The universe trembles slightly."

This is not a city practice.

## How big is a big city?

For two years I have lived in Tsay Keh, an

isolated First Nations community in northern British Columbia. Thirty houses, one general store, one school and one tribal office make up the town. Bears, wolves, moose, foxes and caribou are seen regularly in the village streets. A herd of wild horses comes through to graze. Until I went for a winter hike with Bessie, a woman who has not assimilated white ways, I thought I was living in the bush.

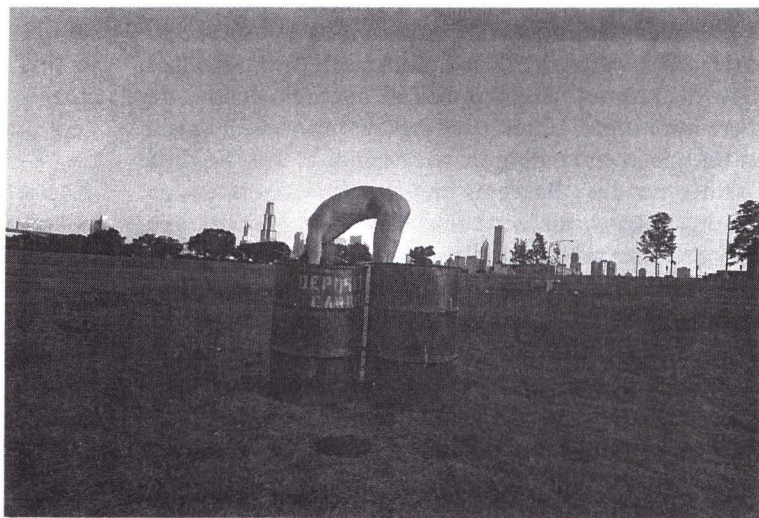
Bessie and I traveled for four hours up a skidoo [snowmobile] trail, then stopped to make a small fire to heat our tea. Bessie looked out across the caribou tracks on the frozen lake, then up to the mountains on the far side.

"Oh Kuya," she said, "this is so good." She sipped her tea and took a bite of the bannock [fried bread] she had just cooked on the fire. A full silence entered the space between us. "I sure hate them big cities."

It took me a minute to realize that she was talking about Tsay Keh, the village with 30 houses. What to me was "living in the bush" was a "big city" to Bessie. Astounding!

I'm writing this now from the Eugene Zendo, a temple in Eugene, Oregon, that I helped to establish a few years ago. To get here, I drove for hours in six-lane, bumper-to-bumper traffic. To me, this is a "big city."

In some ways, however, there is little difference between Tsay Keh and Eugene. Both serve as centers of commerce and communication. Both present machinery noise to the ear during zazen. In both places, alcoholism, drug addiction, and family violence produce immeasurable suffering. In both places, poverty, hunger and environmental destruction provide rich fodder for engaged practice. And in both "big cities," refuge from greed, hate and delusion is as close as the nearest zafu—



Trash Cans #9, Lake Michigan, Chicago

Xiaomin Gu

whether that zafu is in a 10-by-12-foot log cabin, or in a fully developed, inner-city Zen center. When the incense is lit, the meditation bell rung, and the body and mind settled, there is no city. There is no bush. There is only sitting.

When I left the Eugene Zendo three years ago, I didn't know I was leaving forever. Personal karma came up for me in a very strong way, and I went to the bush to sit. I fully intended to come back. But something about practicing in the bush grabbed me, and I ended up teaching for two winters in Tsay Keh to raise money to buy the 76 acres of hay fields and forest where Amazenji now sits. My practice is no longer a city practice.

### Finding no separation, finding gratitude

Bush practice presents many challenges unknown in the city. When women inquire about coming for retreat, I write to tell them that we have mosquitoes, black flies, bears, wolves, moose and lynx. I tell them we have no indoor plumbing, and that they must bring their own tent or camper. I tell them we have limited water, and that showers must be taken down the road at the local campground. I never hear from most city people again. But some brave Amazons come from the city to sit with mosquitoes in a place where they must remember to dispose of their blood rags in sealed plastic containers, to avoid attracting bears. They come from the city expecting the peace and quiet of nature, and are welcomed by screeching Canadian Jays, by chattering squirrels who drop pine cones on the tent zendo, by moose cows crashing through the forest, by wolves howling at night.

They go back to the city stronger, and with a deeper understanding of how the concrete and tarmac separate them from the earth and from the messiness of life. They drive back to the city through miles of clear-cuts, with a fuller appreciation of the animals who suffered as their homes were destroyed. They return home with a deeper appreciation of the comforts that city infrastructures offer: water that flows abundantly from the taps, light that comes with the flick of a switch. In the city there are no mosquitoes waiting for their bare bums in an outhouse, or landing on their hands as they hold the cosmic mudra. Practice in the city seems easier. Gratitude arises for what had been taken for granted. And a deeper understanding of the habitats that cities have destroyed becomes possible. Engaged practice around environmental issues becomes more immediate.

Bush practice is not for everyone. But neither is the city. Each place has its drawbacks for practice. Each place has its offerings. It's good to be able to finish this piece of writing and then fill a bathtub with hot water that comes through pipes from miles away. But I can hardly wait to get back to Amazenji for the next full-moon retreat. Sitting zazen inside a mosquito net,

while the full moon rises behind the distant hills and wolves howl in the background, I find it hard to hold on to the delusion of separation. The interconnectedness I feel when the wolf's eerie cry climbs up my spine makes this planet seem more precious. The struggle to inject wisdom and generosity into nearby logging and mining operations becomes more pressing. I see more clearly the price the planet has paid to develop and maintain its cities. ❖

*Kuya Minogue is the founder of Amazenji, a Zen training center for women in British Columbia. For more information about practice at Amazenji, contact her at: RR2 Site 11E Comp 3, Burns Lake, BC V0J 1E0, Canada. (250)694-3630.*

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### Manhattan

*With a blush, another day  
Vanishes. Firefly brake lights  
Pace the stop go stop go  
Commute. From the Throg's  
Neck Bridge, the city glitters,  
Shimmers, is haloed: The Wheel  
Itself, multitudes grasping.  
Letting go, going to  
Gone, being loved, killed,  
Blessed, condemned, on a neon  
Coral reef of humanity.  
Manhattan, no mind could  
Have conceived you, yet you  
Are of all Minds.*

*I've walked your sideshow  
Side streets. Stood stoned on  
Fifth Avenue, certain I had  
Obtained release to the Pure  
Diorama of NOTHING COULD BE  
BETTER ENTERTAINMENT THAN  
THIS LAND. A Seurat of Sheep  
Meadow hangs in my  
Mind. I'm the King of  
Belvedere Castle, Playmate of the  
Snow Babies. Behold Manhattan!  
From this peripheral span, it  
Glitters, shimmers, gives  
Way to all ways.*

—Robert Brutman



## Working for Peace and Justice in Cambridge

# A PROFILE OF CATHY HOFFMAN

by Tova Green

I was arrested with Cathy Hoffman several times in the mid-1980s when I was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We belonged to a women's affinity group, Black Sweaters. We protested outside nuclear weapons sales conferences and sat in at the Federal Building in Boston as part of the Pledge of Resistance, when the U.S. government was sending aid to the Contras in Nicaragua.

Cathy stayed level-headed in crises and spoke out with strength and courage at rallies and to the press.

When I returned to live in Cambridge last year, I found that Cathy is still a leader in the peace and justice community. She has been director of the Cambridge Peace Commission for the past ten years, a position funded by the City of Cambridge.

Cambridge is one of a handful of U.S. cities that has a peace commission. First funded in 1982 to help prevent nuclear war, the Cambridge Peace Commission got national attention when it established a sister city relationship with Yerovan, Armenia, in the former Soviet Union, during the Cold War; declared Cambridge a sanctuary for Central American refugees; and worked on conversion by meeting with local defense contractors to talk about shifting from military to other sources of funding.

When Cathy took the director's job in 1987, she saw a need to expand the Peace Commission's mission to address violence and injustice within the city of Cambridge. Under her leadership, the Peace Commission has created programs for youth, including a summer Youth Work-for-Peace Camp and the Youth Peace and Justice Corps, based at the local high school. She has also developed an annual Peace and Justice Awards banquet that recognizes the work of local activists of all ages and backgrounds.

The Peace and Justice Corps (PJC) is a program for combating youth violence. Cathy describes it: "We try to put together a conscious community where our goal isn't just to get along but to notice our differences and struggle to know each other. You can't do this kind of work in a strictly action-oriented campaign." The group meets weekly for discussions about the causes of violence, including racism and sexism. They use the model

that power and prejudice together create oppression.

Out of their discussions this year about immigrants and the anti-immigrant backlash, the PJC organized two assemblies at the high school on the theme of immigrants, which more than 1000 students attended. Eight students shared their own stories about being immigrants or descended from immigrants. Then students asked those in the assembly to stand up if they belonged to specific groups. Some examples: Stand if you or your parents or grandparents were immigrants. Stand if your family name was changed to become more "American." Stand if a member of your family has been killed because of their racial/ethnic identity. The large numbers of students who stood brought the issue of immigration close to home for everyone there. The assembly ended with a skit the students wrote and performed.

A few months ago, Cathy brought Hafsat Abiola to meet the members of the PJC. Hafsat is a young Nigerian woman whose father, the elected president of Nigeria, has been imprisoned by the Abacha, the current ruler. Her mother was assassinated a year ago after speaking out on behalf of democratic government. Hafsat spoke of the great wealth Nigeria once had, and the relative well-being of all Nigerians. In recent years, Shell Oil and other multinationals have been exploiting Nigeria's resources and contributing to the wealth and power of the Abacha regime. PJC members were so moved by Hafsat's story that they organized four assemblies at which she addressed almost all the 2400 students at the high school. Many students wanted to take action against the injustices Hafsat reported.

In June I attended a session of the Cambridge City Council. The Council was to decide that evening on a resolution calling on the City of Cambridge to boycott Shell Oil and other multinationals doing business in Nigeria. When I arrived, nearly all the seats in the spectators' gallery were full. The eight councilors and the mayor were in their chairs. I spotted Cathy, moving around, checking in with people. She seemed to know practically everyone there. There were many teenagers in the room, which I thought was unusual for a City Council meeting.



Cathy Hoffman, with Al

The mayor introduced the motion for the boycott. The first to testify was Hafsat. She was followed by two more Nigerians in exile, and by Caroline Hunter, a Cambridge resident who had fought for the South African boycott in the '80s. Then five teenagers from the high school spoke. They described Hafsat's visit to address hundreds of students at their school and the way she had won their support. They had learned about the relative privilege of those of us living in a "democracy" and about the ways in which the U.S. is contributing to an unjust regime in Nigeria. They were impassioned, personal, and powerful.

When the roll-call vote came, the resolution was passed unanimously. We all clapped. History was being made before our eyes.

Cathy's days are full of meetings with teachers, students, city officials, and members of Cambridge peace and justice organizations. She helps to plan events such as an annual Cambridge Holocaust Memorial and a recent International Women's Day gathering for women on the theme, "Finding Our Courage."

Morning runs along the Charles River and meditation help Cathy keep her balance. She began practicing vipassana meditation seven years ago, sitting at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center, across the street from her office in City Hall Annex. Her practice gives rise to a struggle for her. "I feel a tension between creating programs that take the side of 'social justice' on

the one hand, and taking a peacemaking role of trying to reconcile people with different points of view, on the other. I think the second is more Buddhist," she reflects. "Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that we are both victim and persecutor. Out of meditation comes the call to be non-judgmental and non-dominating, to move beyond dualism and even identity politics. I feel very affected by that."

In 1988 Cathy was invited to visit cities in Eastern Europe, where she found that virtually every city had a peace-making department in city government. Cambridge was recently invited to become one of the 70 Peace Messenger Cities around the world. This group has official NGO status at the U.N. and meets once a year. This year, the group focused on the issue of land mines. The next meeting will be in the Ivory Coast; Cathy has been invited to attend.

I have learned a lot from Cathy this year about how to build community in a diverse city. I wish that every city in the U.S. had a Peace Commission and a director like Cathy. ♦

For more information, write to: Cambridge Peace Commission, 51 Inman Street, Cambridge MA 02139. 617/349-4694, e-mail: <choffman@ci.cambridge.ma.us>.

*Tova Green spent the past year living in Cambridge, and is now back home in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she works for BPF, practices Zen, and devotes herself to international activism on many fronts.*

## OLD CITY MAGIC

by David Schneider

Not long ago I visited a friend in the hospital: a lovely young woman, in for a shoulder operation, and found myself staying longer than I intended. Finally I announced that I had to leave to catch the last bus back to town. Protestations—from my friend, and now from several other friends also, who'd joined us on the balcony of the room in the late afternoon sunlight. They assured me there was a very quick path back down to the town. A pretty hike, only 45 minutes, I couldn't miss it. No problem, they'd all done it several times.

At dusk like a fool I wandered out of the hospital complex, past the outlying buildings and yes, there it was, the fast path. Trouble was the light was fading. Almost gone, in fact, and soon I was trudging along in the darkening German woods.

A fork in the path: my friends hadn't told me about that. Appealing to my powers of intuition I went left. Mistake, I discovered, about 15 minutes later. I turned back and as I did, heard a bone-chilling eerie bird cry. I could visualize, quite clearly—much more clearly in fact than when I *try* visualizing in meditation—a big raptor, trilling in victory over its prey, tilting back its

head and .... there it was again.

I began to chant a bit as I walked, just to sort of warn everyone that a human being was coming. My imagination conjured up creatures to go with the rustling I heard right and left of the path: small animals with claws and teeth. Could I outrun one in the dark? Could I kill one?—I'm a Buddhist—how would I, anyway, if I had to? I'd worked out more or less that wolves no longer prowled here. Nor bears. But I remembered that owls are feathered so as to be silent in flight. No rodent ever heard one before its neck was crushed. My neck hairs rose, and I chanted more loudly.

When at last the path gave way to asphalt, I walked happily in the middle of Marburg's border streets, surrounded by humans. Usually it's the opposite—my heart rises upon leaving the asphalt. But this night I was glad of the company and the stone houses with their doors, locks, plumbing and electricity. Good to see the castle, arrogantly lit atop the hill. I understood on a cellular level—the same level at which I'd felt the fear—why people choose to live together.

\* \* \*

When you exit the main train station in Europe's bigger cities you often come across a street-sign city

map. These look remarkably alike: river, often a bend in the river, the old town hugging that, more recent “developments” strewn in concentric circles around it, freeways marking the outer boundaries, tram-lines, cathedral, some other churches (after all, Europe was long known as “Christendom”), the bigger museums, and the spot where you stand. The important point? The river. Possibly also the bend, where water runs slower. Some historic bridges. Over the water.

\* \* \*

Earth, water, fire, air, space. Is it too simple to see old cities in terms of elemental patterns? We have a casual relationship to the elements most of the time these days. And why not? We can bring them into our houses with a fingerflick. But ancestors had no such chance. People establishing the old European cities had by dint of lethal threat a respectful and keenly perceptive approach to the elements. It is difficult to imagine people with such perception putting cities—or residence communities, or bedroom communities, or commuter communities—in some of the places people put them now.

A pattern of elements also helps explain why cities—even cities along the same river—can feel so different. This one has good soil for grapes (the Romans found or founded lots of those!), this one does better with barley. This one guards a glacial mountain valley, that one marks the uppermost point for barge traffic, this one sits in a deltal swamp. It’s so obvious really that it almost need not be said: the natural environment determines what flora and fauna can survive; this in turn creates conditions for culture, and parts of the culture itself. It’s so obvious and so close—humans are also forged from these elements—that seeing this way is forgotten, which is both dangerous and stupidifying.

\* \* \*

If you draw a political map of Europe, you will have to re-draw it *entirely* every 150 years or so. At least that has been the pattern for the last couple millennia. The cities however have been vastly more stable. They are the nails and tacks in the land. Countries are flapping posters—torn down or papered over regularly.

\* \* \*

If seeing cities in terms of elements sounds too simple, then let me add an even more indefensible theory: magic. At some places in the land (this highly reduced version of the theory runs) a confluence of elements produces a special feeling or energy. Every centimeter is sacred, but some spots seem particularly so to human antennae. Most older cultures have names for these local energies: Japanese might say *kami*; Tibetans, *drala*; in English perhaps fairies, or gods or goddesses. Forces beyond mundane human concerns.

Lots of European cities grew up around sacred spots, and many are still explicit about it. Athens, obviously, was the gray-eyed goddess’s haunt, and in

Krakov, the protector dragon sleeps in a cave by the river. They’ve erected a big clunky metal dragon down there below the castle (where the *real* sacred spot is widely known to be) and he spits fire every 15 seconds or so for children and tourists.

Dublin also ordered a statue of their river goddess—a mermaid prototype in what looks like a very large bathtub. Locals have irreverently renamed all the city statues, and so Dublin’s Anna Livia is sometimes called the “floozy in the jacuzzi,” but there she sits. Everyone knows early Christians co-opted pagan worship spots for church sites whenever possible. “Saint” Boniface, for example, went around central Germany with an ax, felling the central tree of a sacred grove, and then converting the worshippers, however forcibly, to Christianity. A visit to a big city cathedral is often a delayed and camouflaged visit to an ancient power spot.

\* \* \*

My current home town Marburg clusters itself around a castle on the culminating bulb of a ridge. The ridge juts into a large river valley and has good long views up and down it—an obvious military advantage. Repairing the castle recently, workers found a much older castle below it, dating back to the early 800s. An archeologist visiting me remarked that there would likely be another castle under that one, and one below that, too, and so on, right back to the Neolithic.

Returning home by train recently, I was struck by how powerfully dragon-like the ridge looked, and how precisely the castle sat, as a crest, on the dragon’s head.

\* \* \*

My office is full of maps, and my eye often wanders over a relief portrait of Europe. One day the Alps seemed to rise from the map as a large, snow-white lizard (dragon) resting quietly in the south of Europe, snout pointing east, long tail curling down into Italy. Vienna marked the nostrils; Trieste, Munich, Basel, Verona and other cities suddenly fell into line as claws and spine. Since that day, I’ve seen Europe as several different kinds of dragons—for instance with Spain as the head (Madrid the eye), Italy a long lurching leg.

\* \* \*

So what? What is the point of such hallucinations?

I often think of the title of the great poet Ted Berrigan’s collected works: *So Going Around Cities*. It is easy to go around modern cities seeing only problems: poverty, traffic, pollution, injustice, overpopulation, and materialism in extremely destructive forms. But I don’t want to go around cities only so. Without closing one’s eyes to such things, a journey through cities could also include appreciation of human intelligence, sensitivity, and mysticism, past and present. That’s how I want to go around cities. So. ❖

*David Schneider is the Director of Shambhala Europe.*

# JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF TOWN

by Cassandra Sagan Bell

Last summer my husband Mark and I were at a conference in Indianapolis, heading back to our hotel on Saturday night after a late dinner. Thanks to a major downtown revitalization project completed in September of 1995, we were able to avoid the cheese-cake-thick heat and the traffic-bass thump of the city streets by strolling through an elaborate system of skywalks. These elevated corridors connected the major hotels with the brand new Circle Center Mall. Two square blocks had been demolished and replaced by a two-story ultra-modern mall. Eight historic storefront facades had been carefully saved and incorporated into the new structure, creating the impression from the outside that it had always been there. Rather than sit back and watch the city center die as suburban mall-sprawl spread outward, Indianapolis chose to plunk the mall right down in the heart of town. This has not only had a tremendous impact on business, but has turned the public square over to private ownership, rendering it safe from muggers, protesters, and transients alike. You can't sleep in the doorway of a business at the mall, or carry picket signs. You can't ask for either signatures or spare change.

At lunch time I had found the mall eerie and disturbing. Electronic color monitors, strategically placed so that they were never out of sight or hearing range, blared MTV-esque commercials non-stop, even in the International Food Court where I ate my chop suey. The commercials were generalized, not for any specific product, simply urging you to *buy, buy, buy*. There were 3-D touch-screen directories on kiosks throughout the mall, so there was no need to make unnecessary human contact. I felt removed from everything I hold valuable.

Yet it was even more disturbing when Mark and I strolled through the mall at ten o'clock on Saturday night. The stores were closed and darkened, the monitors turned, blessedly, off. Young security guards leaned on railings. And the place was still teeming with people, mostly in their twenties, decked out in their date-night best, heading up the stairs and away from the mall. Curious, we followed.

There, beneath a glass dome, we entered "Starport—The World's First Digital Theme Park." In the first attraction we came to, four people with helmet-like sets covering their heads turned slowly in a small chrome-lined ring, guns in hand, shooting at demons and bad guys only they could see. Further along we saw a virtual

hang-gliding booth, a Sega Cinema, a cigar and martini bar, and dozens of people waiting in line to enter each of the five night clubs, some of which had techno-futuristic motifs.

Our mouths hanging open, we entered Virtual World, a Walmart-sized arcade that included the full spectrum of video games, such as a simulated Indy 500, where you could race against a computer-generated rival, or link up with three of your friends and race each other in colorful little cars that didn't really go anywhere. But the majority of the games, like most interactive entertainment, had to do with killing or disabling the enemy. In one such game the screen displayed a downtown street scene, not unlike the scene on the street below, and your job was to "get" the bad

guys, men in black suits and hats. They would appear in windows and doorways, and you were supposed to shoot them. But every once in a while an innocent bystander would appear, represented by an old woman with a bag of groceries, and if you accidentally shot her she would drop her groceries, and splay

her arms and legs wide as she fell. This always got a laugh, even though you lost five points.

In a meditation retreat we observe our "monkey mind," and cultivate the habit of responding to distressing images and delusions with calm and compassion. Here in Virtual World, the monkey mind of our national culture was on display, but in this case, people were being trained to react to the unreal images with frantic intensity, to respond in ways that would be reckless and brutal in actual life.

And here's the ironic twist: when you get upset because of the violence of electronic games (or movies, or television, or songs), others look at you as if you're crazy and say, "But it's not *real*."

We emerged, overwhelmed, from the digital theme park. It seemed as if we were on a mythic journey. As we went down one level to the mall, which earlier had seemed the outer limit of fantasy and hype, we felt ourselves returning to a more familiar and stable reality. The next stage of our journey took us outside to the downtown street scene—lights flashing, traffic steady, rap music blasting from open convertibles—itself a sort of theme park, yet earthy and real compared to the mall and Starport. We took in a deep breath of the thick, humid, exhaust-filled air, and felt like we were almost home. ♦

*Cassandra Sagan Bell is a poet, songwriter, and teacher. She practices vipassana and lives in Vancouver, Washington.*

*If you accidentally shot her  
she would drop her groceries,  
and splay her arms and legs  
wide as she fell.*

# THE SUNYATA GENERATION

*Jake Martin and Josh Schrei interview each other*

*Jake Martin and Josh Schrei grew up at Rochester Zen Center. They are both 27 now. Jake is a writer and a Ph.D. student in English at UCLA, and Josh, also a writer, works at the Milarepa Fund (dedicated to the promotion of human rights in Tibet and China) in San Francisco. Here they talk together about what it means to them to have grown up in a Zen center.*

**Jake:** What's your very first memory of the Zen Center?

**Josh:** Wood. The hallways, the zendo floor, the smell of the incense they used to burn there. Definitely this feeling of neatness and orderliness. The polished floor... The wooden knocker. It said "Don't waste a moment/ Life passes quickly by/ Wake up! Wake up!" What about you?

**Jake:** Jumping off the stairs, at the Halloween party. We were eight years old, sitting on the stairs enjoying our Zen Center Halloween party, and ZC staff members dressed as hungry ghosts came down the stairs and just scared the shit out of us! In some ways it was an enlightenment experience. Like Bodhidharma getting hit in the head with rocks.

**Josh:** Or the next patriarch who cut off his own arm, to offer it to Bodhidharma. Dedication.

**Jake:** That's an interesting model for dedication, isn't it? What effect would you say that sort of image has on a child?

**Josh:** Well, directly and indirectly, I think one of the things that I took on as a child at the Zen Center was that selfless giving is basically the highest human ideal, that I should always think of others, that I should be ready to give myself up for others, that I should give and give and not think of myself, because the thought of myself was kind of greedy.

**Jake:** And simply in error.

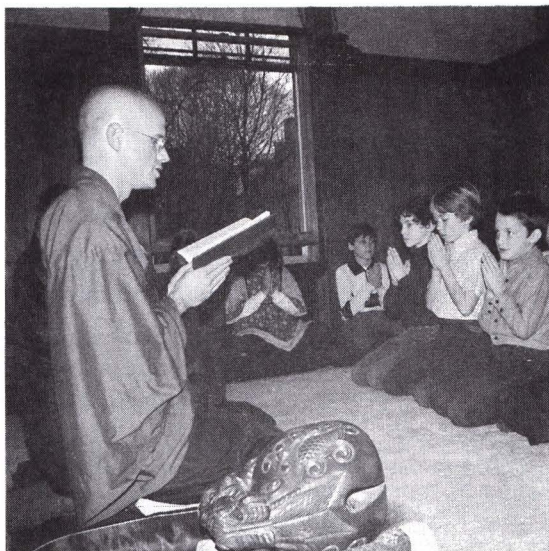
**Josh:** Right, in error. There was no reason for me to think of myself. It was *all* about everyone else. I think the stories reinforce that, but it wasn't just in the stories, it was everywhere. It was even told to me directly.

**Jake:** That "everywhere" is interesting, because it was a very small community, really, that constituted "everywhere." Granted that a child is also very small, but there was a whole world outside the Rochester Zen Center. I'm curious about when you started getting the sense that in fact there were people in this world who were not Buddhists.

**Josh:** When I was like 23! It's still a process of discovery for me. Of course, the basic thing I learned was when I was five years old and went to spend the night at a friend's house and his mother said, "Let me cook you some hamburgers," and I had to explain why I was a vegetarian. And then later on, I had to discover more and more that there are actually people who don't hold spirituality and their own "spiritual development" as their highest ideal. I knew that theoretically, but I don't think it really sank in until fairly recently. What about you, when did you realize?

**Jake:** Much earlier than 23, because there were issues in my family about my parents being Buddhists. It was when I was six, going down to Florida to visit my mother's parents, who were Holocaust survivors and were not very pleased that their daughter was no longer Jewish. That question of Jewishness was there from early on. But it's funny, because we sit here talking and we certainly do have the benefit of experience and perspective, at least to the extent that one can have it at 25, but we were actually very devout little kids. I think I remember an incident where you tried to convert our friend Jed?

**Josh:** Yeah, that was a little later. I was probably ten, and I was trying to explain to him why Buddhism is better than Judaism, because in Buddhism, you can actually attain something, you can actually *get* to nirvana. As opposed to these other religions where God is this outside thing. I told him that Buddhism is a religion where God is something you can realize inside yourself. When I was ten I was telling him this! And so we played *Rebirth*, "the Tibetan game of liberation," where you jump from lifetime to lifetime and you can either end up in the hell realms or the devic realms



*Taking the precepts: Josh on right, Jake, 3rd from right*

where you go through all the levels of spiritual practice until you reach enlightenment.

**Jake:** Yeah, that's how I learned about the Buddhist hells. That was PG-13 at least.

**Josh:** I also remember this little book called *Unsuï*, which was a guide to Zen monastic life, and I was so enthralled with it that I decided I was going to live the Zen monastic life.

**Jake:** At the age of...?

**Josh:** Seven. And so I started sleeping sitting up and taking all my meals at specific times, and trying to live this totally regimented life. That lasted probably two days. But I thought the whole idea of leaving home and going to join a monastery seemed very romantic.

**Jake:** When I was four or five I pushed a kid off a railing, attempting to give her enlightenment. I'd heard that was how one of the patriarchs had achieved enlightenment. Terrible, misguided child...

**Josh:** I also remember when we were seven we took the precepts. I think it made a lot of sense to me.

**Jake:** To take the precepts when you were seven?

**Josh:** I mean of course it made sense to me, since I didn't know anything else, but...

**Jake:** And you resolved to refrain from drinking alcohol and taking intoxicating drugs...

**Josh:** No, not those precepts.

**Jake:** ... and improper sexual behavior...

**Josh:** That was the important one! But I don't feel, in retrospect, that I was just a little kid who was full up on his parents' dogma. I really felt what was being said about loving-kindness and kindness to animals. So I don't think I was a little brainwashed Buddhist. But it was a very strict place. There was a sense of fundamentalism, of these rules that had to be followed.

**Jake:** It seemed like every rule was religious, like not flushing the toilet after you peed.

**Josh:** Exactly. There was a little sign.

**Jake:** Which in retrospect seems economical and environmentally conscious, but at the time seemed somehow connected...

**Josh:** ...to the religion, like there was going to be some spiritual repercussion if I flushed the toilet after I took a piss. Freud would have a field day. I think a lot of that ties in with Philip Kapleau's whole psychology—the Japanese psychology as well—but he was a very meticulous person, and he had a lot of little things that had to be exact, a lot of things that had nothing to do with Buddhism but became part of the scene there.

**Jake:** And he certainly had a lot at stake, personally, in the Rochester Zen Center. I've been thinking recently

about the pressures he must have felt, because here was a man who had in fact broken with his teacher because he was trying to loosen things up. And we look at it and it doesn't seem all that loose. But I can't imagine what it must have been like for him, liberalizing and Americanizing, when of course he gets pegged as so very Japanese.

**Josh:** He gets pegged as the most Japanese of all of them. In San Francisco they call Rochester the Zen boot camp.

**Jake:** [laughs] Well, that's San Francisco. But yeah, maybe Rochester *was* Zen boot camp.

**Josh:** In America, anyway. One of the things I always come back to is that the Rochester Zen Center could never decide whether to be a monastery or a community. The practice was very much geared toward training monks and nuns. My family did not have a life outside of the Zen Center.

**Jake:** And my family caught heat...

**Josh:** ...for having one. My parents were basically on staff for years and years, and I spent so much of my time there. They were being trained to be monks and nuns, and I was in a strange position myself, because I was seen as a hindrance to their spiritual practice.

**Jake:** The little fetter.

**Josh:** I remember at one point Kapleau told my mother that she should spend less time with me because I was getting in the way of her spiritual practice.

**Jake:** Which from one perspective is true. It's a question of priorities.

**Josh:** It's interesting to think about why our parents got involved with something so strict.

**Jake:** One key point is that for every adult at the Rochester Zen Center there was a question of a conversion experience, whereas for us there was nothing else. We were placed in a very strange position, because for our parents, there was an element of having to refuse things, having to turn their backs on a tradition, and so it was a very courageous thing to be doing, and obviously they felt very strongly about it. For us, though...

**Josh:** We were very disconnected. Our parents had made that choice and had severed a lot of bonds.

**Jake:** We really had no tradition. My parents certainly tried to fill that in, with Jataka stories, and songs about Bodhidharma, and things like that. All wonderful, but there was certainly no family tradition. If anything, there was a sense that my parents were responsible for breaking a tradition.

**Josh:** And there was that sense in my family too. My step-dad's parents were definitely confused when he joined the Center. It feels strange to look back and to

think of how we grew up with so much tradition in one way but so little tradition in another.

**Jake:** For years, when I was going to a pretty straight-laced prep school, I went around pretending that I was Jewish! There was another Jew in my class, and it was a little less weird than actually admitting to...who I was. I couldn't really do that till college.

**Josh:** But still in me there's a deep love of Buddhism, and a deep affinity with it, and an inability to escape it.

**Jake:** It's funny. I would love to be able to raise my children in a Buddhist home, as "little Buddhists," if you will, but it's very sad. I think my chances of meeting someone who will fulfill all those other requirements we have, and who will also be willing to raise Buddhist children, are pretty slim.

**Josh:** Another thing I've noticed in myself is that since I was constantly surrounded by these images of perfection while I was growing up—the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, these stories of perfect people—I find myself judging myself and other people on those standards. Whether or not I do this consciously, I think in some ways that's still what I'm looking for. This kind of idealized human being, this vision of Buddhahood, or perfection, that was really ingrained in me very deeply.

**Jake:** As it was supposed to be. It's always been what we're supposed to strive for. Without striving.

**Josh:** Unfortunately, when you come in contact with the world, and try to live in any kind of relaxed, ordinary manner, it makes it somewhat difficult, because there's always this nagging voice, "What would the Buddha have done in this situation?"

**Jake:** Well, what *would* the Buddha have done? Since neither of us is practicing, how do you incorporate Buddhism into your life?

**Josh:** It takes many shapes. Right now I'm finding that the most "Buddhist" thing I can do is ease up on myself and my never-ending judgment of myself against these terms.

**Jake:** "I left the woman at the river. Why are you still carrying her?"

**Josh:** Exactly. The Middle Way. Right now—and I don't know if this is "Buddhist" or not—I'm basically working with the concept of "allowing" rather than forcing. It's very important, for me and for the world, to try not to inflict things on other people. But people are lost, say, and they find Buddhism, and Buddhism seems pretty good to them, and they think that it's the truth, and then they do a classic thing with the Buddhism...

**Jake:** Reify.

**Josh:** "Now this is true. I've found Buddhism and it's true."

**Jake:** And certainly in this country, it's also been tied

in to wacky New Age crap-ola. I'm interested in finding a way to reclaim a more Shao-lin Buddhism, a Samurai Buddhism. Because it's not about sitting on your ass dreaming of lotus lands. And also there's this image that has prevailed in the West since the first real contact with Buddhism in the 19th century, of Buddhism as passive and quietist.

It's the same as hearing in *Newsweek* or *People* magazine that Jerry Seinfeld lives in "Zen-like simplicity" because he has a million-dollar apartment that's sparsely furnished. To hear that something is "so Zen" or "Zen-like."

**Josh:** You can't count the number of books right now that begin with "Zen and the Art of—"

**Jake:** "Zen and the Art of Devastating Your Opponent in Business." "Zen and the Art of Divorcing Your Toxic Spouse." It's a real blow, a real cheapening of what is actually our culture.

*It seemed like every rule was religious, like not flushing the toilet after you peed.*

**Josh:** It happens to everything though.

**Jake:** I guess it's only a problem if you're attached to the notion of Zen in some proprietary way. But nonetheless, since one did grow up on it, one identifies with it.

**Josh:** And it's not about sitting there watching the world go by, saying everything's fine just the way it is, and it's all one, these cheap terms...

**Jake:** Because changing things, influencing and affecting things, can be part of "just the way it is."

**Josh:** Changing things and being active. But people can hide behind any spiritual tradition. If I'm totally terrified of the world and all of a sudden I encounter the Rochester Zen Center, and people are saying, "You should be this way, because the world is meaningless and *samsara* is an endless cycle of shit." Then I can say, "Oh, great! Finally I've found a justification for my fear of the world."

**Jake:** Let's talk about this, because that's the attitude that's always ascribed to "Generation X." The world is shit, and we're too cool for the world and we just want to bliss out on Ecstasy or television or Nintendo. Do you think that Buddhism, and the sort of Buddhism that we're familiar with, has made us more or less comfortable with that idea of ourselves as a "lost generation"?

**Josh:** I guess I feel so removed from any kind of mainstream American "generation" that it's hard for me to answer that. I feel like the issues I have are coming from a totally different place.

**Jake:** So what are the issues for the sunyata generation, if we're saying that our issues as young Buddhists are not the same as the issues of our generation as a whole? What are the interests of these few people who grew up on this very small Outside?

**Josh:** I was going to write a book called "I Got the Nirvana Part, Now Show Me How to Change a Tire." I'm very comfortable philosophizing, I'm very comfortable in this kind of formless realm, so to speak. I'm very comfortable with the teachings of Buddhism and Eastern philosophy, I'm very comfortable with being not attached. When it comes to actually dealing with possessions and life and career, that's when my big monsters rise up.

**Jake:** Right. It's easy to be not attached to things until you have them. If you can push the things away and keep the things away and not have the things to begin with.

**Josh:** Exactly. I think I got the perfect upbringing if I wanted to be a monk. That would be the absolute easiest thing for me to do. To be a monk. I grew up with the appropriate distaste for the world and a lot of spiritual stories and got taught to meditate.

**Jake:** Do you still?

**Josh:** Meditate? Yeah, but it's sporadic. But when somebody asks me if I'm Buddhist or not I say "Yes." I also say I don't really have a choice, not that I would necessarily want to escape from it.

**Jake:** In that sense, our parents did something that I don't think we'll ever do. Turned their back on their heritage.

**Josh:** So what are the issues for you, as a member of the sunyata generation? Do you see yourself as part of this Generation X thing?

**Jake:** Well I do and I don't. For years I set about proving that I was as mainstream as I could be, and so my issue now is admitting to myself that I'm not. But the fact is, I'm not. As much as I want to say, "Oh, we're just like everyone else," the fact is we are unlike most of America in that the first 12 to 15 years of our lives were about religion. The life of the spirit. I think that really does set us apart. And the fact of it being an extremely religious upbringing and also a religious upbringing that has no tradition at all, no history in the West. If you're a fundamentalist Christian, at least you're a Christian. On some level, Americans can relate to that.

**Josh:** There's a community around it. And there's a community around Zen Buddhism, but...

**Jake:** But you have to explain yourself all the time. You're constantly being thought of as *interesting*. But you're also not on the "outside" in any traditional way. You're not oppressed. You're white, you're middle-

class, give or take—poor, but educated. You can pass in mainstream culture. So I think for the sunyata generation the issue is not the aimlessness but the acceptance of a deep and real spiritual grounding. And if we accept that grounding, which I think we have to do, then the problem is how do we go about claiming it? Because there is no tradition, there's no set path, there's no model.

**Josh:** Many people I meet say: "Oh, you have such a strong spiritual grounding, you're so spiritually centered," and sometimes I wish I didn't have the spiritual language. I wish I didn't have the Buddhist analysis for every situation. I wish I didn't have the self-awareness a lot of the time, because that's something I can never escape from. It's like a voice in my head, really. I can feel the presence of Buddhism and the Buddha's teaching in everything I do. It's just always there. Of course the problem is I'm a human being, with my own faults and emotions and angers and pains and joys and everything, it's just that my language is different. And so when I express that anger it comes across maybe in a different way than somebody else's who had a different upbringing. It's the way a Catholic mother can use Catholicism to impose guilt on a child. It's like my Buddhism can be so many things. It can be the way I get angry at people, it can be the way I try to manipulate people, it can be the way I'm happy. It's the language with which I interpret the world.

**Jake:** When manipulating, just manipulate. That's Buddha.

**Josh:** I also think the Four Noble Truths sum up the beliefs I absorbed at the Zen Center. The first being that the world is an endless cycle of suffering, and that the suffering is caused by my own desire. So therefore it's wrong for me to want things, and in some sense even my own goals are greedy. And basically, I should look for a way out of the world. I don't think that was being taught directly, but that was a large part of how I absorbed it. I think that can be pretty damaging. It sets up a strange dynamic when you want to be in the world and yet you've been taught so much about escaping it.

**Jake:** And you have to be in the world.

**Josh:** Well, the monk thing was always an option for me. I actually gave it some serious thought at one point. But being a monk would be taking the easy way out, and I don't want to do that. This is going to sound hokey, or New Agey, but if there is in some strange way a reason or a purpose to life, to this lifetime, it's to leave the monastery and explore life in its fullest. And really I think the crux of the issue for many of our generation is that we are in a position now where we are trying to find a balance between the monastery and the world. ♦



## DALAI LAMA MEETS WITH LESBIAN AND GAY LEADERS

In a historic meeting in San Francisco on June 11, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for the first time ever, discussed issues of homosexuality, human rights, and Buddhism with a small group of gay and lesbian Buddhists and human rights activists. The Dalai Lama proposed the private meeting in response to a letter from Steve Peskind, Coordinator of the Buddhist AIDS Project, requesting clarification of teachings in two recent books by His Holiness, *Beyond Dogma* (North Atlantic Books, 1996) and *The Way to Freedom* (Harper Collins for the Library of Tibet, 1994).

Attending the meeting were Steve Peskind; Eva Herzer, president, International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet; José Cabezon, Buddhist scholar and associate professor, Iliff School of Theology; Tinku Ali Ishtiaq, co-chair, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission; Lourdes Arguelles, professor of education, Claremont Graduate School, and BPF Board Member; K.T. Shedrup Gyatso, spiritual director, San Jose Tibetan Temple; and Rabbi Yoel Kahn, leader in the national lesbian/gay Jewish community.

The meeting opened with remarks by Eva Herzer, who acted as meeting coordinator on behalf of the Office of Tibet. Eva thanked His Holiness for meeting with the group about two key issues: first, the concerns of gay and lesbian Buddhist practitioners who seek to reconcile their sense of self and identity with Buddhist teachings that characterize homosexual activities as "misconduct." Second, she expressed the group's concern that if His Holiness's position on human rights for gay and lesbian people was unclear, it would be possible to conclude that he did not support full human rights for gay and lesbian people. This would be particularly problematic, since his opinion as a Nobel laureate and preeminent leader for peace carries much weight in the court of public opinion. She provided His Holiness with a short overview of the status of gay rights and of the kinds of discrimination and psychological and physical violence that continue to date.

"Thank you for trusting me in coming here," His Holiness said in his opening remarks. "Discrimination is very sad." He offered to discuss his views from two separate perspectives: first, from the perspective of soci-

ety and human rights, and second, from the perspective of a Buddhist practitioner.

From a social perspective, His Holiness said, "It is wrong for society to reject people on the basis of their sexual orientation...Your movement to gain full human rights is reasonable and logical...and there is no harm in mutually agreeable sexual acts." He further stated that Buddhist principles support the struggle of all people for equal treatment and full human rights.

From a Buddhist practitioner's perspective, His Holiness noted that traditional teachings, dating back to the Indian Buddhist scholar Ashvaghosha, assert that sexual misconduct for all Buddhists, heterosexual and homosexual, is determined by "inappropriate partner, organ, time, and place." Inappropriate partners include men for men, women for women, women who are menstruating or in the early stages of nursing, men or women who are committing adultery, monks or nuns, or

prostitutes paid for by a third party and not by oneself. Sex with the "inappropriate organs" of the mouth, anus, and "using one's hand" also constitutes sexual misconduct. Inappropriate places include Buddhist temples and places of devotion. Proscribed times include sex during daylight hours and "sex more than five consecutive times." (In his recent publications, the Dalai Lama has reiterated these teachings, with no qualifications for cultural context, personal relationship, modern sci-

entific findings, or social history.)

His Holiness then explained the purpose behind these precepts. The aim of Buddhist practice is nirvana, which is achieved by eliminating afflictive emotions and reducing attachment and desire. Sexual desire, he said, is one of the strongest desires and should therefore be decreased by all Buddhist practitioners. And sex is improper altogether for those who have taken vows of celibacy.

His Holiness pointed out that all Buddhist precepts must take into account the culture and society in which they originate. For example, monks were to wear saffron because at the time it was conventional in India for poor people to wear this color. Similarly, having sex with a professional prostitute at the time the precepts



L to R: Rabbi Yoel Kahn, Tinku Ali Ishtiaq, Eva Herzer, H. H. the Dalai Lama, José Cabezon, Steve Peskind, Lourdes Arguelles

were formulated was acceptable and was therefore not sexual misconduct *unless* a third party paid for it. So, if homosexuality is part of currently accepted norms, "it is possible that it would be acceptable [in Buddhism]. However, no single person or teacher can redefine precepts. I do not have the authority to redefine these precepts, since no one can make a unilateral decision or issue a decree," he said. "Such a redefinition can only come out of sangha discussions within the various Buddhist traditions. It is not unprecedented in the history of Buddhism to redefine issues, but it has to be done on the collective level."

Steve Peskind expressed serious concern about the "consequences of teachings by the Dalai Lama on sexual misconduct, which are being published for worldwide distribution." Peskind said he believed that their presentation "supports the climate of violence and human rights violations against gay people and others." His Holiness was then clearly moved by the personal statements of Eva Herzer and José Cabezon. Herzer spoke of the great difficulties she experienced with her family's response to her coming out as a lesbian. Cabezon cited Buddhist scriptures stating that a man may have sex with his wife no more than five times per night. If the purpose of the proscriptions is to reduce sexual activity, he asked, how does it make sense to allow a man to have sex with his wife up to five times a night, while saying that it is sexual misconduct for a man to have sex with another man even once in his life? Cabezon added that these prohibitions are found in all four of the major Tibetan Buddhist lineages. (Although the strictures do not specifically mention homosexual orientation, they include most of the usual sexual behavior of gay people.) His Holiness roared with laughter, saying "You have a point there!" He suggested that one way of looking at these sexual proscriptions is to recognize that the purpose of sexuality, as seen in India at the time, was reproduction, which would explain why all sexual activity that could not result in reproduction was prohibited.

Peskind then asked, "Which of the proscribed behaviors—regarding partner, organ, or excessive frequency—do you personally consider most important?" The Dalai Lama did not respond. He did offer, later, that sexual expression, homosexual or heterosexual, is much preferable to harming oneself or another from pent-up sexual frustration.

Lourdes Arguelles, BPF Board member, remarked that in some cultures, such as the Navajo, relationships between men are highly regarded and that it might be beneficial to hold a broader-based conference on issues of human sexuality. His Holiness agreed that it is important to broaden the dialogue and that it would be appropriate for the gay and lesbian community to raise the sexual precept issue within the context of upcoming Buddhist conferences. He noted that several other seri-

ous issues are currently under discussion, such as Bhikshuni vows (full ordination of women) and the treatment of nuns in general. He suggested that out of such further discussions a consensus might emerge to hold a separate conference on human sexuality.

In a public press conference on Tuesday, June 10, the day before the private meeting, Peskind asked, "When and where did the Buddha give these teachings on sexual misconduct?" His Holiness, chuckling, responded, "I don't know." Though His Holiness stressed that "The

*(Continued on page 29)*

### *Another View*

In a story in the June 11 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the Dalai Lama commented that, from a Buddhist point of view, "men-to-men and women-to-women is generally considered sexual misconduct."

The Dalai Lama is revered as an enlightened teacher by Buddhists of many traditions. He is deeply committed to preserving his Tibetan culture in the face of atrocities committed against his people. However, this should not be a reason to dismiss or fail to confront his blatant homophobia. Many times, oppressed peoples have a special affinity for other oppressed people, due to their shared suffering. Unfortunately, this doesn't always mean that prejudice is eradicated.

His comments should not be minimized simply because he may not belong to my or your particular sect of Buddhism. If we take prejudice seriously when spoken or demonstrated by those around us, how much more seriously should we take a man of our religion who is followed by millions of people?

We need religious leaders who can celebrate with us what it is to be different in society, to celebrate and affirm what it is to be homosexual and a whole human being. We do not need yet another religious figure saying or implying that there is something fundamentally wrong with our intimate selves.

Of course, this issue brings up the issue of how we, within the religious framework, relate to our teachers and sangha. How do we relate to a man like the Dalai Lama, who has deep spiritual resources, and yet can come forth with such homophobic and life-denying precepts? How, on a more personal level, do we relate to our own teachers, where spiritual maturity may be juxtaposed with prejudice? This is one of the great koans of American Buddhism. My own experience is that sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of ignorance are to be found at every turn, including within myself.

If the call at the heart of Buddhism is sincere in asking us to be ourselves, then our ability to embrace and look at these polarities in ourselves and others will surely grow.

*—Bryan Burch has been practicing at the San Francisco Zen Center for the past five years.*

# RESPONSIBILITY AND VICTIMHOOD

by Karin Meyers

As I sit writing this, I hear an argument on the sidewalk below my window: a woman's voice, a man's voice. I'm angry that my space is being invaded. I can't hear my music and I can't think. Doing something about it is the furthest thought from my mind. I'm not sure what I could do, and anyway, I don't feel that it's my responsibility. I feel like I'm the victim.

I've never been the victim of serious physical violence. Nor have I been the instigator of such violence. The word "violence" has always conjured up images of something remote: war, torture, genocide—something I might see on TV.

I've also never lived in a city before now. The strangest part of living in the city is the overwhelming proximity of things—traffic, voices, bodies. The city is vital and exciting, but it also has a tendency to erupt. Right there, outside my window. At that point I become a victim of violence, but am I also in some way responsible for it?

In June I attended the "Peacemaking: the Power of Non-Violence" conference in San Francisco. For three days, activists from around the country gathered to share strategies for cultivating nonviolence. While much of what was discussed had to do with the epidemic of violence in the U.S., there was also an international perspective to the conference. His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet served as the keynote speaker for a series of panels, which included José Ramos-Horta, Nobel laureate from East Timor, and Anna Menchu, sister of Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchu of Guatemala (who was unable to attend because of illness).

While the conference ostensibly was not religious in nature, the presence of His Holiness and a team of meditation instructors added a Buddhist perspective. BPF was one of the many organizations invited to participate, and this gave us an opportunity to share the perspective of engaged Buddhism with a wider community of social activists. BPF Director Alan Senauke and BASE Coordinator Diana Winston led a workshop on the BASE program, which generated considerable interest in engaged Buddhism as one means to practice nonviolence.

The conference was also marked by a strong presence of young people, thanks in part to a conscious effort on the part of the conference organizers to include them. Young people sat on the panels and spoke of their personal experiences with violence, particularly with the violence in their schools.

For many of our nation's youth, violence is an unavoidable part of daily life. At one point in the con-

ference the audience was asked to raise hands if we had lost a friend or family member to violence. The visual impact of the moment that followed was powerful. I had been hearing statistics all morning, but I was still shocked to see that the overwhelming majority of the raised hands belonged to young people.

Our young people are not only the victims of violence because of their immediate physical danger, there is another much more insidious way in which violence affects them. The constant mental stress that comes from knowing violence could erupt at any moment has a tremendous untold impact on their lives. For the kids who attended the conference, this victimhood does not result in helplessness, but serves as a call to responsibility. The intolerability of the violence in their environments has propelled them to transform themselves as well as their surroundings. Many of them are involved in school and community projects to learn nonviolent conflict resolution. Given that a number of their fellow students are toting guns to school, this is a courageous stance.

I came away from the conference inspired by the youths' readiness to transform their lives and environments. It is true that youth rarely lacks enthusiasm, but it is unusual to see that enthusiasm earnestly seek direction. Repeatedly, the young people requested tools and knowledge. At the closing ceremony a young man announced that a peacemaking conference for youth was in the works for next year. The exuberance and hope that pervaded the closing ceremony culminated in a pledge of \$10,000 from His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the youth conference, followed by Robert Thurman's pledge of a matching grant from Tibet House. Thus, the conference ended with a feeling of renewal, that the work was just beginning.

Personally, I learned from the youth at the conference. Living in the city has been a challenge for me, especially because of my feeling of vulnerability. I have tended to let this feeling overwhelm and disempower me. But from a Buddhist perspective, I think victimhood can serve as a reminder of interdependence. Through the complicated web of action and reaction, we are responsible for our own environments. We may not be directly responsible for any one particular instance of violence, but we have the ability to participate in our environments as forces of nonviolence. Our decision to do so or not do so implicates us in the overall well-being of our environments. What I see as an intrusion upon my environment, like the argument outside my window, can serve as a catalyst. By reflecting on the role I choose to play in my environment, I can transform my sense of victimhood into a sense of

*(Continued on page 29)*

# THICH NHAT HANH ON LOVE

## —from *Teachings on Love*

### *Love (Maitri)*

The first aspect of true love is *maitri*, the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness. To develop that capacity, we have to practice looking and listening deeply so that we know what to do and what not to do to make others happy. If you offer your beloved something she does not need, that is not *maitri*. You have to see her real situation or what you offer might bring her unhappiness.

In Southeast Asia, many people are extremely fond of a large, thorny fruit called durian. You could even say they are addicted to it. Its smell is extremely strong, and when some people finish eating the fruit, they put the skin under their bed so they can continue to smell it. To me, the smell of durian is horrible. One day when I was practicing chanting in my temple in Vietnam, there was a durian on the altar that had been offered to the Buddha. I was trying to recite the Lotus Sutra, using a wooden drum and a large bowl-shaped bell for accompaniment, but I could not concentrate at all. I finally carried the bell to the altar and turned it upside down to imprison the durian, so I could chant the sutra. After I finished, I bowed to the Buddha and liberated the durian. If you were to say to me, “Thây, I love you so much I would like you to eat some of this durian,” I would suffer. You love me, you want me to be happy, but you force me to eat durian. That is an example of love without understanding. Your intention is good, but you don’t have the correct understanding.

Without understanding, your love is not true love. You must look deeply in order to see and understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the one you love...

*Maitri* can be translated as “love” or “loving kindness.” Some Buddhist teachers prefer “loving kindness,” as they find the word “love” too dangerous. But I prefer the word love. Words sometimes get sick and we have to heal them. We have been using the word love to mean appetite or desire, as in “I love hamburgers.” We have to use language more carefully. “Love” is a beautiful word; we have to restore its meaning. The word “*maitri*” has roots in the word *mitra* which means friend. In Buddhism, the primary meaning of love is friendship.

We all have the seeds of love in us. We can develop this wonderful source of energy, nurturing the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return. When we understand someone deeply, even someone who has done

us harm, we cannot resist loving him or her. Shakyamuni Buddha declared that the Buddha of the next eon will be named Maitreya, the Buddha of Love...

### *Deep listening and loving speech*

In many American universities, there is a course called Communications Skills. I am not certain what they teach, but I hope it includes the art of deep listening and loving speech. These should be practiced every day if you want to develop true communications skills. There is a saying in Vietnamese, “It doesn’t cost anything to have loving speech.” We only need to choose our words carefully and we can make other people very happy. The way we speak and listen can offer others joy, happiness, self-confidence, hope, trust, and enlightenment...

Suppose your partner says something unkind to you, and you feel hurt. If you reply right away, you risk making the situation worse. The best practice is to breathe in and out to calm yourself, and when you are calm enough, say, “Darling, what you just said hurt me. I would like to look deeply into it, and I would like you to look deeply into it, also.” Then you can make an appointment for Friday evening to look at it together. One person looking at the roots of your suffering is good, two people looking at it is better, and two people looking together is best.

I propose Friday evening for two reasons. First, you are still hurt, and if you begin discussing it now, it may be too risky. You might say things that will make the situation worse. From now until Friday evening, you can practice looking deeply into the nature of your suffering, and the other person can also. While driving the car, he might ask himself, “What is so serious? Why did she get so upset? There must be a reason.”...Before Friday night, one of both of you may see the root of the problem and be able to tell the other and apologize. Then on Friday night, you can have a cup of tea together and enjoy each other. If you make an appointment, you will both have time to calm down and look deeply. This is the practice of meditation. Meditation is to calm ourselves and to look deeply into the nature of our suffering.

When Friday night comes, if the suffering has not been transformed, you will be able to practice the art of Avalokiteshvara—one person expressing herself, while the other person listens deeply. When you speak, you tell the deepest kind of truth, using loving speech, the kind of speech the other person can understand and accept.

*You may have the impression that you know everything about your spouse. You think, “There is nothing new in her anymore.” That is not correct. If you treat her that way, she will die slowly.*

While listening, you know that your listening must be of a good quality to relieve the other person of his suffering. A second reason for waiting until Friday is that when you neutralize that feeling on Friday evening, you have Saturday and Sunday to enjoy being together...

Loving speech is an important aspect of practice. We say only loving things. We say the truth in a loving way, with nonviolence. This can only be done when we are calm. When we are irritated, we may say things that are destructive. So when we feel irritated, we should refrain from saying anything. We can just breathe. If we need to, we can practice walking meditation in the fresh air, looking at the trees, the clouds, the river. Once we have returned to our calmness, our serenity, we are capable again of using the language of loving kindness. If, while we are speaking, the feeling of irritation comes up again, we can stop and breathe. This is the practice of mindfulness.

The practice of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva is to listen very deeply to every kind of sound, including the sound of pain from within and from without. Listening to the bell, the wind, the water, the insects, and all living beings is part of our practice. When we know how to listen deeply and how to breath deeply in mindfulness, everything becomes clear and deep.

### *Living mindfully together*

To meditate is to look deeply into the nature of things, including our own nature and the nature of the person in front of us. When we see the true nature of that person, we discover his or her difficulties, aspirations, suffering, and anxieties. We can sit down, hold our partner's hand, look deeply at him, and say, "Darling, do I understand you enough? Do I water your seeds of suffering? Do I water your seeds of joy? Please tell me how I can love you better." If we say this from the bottom of our heart, he may begin to cry, and that is a good sign. It means the door of communication may be opening again.

True love includes the sense of responsibility, accepting the other person as he is, with all his strengths and weaknesses. If we like only the best things in the person, that is not love. We have to accept his weaknesses and bring our patience, understanding, and energy to help him transform...

You may have the impression that you know everything about your spouse, but it is not so. Nuclear scientists study one speck of dust for many years, and they still do not claim to understand everything about it...Driving the car, paying attention only to your own thoughts, you just ignore your spouse. You think, "I know everything about her. There is nothing new in her anymore." That is not correct. If you treat her that way, she will die slowly. She needs your attention, your gardening, your taking care of her.

We have to learn the art of creating happiness...The

problem is not one of being wrong or right, but one of being more or less skillful. Living together is an art. Even with a lot of good will, you can still make the other person very unhappy. Good will is not enough. We need to know the art of making the other person happy. Art is the essence of life. Try to be artful in your speech and action. The substance of art is mindfulness. When you are mindful, you are more artful. This is something I have learned from the practice. ❖

*From Teachings on Love by Thich Nhat Hanh, forthcoming from Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, 1997. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.*

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### Dalai Lama (Continued from page 26)

Buddha is our teacher"—the historical reference for all Buddhists—he has also said, "If science points to or proves a truth contradictory to Buddhist teaching, then Buddhist teaching must change."

Steve Peskind said of the meeting, "This open, honest discussion of Buddhist traditional doctrine, with the participation of one of its most outstanding teachers, is 20th-century Buddhism at its best."

Lourdes Arguelles said, "I left the meeting with the feeling that this is a first stage in an exciting and provocative dialogue between His Holiness and other Buddhist teachers on the one hand, and gay and lesbian Buddhists and human rights activists on the other."

*—from a press release by the Buddhist AIDS Project and meeting notes from the International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet.*

On August 4, the Buddhist AIDS Project brought together about a dozen people, mostly from the gay Buddhist community in San Francisco, to follow up on the Dalai Lama's comment that any redefinition of "sexual misconduct" must come out of sangha discussions within the various Buddhist traditions. It was a friendly and useful discussion, and the participants all expressed an interest in addressing the questions further. ❖

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### Victimhood (Continued from page 27)

responsibility. That sense of responsibility may then grow into action, so I do not sit stewing, the victim of a noisy intrusion, but engage with my community to eliminate the sources of violence (the effects of which are often much more serious than a verbal argument). It might not be appropriate to go out onto the street and intercede in the argument, but engagement could take on many forms, such as working to end domestic violence or learning mediation techniques. The important thing is that I develop a relationship with my community wherein I am not a helpless victim of its violence, but a responsible defender of its peace. ❖

*Karin Meyers is a student of Tibetan Buddhism, and is a staff person in the BPF office.*

*When Things Fall Apart:  
Heart Advice for Difficult Times*

by Pema Chodron

Shambhala, 1997, 148 pages, \$18 clothbound

Reviewed by Marianne Dresser

Recently, within a few months, my life fell apart. Faced with the dissolution of a relationship on returning from an extended trip abroad (for which I had left both job and home), I plunged into anxiety and despair. The impulse to shut down emotionally was strong. But the common ploys of “coping”—denial, suppression, numbing *all* feelings so as not to have to experience difficult ones—came at a high cost. Avoiding pain meant avoiding pleasure; sidestepping the anguish of loss meant also giving up the possibility of finding my way back to joy. There had to be another way.

Pema Chodron's new book *When Things Fall Apart* illuminates the way. As with her other books, this latest collection of skillfully edited talks is noteworthy for its simplicity, and for the graceful, down-to-earth way she contextualizes and interprets Buddhist teachings of compassion, impermanence, and emptiness. Invoking these by less formal, daunting terms, she notes the “great need for *maitri* (lovingkindness toward oneself)” that underlies these “teachings on honesty, kindness, and bravery.”

Quoting her teacher Trungpa Rinpoche, Chodron advises “leaning into the sharp points,” *into*, rather than away from, our experience, no matter how frightful, painful, boring, or lonely. The meditation cushion is an excellent place to try this out, offering both space and containment for whatever arises, and Chapter Four, “Relax As It Is,” gives an elegant introduction to *shamatha-vipashyana* practice. But what I love best about this method is its applicability to every facet of our lives. These principles make as much sense in the subway or kitchen as they do in the meditation hall.

*When Things Fall Apart* moves through the full spectrum of crisis, grounding us first in self-acceptance and lovingkindness—accept the fact of pain and fear,

she says, and befriend your demons—then introduces a marvelous tool (meditation) with which to stay present with suffering (and all else). From there we can begin “widening the circle of compassion” (Chapter Thirteen), recognizing the commonality of suffering—from the core fear of death all the way to the global threat of annihilation. By the wonderful, elliptical logic of much Buddhist teaching, the more we are able to de-personalize our own suffering, the greater our capacity for compassion, and the greater the potential for healing ourselves and our world.

With her lean conversational style and colorful, earthy metaphors, Chodron offers an astonishingly simple alternative to the tension and anxiety we bring to “difficult times”—*relax*. “Relaxing with the present moment, relaxing with hopelessness, relaxing with death, not resisting the fact that things end, that things pass, that things have no lasting substance, that everything is changing all the time—that is the basic message.” This is good news. ♦

Bay Area-based writer/editor Marianne Dresser is a Buddhist practitioner and the editor of the anthology *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier* (North Atlantic Books).

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*Head-On Collision*

*Rounding a corner,  
I slammed into myself.  
A loud argument ensued.*

*“Why don’t you pay attention!”  
I shouted. “Always rushing around  
like that! What’s the matter  
with you, anyway?!”*

*“It’s not my fault!” I retorted.  
“Someone else made me hurry,  
and I have a lot on my mind.  
Besides, if you weren’t so  
damned judgmental...”*

*The universe  
cleared its throat.*

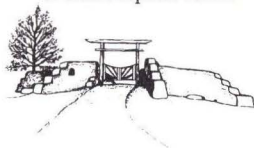
*I stopped in mid-sentence,  
looked myself in the face,  
and laughed.  
And vanished.*

—Shannon Hickey

Vipassana and the Teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh

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## *Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row*

by Jarvis Jay Masters

Padma Publishing, 1997, 216 pages, paperback  
Send check for \$12 payable to Chagdud Gonpa  
Foundation, P.O. Box 279, Junction City, CA 96048

Reviewed by Barbara Hirshkowitz

A peace activist in a rough neighborhood, a student of Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, an inmate on San Quentin's death row, a frequent contributor to *Turning Wheel*: Jarvis Jay Masters is all of these and more. What comes across most clearly in *Finding Freedom* is a human being struggling, in circumstances of the utmost difficulty, to change himself and reach out to others, including—and perhaps especially—to the readers of this work.

Jarvis has been incarcerated at San Quentin since 1981. He was nineteen when he arrived at the penitentiary with a history of a broken family, foster homes, institutional care, juvenile hall, and a crime spree. While serving time at San Quentin, he was part of a group of prisoners accused of the execution of a prison guard; he was convicted and sentenced, without mercy, to live on death row until the state executes him in the gas chamber. His story is filled with violence and abuse and does not have a happy ending in sight. But his story is not filled with despair but with hope, compassion and love, with lessons painfully learned and painstakingly written for our edification.

The book lays open a life of suffering and joy, using stories of day-to-day life "inside" (both the dramatic and the mundane), correspondence with friends over the years, and some powerful dreams. After watching a television show about the reinstatement of the death penalty in California, Jarvis narrates a long dream, ending the chapter with:

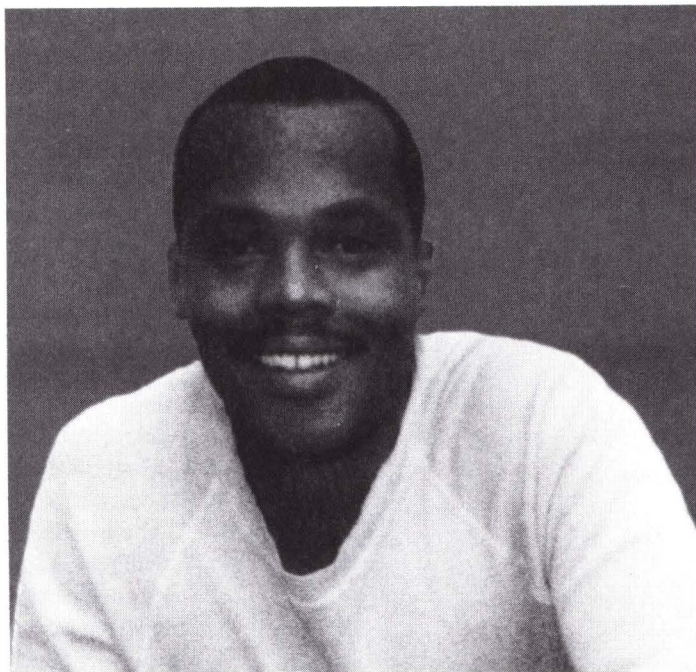
*When I woke up, I was hyperventilating and my body was drenched. I was bleeding from scratches I had carved into my own flesh. "What a nightmare!" I thought. But then I*

*realized something even worse: I had awakened again on death row.*

Buddhism and meditation practice are a constant part of Jarvis' life within the walls. His situation gives him an unusual clarity on some aspects of the Dharma. Consider this aspect of the ever-changing wheel:

*Understanding impermanence, that things are here today and gone tomorrow, really helps. No matter how bad something is, you can remind yourself: "Damn, this won't last long." Then when it doesn't last, you can laugh and say "I knew it!" What goes around, comes around, and what comes around doesn't last. Everybody gets their turn: the police jump on you, the light goes out, there's a roach in your soup.*

Jarvis takes his bodhisattva vow seriously. He has



more than once put his life on the line for the principle of no killing. In one incident, he dreamed up a way to get even with two obnoxious guards (by inciting a flood), in order to stop a plot by the prisoners to kill them for revenge. The story ends with "I smiled at the guards standing at my cell. Being thrown in the Hole was worth the pleasure of seeing them still alive." On a lighter note, Jarvis spreads the Dharma by wrapping a daily ration of tobacco in a page of Thich Nhat

Hahn's *Being Peace* and passing it on to Bosshog in the next cell. By doing this he gains both a little peace and quiet in his neighborhood and, by and by, a friend.

If you have taken the bodhisattva vow to "save all beings," you might consider exercising it on Jarvis' behalf and working against the death penalty. In any case, *Finding Freedom* will inspire you in your own struggles with Buddhist practice, activism, and the ever-changing nature of all things. Buy the book and encourage your friends to buy it, too.

Jarvis, I bow to you with palms together. Thanks for reaching beyond the concrete rage and steel cage to lift up a better possibility for every sentient being. ❖

*Barbara Hirshkowitz lives in the big bad city of Philadelphia, where she gardens, writes reviews, organizes, plays Scrabble, dreams, and sends books to prisoners.*

## Voices from the Inside

one-hour video documentary by Karina Epperlein

Ordering information: Transit 2000, 641 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94708. 510/559-8892. Fax: 510/527-8650

### Reviewed by Susan Phillips

Imagine living in a bathroom with a complete stranger. Imagine being able to see your children only once every two years through a pane of glass. Imagine rude awakenings every two hours with the shock of a flashlight. That's part of what Karina Epperlein helps you to envision while showing you life on the inside of a federal prison.

"Voices from the Inside" passionately portrays the stories of four courageous women serving time in the federal prison at Dublin, California, and the journey one woman from the outside took to use her skills as



Clockwise from left: Dylcia, Evangelina, Karina, Aida, and Florencia

an artist to create change by establishing "a safe place for the women to show emotion." Karina Epperlein, born in Germany, was "shocked" to learn of the use of the death penalty here in the United States. This catalyzed her to enter into a voluntary four-year teaching stint in the prison. She used a combination of visual art, sound, breath and movement therapy to help women prisoners enter, if only for a short time, a safe space together, where no one is telling them when to sleep, eat, drink, and work.

In this captivating, intimately shot video, we are transported into a world few of us on the outside ever take the time to consider. And yet, an increasing number of people are spending time inside prison walls

where privacy, even to take a shower, rarely exists. As the camera slips silently through the barbed wire fence, we learn of these women's individual stories, and we see their enormous tenacity to endure. Due to the racist underpinnings of the court system, a disproportionate number of women prisoners are African-American, Latina and Asian. Most could not afford a good lawyer but had to accept the inadequate efforts of a public defendant. The four prisoners featured in the movie are all women of color. And beware, these women are far from useless, far from being beaten down, and they don't at all fit the stereotype of infantilized female prisoners. "Voices from the Inside" helps us understand some of the causes and conditions that brought these women to prison.

Additionally, the video illustrates the existence of political prisoners here in the United States, something our government has hypocritically denied. Dylcia Pagan, a Puerto Rican independence activist sentenced to 50 years for "criminal conspiracy" speaks out as a wise and courageous mother and revolutionary, who has never abandoned her principles in the fight for her people's freedom. The other three women—Aida, Evangelina, and Florencia—also share their personal stories and the anguish they feel at being separated from their children. We are introduced to these women as our own sisters, mothers, and grandmothers. Most importantly, we are introduced to their eloquent children, and we see the tragedy that occurs daily in this country when the punishment of mothers is also the brutal punishment of their children.

This documentary presents staggering figures. Eighty percent of women in prison are mothers, with an average of two dependent children. Seventy-five percent of women in prison have been convicted of nonviolent offenses; 36 percent have been convicted on drug charges, solely for possession. Most women serve more time than men for committing the same crime. With 1.5 million people in prison, women inmates are increasing at a rate far higher than men. This particular prison is so overcrowded that a cell built for one now holds three women. With the passage of the Crime Bill and so-called Anti-Terrorism Act of 1996 these numbers will increase, as will the time spent behind bars for each individual. That this video was made at all is a miracle. In the current climate not only would Epperlein have a hard time showing up with a video camera, she would probably be banned from teaching inside prison. This in itself makes this film a rare treasure.

(Continued on page 35)



## *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights*

by Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren

Kumarian Press, 1997, \$21.95

Reviewed by Gary Pace and Margaret Howe

Because of the force and complexity of the problems in today's world, I often get overwhelmed when trying to apply the principles of engaged Buddhism. Finding meaningful entry points for bringing my practice into the social arena can be difficult. *Unarmed Bodyguards* explores an avenue of direct involvement that seems uniquely suited to Western Buddhists. The book describes real-world applications of nonviolent strategies in scary situations that use techniques strikingly similar to a meditation practice. The authors, Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren, were volunteers with Peace Brigades International, an organization that has been at the forefront of attempts to protect local activists in violent, repressive societies through the act of accompaniment. Accompaniment uses the physical presence of foreign volunteers to protect civilian activists from politically motivated attacks, thus allowing them to proceed with their democratic activities. The simple act of placing an international companion with people at risk can prevent the state from attacking them. The authors explore in some detail the successes of various accompaniment groups in Guatemala and Sri Lanka, and also discuss efforts in El Salvador, Haiti, and Colombia. They analyze this tool of nonviolent change, and formulate some guidelines for its use.

*As the demonstration came to a close, Nineth de Garcia, GAM's president, took the megaphone and urged everyone there to show solidarity with the family (who had recently lost members to state oppression) by attending the wake that night in San José Poaquil. I remember thinking that she couldn't be serious. How could she ask these poor people to drop everything to go to an unknown family's wake nearly a day's ride away? I then followed as 50 women, with children on their backs, trudged twenty blocks to the bus terminal...I stood apart from the group, talking with David, another Peace Brigades volunteer and the only other foreigner around. The Guatemalans seemed barely aware of our presence. It was now pitch dark. Two other women came over to us saying, "We must find some food for all these people while we wait. Can you come with us?" We both nodded and took a few steps in their direction, when all of a sudden several shouts arose from the group behind us—"No! Solo uno! Solo uno!" (Only one!) David accompanied the two women; I stayed with the group. So there I was, standing in the dark, incredulous. Did they really think that I could make a*

*difference if soldiers or death squads arrived? There was no light, no phone, no bus, no food, and it was getting cold. I was frightened.*

While not Buddhists, these authors are deeply committed to a model of nonviolent social action which bears some resemblance to meditation practice. Like Joanna Macy's vision of Nuclear Guardians, accompaniment can have the powerful transformative effect in the social realm that comes from an ability to sit still with unpleasant or dangerous experiences. As one PBI volunteer says:

*You sit there all day and every day, and nothing happens; you feel a little bit like a piece of furniture. And it's not clear that anyone really knows or cares that you're there. But during moments of crisis, I felt that all that time maybe really did matter, so that you would be there at the moment when you were needed.*

Sounds familiar...just sitting.

Consistently in Peace Brigades work, the emphasis is on the role of foreign volunteers *accompanying*, not directing. Accompanists use their privileged status, often obtained at the expense of the very people now being protected, as a tool for social justice. Any paternalistic ideas of doing a favor for the local activists dissolve in the mutuality of the relationship, as all parties work together towards social justice. Ego, then, begins to fall away.

(Continued on page 35)

*Mountains and Rivers*  
*Mystical Realm of Zen Master Dogen*

This video by Abbot John Daido Loori is a twentieth century manifestation of the spirit of direct pointing of Zen, using modern creative media. Combining provocative visual images with the sounds of nature, original musical score, and a reading of Master Dogen's *Mountains and Rivers Sutra*, the video illuminates Dogen's timeless words.

The magical weaving of the camera, music, and narration brings the viewer into the complex profundity of "becoming a mountain," where the boundary between nature and human thought is no longer distinct.

— Kazuaki Tanahashi: artist, poet, and Dogen translator

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT CITIES

*The secular aspects of cities separate us, encouraging us to pursue consumptive, busy ways. The spiritual aspects bring us into dharmic community, dedicated to the awakening of all beings.*

### 1. Personal practice

From the point of view of compassion, study strangers on streets, on public transportation. Look at the other from the (imagined) point of view of his/her heart's desire, what he/she most truly wants. Can you see aspiration on the face?

### 2. Interpersonal and Community Work

**Neighborhood.** How do you support your neighbors, cultivating exchanges? Do you belong to neighborhood crime-watch or other groups? How do you promote neighborhood as extended family?

Gardens. Even one houseplant can make a difference! Bodhisattvas can plant sidewalk strips and traffic barriers. Front yard gardens are offerings to those who pass by. Backyard gardens offer fresh space and respite. Community gardens grow their own neighborhoods and solutions to large social issues—hunger, joblessness, crime, and alienation.

**Civic participation.** Do you know who your City Council person is? Have you ever worked in a city election? Have you ever gone to a City Council meeting? Can you commit to taking up one issue and writing a letter, or making a phone call?

**Schools.** Research indicates that, no matter whether the district is affluent or impoverished, the higher the level of outside participation, parental and communal, the better students do. Schools offer natural volunteer locations with a range of possibilities, from tutoring to mediation projects to school gardens. Call your local school district volunteer bureau.

**Civic culture.** How do you experience and further your city's diversity—age, race, class, nationality? What groups—religious and other—do you participate in that bring diverse people together on a common ground? Can you organize a house party that educates on an issue or benefits a local group? Can you plan a community event that addresses common problems—peace walks, processional gatherings at sites of street murders, gun store protests, sleep-ins and teach-ins in support of homeless people?

**Traffic.** Do you walk sometimes, ride a bike, take public transportation, address community traffic issues with letters, meetings, etc.?

**Waste.** Do you recycle, cut down on use of non-recyclables, compost? Do you know your city's waste management policies?

**Food.** Can you patronize smaller stores, farmers'-markets and food co-ops rather than large chains? Pay more for organic produce?

**Open spaces.** Do you support your parks, monitor issues around zoning and city growth, restoration of natural streams and land patterns?

**Crime.** What can you do to make yourself feel more supported by community? What preventive work can you undertake—youth group activities, graffiti clean-up, support for people on probation or parole, gun-control?

**Social Justice Work.** Remembering that “we do not have democracy, we make democracy,” how do you move in solidarity with victims of oppressive social structures? With immigrants, with people living in shelters, in prisons, in struggles for welfare reform, with AIDS and other illnesses?

### Resources

The American Community Gardening Association, 100 North 20th St., Fifth Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103-1495. Tel. 215/988-8785, e-mail: sallymccatlibertynet.org. This is *the* national networking garden organization. They will give information about how to start a community garden, how to find others, and how to receive their newsletter, video, and other publications.

The National Organizer's Alliance, 715 G St. S.E., Washington D.C. 20003, keeps in touch with “wedge issues” like welfare, health reform, and affordable housing.

The Center for Living Democracy, workplace of Frances Moore Lappé, publishes a valuable quarterly newspaper called “Doing Democracy,” RR#1 Black Fox Rd., Brattleboro, Vermont, 05301. Tel. 802/254-1234. e-mail: cldatsover.net

Results is a national organization working to end hunger and poverty world-wide. Each month more than 120 groups across the country participate in a conference call to plan the lobbying action of the month. 236 Massachusetts Ave. NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002. e-mail: results@action.org

Urban Habitat Program, PO Box 20998 Presidio Station, San Francisco, CA 94129-9908. Tel. 415/561-3333. Publishes a journal, *Race, Poverty and the Environment*, and is a guide to local & national projects.

### Books

*Rebuilding Community in America: Housing for Ecological Living, Personal Empowerment and the New Extended Family*, by Ken Norwood and Kathleen Smith (Shared Living Resource Center). An inspiring account of some successful experiments in community living, and many other positive responses to urban living.

*A Pattern Language*, by Christopher Alexander et al., Oxford University Press, 1977. A classic overview of city behavior and habitation.

*Altars in the Street*, by BPF Board member Melody Ermachild Chavis. Reviewed in last TW. ♦

—Maylie Scott

# BPF ACTIVIST NEWS

## Chapter News

Kara Steiniger reports on the **Los Angeles** Chapter: "One Friday evening in June, five of us gathered, made about 70 peanut-butter-&-grape-jelly sandwiches, and went out with the sandwiches, apples, and mini candy bars to offer them to those who seemed in need. We walked in Santa Monica in the Palisades Park and Third St. Promenade areas. We all felt good about the experience and we plan to do it again. Almost everyone we talked to was very appreciative. One group of tourists from Arizona observed us and said we'd made their day, and took our picture! It helped the hungry, us, and some tourists too!"

## Chapter Briefs

Welcome to the new contact for **Minneapolis/St. Paul, Lee Lewis...Vermont** is beginning the process to move from contact to chapter...**Boston** is reviving the chapter as well... **San Diego** continues to feed people in a transitional housing program once a month...**Sacramento** is interested in a prison project...**De Kalb** continues its weekly sitting group...**Seattle** continues to develop a multi-sangha approach to doing service projects and responding to overseas issues such as landmines... Write us with your chapter or activist news.

## Affiliate News

**The Buddhist AIDS Project (BAP)** can now be accessed through their new web site: [www.wenet/~bap](http://www.wenet/~bap), where you can find information about upcoming events, resources, related organizations, and current activities. Also included on the web site is the report from the recent meeting of lesbian and gay activists, Buddhists, and leaders with H. H. the Dalai Lama (see p. 27). BAP is growing to include a connection to garden projects for people with HIV, meditation classes based on the *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, and the upcoming publication of its own book on Buddhism and HIV.

## BASE News

**Boston BASE** has been meeting weekly since June. They have had two wonderful practice days, the first a sitting and walking retreat interspersed with people's stories of how they came to the dharma, the second day, on how they came to service. One member felt "much more of a sense of sangha than many of us have had before."

**Santa Cruz BASE** reported that self-facilitation has been a key to the success of the group. It has ensured people's participation and responsibility in directing the meetings. They have also discovered that their internal process is mirrored by their external work. Doing a "listening project" with homeless people and merchants at the Santa Cruz mall pointed to the need for listening more deeply within the group.

## Bay Area:

**The Bay Area BASE internship** program that began in February is winding down. The nine volunteers who have worked in volunteer jobs—with homeless teens and families, in hospices, in a medical clinic and other programs—have created a closely knit community that will sadly be coming to the end of the six-month commitment. Meanwhile a new **local BASE** in affiliation with **Spirit Rock Meditation Center** will be starting up in October for people whose work is already in the field of service or social action. Last year's fall group continues to meet three times a month to maintain the continuity of an activist and service sangha. Recently they have studied about base communities in Latin America. They are close to their one year anniversary and are still going strong! ❖ —Diana Winston

## Prisoners (Continued from page 32)

Epperlein urges us to act, as she asks us quite frankly, "What will you do to stop this?" Of course there are many paths to action. In this video, Epperlein chooses what she calls "pouring love into bones," in a world of nightsticks, flashlights, and barbed wire. "Voices from the Inside" inspires and challenges us all on the outside to remember and connect with those living behind prison walls. As someone who works directly with the prisoner rights movement, I commend Karina Epperlein for providing us all with an excellent tool for organizing. I encourage you to buy or rent a copy and show it to a group. ❖

*Susan Phillips lives in Philadelphia and is active in the prison rights movement. As an anti-death penalty activist and member of the Philadelphia Anarchist Black Cross, she is currently producing a video on one of the groups she is active with called Books Through Bars, which provides books and educational materials to indigent prisoners.*

## Bodyguards (Continued from page 33)

I have experienced some tension in engaged Buddhist groups between action-oriented people and those more focused on process—"do-ers versus be-ers." Here is a socially engaged practice of "doing by being," which facilitates change by *standing with*. As I read this book, I kept returning to the thought that this form of social engagement is inherently Buddhist; in fact, some of the PBI volunteers have been meditators. Dare I suggest that the Buddhist community consider joining with Peace Brigades to develop such a response in other Buddhist countries like Burma or Tibet? This book is an excellent read, especially keeping this potential in mind. ❖

*In September, Margaret and Gary are moving to Guatemala with their daughter, Maya, for a year or more of living and working with some of the displaced people of the Peten.*

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

It seems like ages ago that I wrote my last column. The cycle between issues of *Turning Wheel* is three months, just as usual. Lives have changed and passed and been born in these few months. And this is just as always. So what is it? A venerable Zen question...But it is also true that out-of-the-ordinary things have happened in the last several months—travel, moving the office, and staff changes. Here are some of the details.

The first meeting of what we call the "Think Sangha" came together at the end of May in Hakone, Japan. For five days, about fifteen of us (including old friends Santikaro Bhikkhu, Ven. Paysal, and Ouyporn Khuankae from Thailand, Jon Watts, Ken Jones, Shelley Anderson, Vidya Soon, BPF board member Lourdes Arguelles, and several of our Japanese comrades) ate, slept, meditated, strolled, shopped, and put our heads together to explore consumption and consumerism in our various societies. It was a rich beginning. There is much work to do clarifying our understanding.

The Think Sangha is an offshoot of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists' social analysis group, which has just published a book I co-edited, *Entering the Realm of Reality: Towards Dhammic Societies* (available from BPF for \$15). We hope to expand both the analytical work and our Think Sangha circle over the next year. For now, the best place to learn about it and to follow the various papers we are reading and writing is on the Think Sangha section of BPF's web site. The address is <[www.bpf.com/bpf/think.html](http://www.bpf.com/bpf/think.html)>.

In early June, Diana Winston and I participated in a landmark conference hosted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in San Francisco—"Peacemaking: The Power of Nonviolence." We gave a workshop on BASE—what it is and how to do it—for about 50 people. But the deeper experience was to be among spiritually engaged activists from many traditions, including hundreds of young people, and representatives of the Bay Area's

diverse communities. It made me feel at home to see and talk with many of you from BPF. BPF staffer Karin Meyers has an account of the conference on page 27.

We have a new office as of July 15, something we had planned, but not quite so suddenly. The Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, our home for eight years, needed our space for classrooms. So we said bittersweet good-byes to the crowded rooms we shared with the Berkeley Gray Panthers. Our new office, a mile or so south, is larger and brighter, tucked into a small stretch of shops and offices in the Lorin district that Melody Ermachild Chavis wrote about in *Altars in the Street*. Six weeks later, we are still unpacking, still getting settled. Please come and visit us. Maybe do some volunteer work. The address is 1840 Alcatraz in Berkeley, just east of Adeline. Check the *TW* masthead for new phone and fax numbers.

With the close of the latest residential BASE program here, Diana Winston, our BASE and chapter coordinator, is going on an extended leave. She is taking a year to go to Asia: a six-month retreat with her teacher U Pandita in Burma, then six months of travel among Asian engaged Buddhists as a kind of roving agent of BPF. This is an adventure she has been dreaming of. We wish her good health and fruitful experiences. We envy her just a little, too.

It is hard to reckon all that Diana has brought to BPF—her vision, her energy, her heart. The idea of BASE was hers, and we all developed it with a lot of hard work and faith. Over these years Diana has grown in clarity and confidence. Our work together has been close and challenging. My fingers are crossed that she will come back refreshed and ready to re-engage with BPF.

Meanwhile, we didn't have to look far for someone to take on Diana's job. BPF's Board president Tova Green was eager to stand in for a year, scaling back some of her Board committee work. After training with Diana for a week in July, Tova set up her desk in the office right after Labor Day. It is a joy to have her working beside us day by day.

As autumn comes on, we are looking forward to the visit of Thich Nhat Hanh. His talks and retreats always challenge our understanding and teach the practice of continuous mindful engagement. We are also scheduling a talk in Berkeley with Tulku Thondup, who wrote *The Healing Power of Mind*, and a reading of Jarvis Masters' new book, *Finding Freedom*. Jarvis is, of course, very familiar to *Turning Wheel* readers, and the release of his wonderful book creates an opportunity to build bridges between the Buddhist and African-American communities here in the East Bay. It also is an expression of BPF's unfolding exploration of prison work, a process of exploration by board, staff, and friends that we hope will grow into commitment and clear program next year. As always, we welcome your thoughts about this work. ❖ —Alan Senauke



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**SHARPHAM COLLEGE** of Buddhist studies seeks a middle way between the academic study of Buddhism and orthodox presentations of the Dharma. Coursework emphasizes traditional Buddhism and its interpretation in ways relevant to our times. The College adheres to no particular school. Write for application information for 1998-99, to: Stephen Batchelor, Director of Studies, Sharpham College, Ashington, Totnes, Devon TQ9 7UT. E-mail: 101364,537@compuserve.com. Fax: 01803-732037.

**THE PRISON DHARMA NETWORK** is alive and well and in need of funds. Please send your tax-deductible donations to: PDN, P.O. Box 912, Astor Station, Boston, MA 02123.

**MEDICAL CHI KUNG** is an ancient Taoist system of simple movement, breathwork, visualization, and meditation. It is gentle and easy to learn. Daily practice encourages self-healing by mobilizing the body's natural healing capacities. Chi Kung is profound inner medicine that quiets the mind, increases energy and vitality, enhances immunity and encourages longevity and spiritual development. For information and schedule of San Francisco Bay Area classes, call Ellen Raskin at 415/431-3703.

**THE CONCH-US TIMES**, the Journal of the Dead Buddhists of America, for those appreciating both Grateful Dead and Buddhist Cultures: \$8/yr. Payable to: Ken Sun-Downer, Box 769, Idyllwild, CA 92549.

**BISEXUAL BUDDHIST ASSOC.** affirming unity, positive self-image, and bisexual identity for those committed to meditation and mindfulness practice. P.O. Box 858, Amherst, MA 01004.

**HOMELESS AND HOUSED** people meet weekly in Berkeley, California, for meditation and discussion. Volunteers from Berkeley Zen Center and East Bay Insight Meditation facilitate sessions oriented toward stress reduction. Free coffee and bagels. Mondays, 7:30 to 9 p.m., 2345 Dana St., Berkeley. For more info, call the Chaplaincy to the Homeless at 510/548-0551. All are welcome.

**GAY BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP:** sittings, speakers, and discussions every Thursday evening and every other Sunday morning in San Francisco. Classes, workshops, retreats, monthly potluck dinners, and work in Buddhist AIDS projects. Newsletter, with information and articles on topics of concern to gay Buddhists, available for \$15/8 issues. (See inside back cover for address.)

**VOLUNTEER M.D.s AND NURSES** are needed to provide health care to Tibetans in India. Former volunteer will provide information on how to help. Barry Samuel, M.D., 18324 Newell Rd., Shaker Heights, OH 44122-5052.

**HELPING HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN:** You can help by donating personal care items that are greatly needed—toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, hair brushes, combs, and hand lotion—to the Women's Daytime Drop-in Center in Berkeley. Volunteers are also needed to work with the women and children. For more information call: 510/548-6933.

**SUPPORT HOMELESS PEOPLE:** The Berkeley Ecumenical Chaplaincy to the Homeless is seeking supporters for its new "Community of Compassion," a group of people underwriting monthly rent (\$300/person) for the Haste St. Transitional House, which seeks to empower homeless adults in their move from the streets to permanent housing. This progressive, interfaith program involves homeless people in counseling, volunteer work, job development and community living. For information, write: 2345 Channing Way, Berkeley, CA 94704, or call 510/548-0551.

**PRISON SANGHAS** need supplies for Buddhist practice and services. Zen group in Ohio requests zafus, zabutons, study materials, bells, a mokugyo, malas, incense, robes, and a baby Buddha image. Send to Zen Buddhist Group, c/o Chaplain Tim Smith, Religious Services Department, North Central Correctional Institution, 670 Marion Williamsport Rd. E., P.O. Box 1812, Marion, OH, 43301-1812. Theravadin group in Michigan requests books, tapes, incense, robes, pictures or posters of Buddha, an altar cloth, and a visit from a Bikkhu. Contact Richard L. Kaufman, #224865, Riverside Correctional Facility, 777 West Riverside Dr., Ionia, MI 48846.

**TIBET DOES NOT EXIST**, a new play by Don Thompson, features illuminating encounters between a Tibetan lama and some well-meaning but clueless academics. Sponsored by Theater for Human Rights, the show runs from September 18 to October 26 at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center in New York City. Call 212/346-8510 for performance times and ticket information, or see the website at [www.theaterpeace.org](http://www.theaterpeace.org).

**INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY** walks in northern Thailand, December 13-22, 1997. These walks are intended to bring an international, interfaith, moral witness to the struggles of indigenous peoples, who are trying to preserve a sustainable way of life and protect their lands from modern pressures. Co-sponsored by the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, under the guidance of Achaan Sulak Sivaraksa, and the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit. Contact the latter for details: phone 303/939-8398, fax: 303/447-2253, or mail to 1314 Eighth St., Boulder, CO 80302.

**RETREAT TO BEAR WITNESS** at the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau is scheduled for November 11-15, 1997. The second retreat of its kind, this event is co-sponsored by the Zen Peacemaker Order and Kanzeon Sangha of Warsaw, Poland. Led by Bernie Glassman Roshi and representatives of other religious groups, the event will feature daily meditation, interfaith services and discussion. Phone: 914/968-4734, ext. 111. E-mail: [peacemaker@zpo.org](mailto:peacemaker@zpo.org), or see website at [www.ZPO.dat.org](http://www.ZPO.dat.org). ❖

# HELPING TURN THE WHEEL

*BPF gratefully acknowledges contributions above membership received between April 1 & June 30, 1997.*

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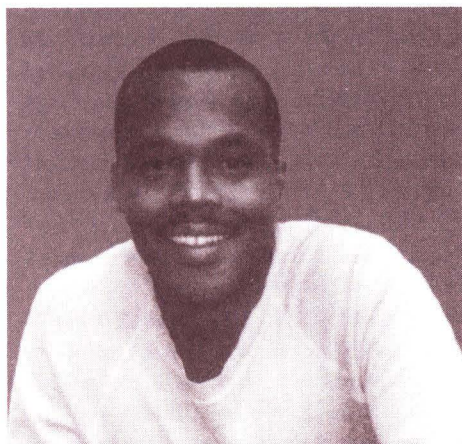
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