

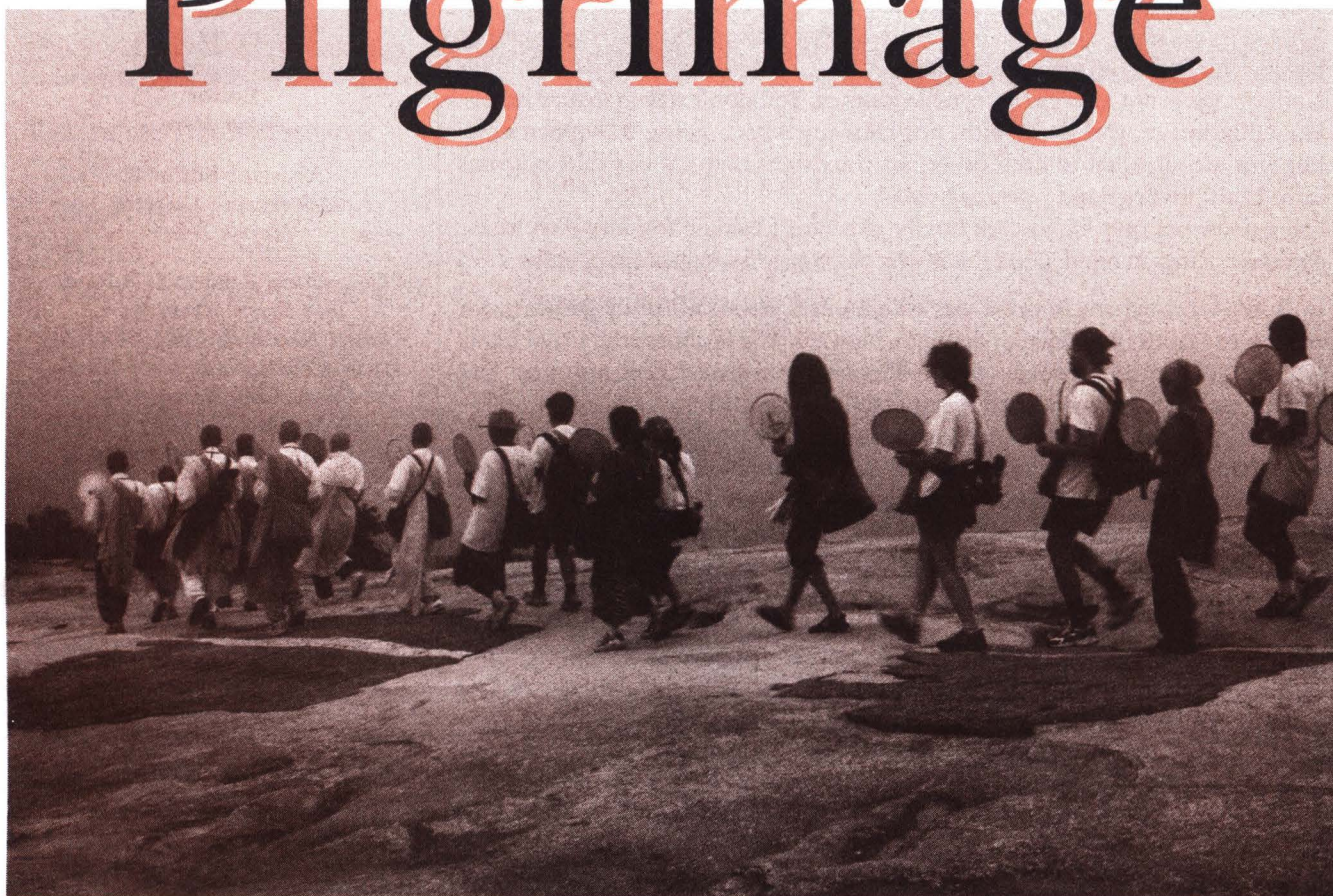


# TURNING WHEEL

Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Fall 1999 \$4.00

## Pilgrimage



### ENGAGED JOURNEYS TO:

◆ *La Brea Boulevard*

◆ *Auschwitz-Birkenau*

◆ *a slave prison in Senegal*

◆ *Mount Kailash...and more*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

In the thirteenth century, Zen Master Dogen wrote: "Why leave behind the seat that exists in your home and go aimlessly off to the dusty realms of other lands? If you make one misstep, you go astray from the Way directly before you." I asked myself this question often as I traveled in the dusty realms of India last December, one of a group of people on a "Buddhist/Christian Pilgrimage."

Here's what I think a pilgrimage is, in list form. (I'm a Buddhist, after all.)

- 1) A pilgrimage is an outer journey that reflects and makes possible an inner journey.
- 2) The outer journey has a beginning, middle, and end.
- 3) You leave your ordinary life, and therefore your personal identity, behind.  
You let go of everything familiar. *Who are you?*
- 5) You keep moving, so that the process of letting go continues throughout the pilgrimage. *What do you long for?*
- 6) A pilgrimage is not a very comfortable journey. You don't stay in luxury hotels.
- 7) On a pilgrimage, you go in faith, not knowing what's going to happen next.
- 8) Pilgrims are all equal to each other. To the extent that it's possible, pilgrims leave both privilege and poverty behind.
- 9) You journey not only for yourself but for all sentient beings. You may even have particular beings in mind. (And this is why pilgrimage is a suitable subject for *TW*.)

In Bodh Gaya, where Buddha was enlightened, about 60 of us gathered for three days of Buddhist-Christian dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Father Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk from England who had organized our trip. (For more about the trip, see page 31.)

On the first day we went early in the morning to the Mahabodhi Temple to meditate with the Dalai Lama. Beforehand, for the security of the Dalai Lama (whose life is often threatened), the entire temple grounds—several acres in all—had been cleared by police of hundreds and hundreds of regular pilgrims and worshippers. Then we 60 Westerners followed the Dalai Lama and his bodyguards through the streets to the temple gate. Crowds of Tibetans parted to let us through, bowing and offering katas to H.H. as he passed by. He seemed to greet every single person, and we followed in his wake (failing to leave our privilege behind).

Inside the strangely quiet temple, we sat down to meditate under the bodhi tree. I was excited to be sitting in the very spot where Buddha was enlightened, under the grandchild of the tree that sheltered him. Would I get enlightened, too?

And this is the one slide I want to show you here. Facing us, right under the tree, side by side and cross-legged, sat Father Laurence, in his white robes, and His Holiness, in red and yellow. I was at the heart of the heart of the Buddhist world, at sunrise, meditating under the bodhi tree with the Dalai Lama! Birds called. A leaf fell from the tree. And right in front of me were not two but four men: symmetrically flanking the teachers of peace stood two soldiers in camouflage green, as still as meditators, holding automatic rifles diagonally across their chests.

I went to the dusty realms to see that sight, to understand that this is the world I live in, and to keep searching for my true response.

*TW* has a new assistant editor, Marija Duerr. She's a cultural anthropologist who is currently studying spirituality and health in Asian and Asian American women. Former editor of the *Mindfulness Bell*, she's a member of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, and the Zen Peacemaker Order, and her root teacher is Joan Halifax. She introduces herself to you in this issue (on page 15) with a piece about a pilgrimage she recently made. We're lucky to have her. ❖ —Susan Moon

Coming themes for *Turning Wheel*:

Spring '00—**Class**, deadline: 1/1/00

Summer '00—**Buddhism and Human Rights**, deadline: 4/1/00

Fall '00—**Asian & Asian American Buddhists in the West**, deadline: 7/1/00

Winter '01—**Agings**, deadline: 10/1/00.

We welcome submissions on these and other subjects. Please include SASE.



## TURNING WHEEL

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Assistant Editor &  
Advertising Director

Marija Duerr

Consulting Readers & Editors

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Annette Herskovits, Shannon Hickey,  
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by Louise Dunlap

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## LETTERS

[Please write to us. We welcome your responses to what we print. When you think we are one-sided, or leave out important perspectives, let us and our readers know. Tell us what you like, too. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.]

**INEB Conference and Diversity**

As a participant in INEB's (International Network of Engaged Buddhists) Tenth Anniversary Conference in Sri Lanka in February, 1999, I would like to expand on some of the observations made by Alan Senauke in his Conference Report (*TW* Summer 1999).

I agree with Senauke that before Buddhists venture into new contexts, they need to try to understand the complexity of local political, economic, and cultural realities. If not, even the most well-intentioned outsiders may end up aligning themselves only with those groups that have access to funding, modern technology, the English language, and other connections to the external world.

Had Sri Lankan Buddhist activist groups been contacted and invited to the INEB Conference, a diversity of perspectives on the Sri Lankan conflict and on socially engaged Buddhism would have been available. The absence of diversity contributed to the perpetuation of the narrow but commonly held view that the civil war in

Sri Lanka is simply a conflict between Sinhalese Buddhists and Hindu Tamils. This view tends to overlook the similarities and traditions of peaceful coexistence between the two groups. Moreover, such an ethnically based analysis conveniently ignores how the history of colonialism, the contemporary globalization project, and the arms trade originating in the West have shaped and perpetuated the conflict in Sri Lanka and so-called ethnic conflicts in other parts of the world.

The precious jewel of the Buddha Dhamma is available to the world today because it was preserved under great duress for several centuries by Buddhists, especially the monks and nuns in Asian countries such as Sri Lanka. Do Buddhists in the West now owe a debt to help preserve the Dhamma and Buddhist cultural heritages in Asia, which are severely threatened by the forces of global economic and cultural development? For example, should they help preserve Buddhist sacred sites such as the Temple of the Tooth in Sri Lanka that was recently bombed? Should international Buddhist networks pay attention to the ethics of Christian and other proselytization efforts that use economic incentives to convert poor Buddhist, Hindu, and other communities in Asia?

—Asoka Bandarage, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts

**On Being in Prison**

I have been reading *Turning Wheel* for some years now. I am serving a "life" sentence for a second-degree murder which occurred in 1981. It took me 10 years after I was sentenced to figure out who put me in here. Finally I realized it was myself, not society, not bad luck, or the Vietnam conflict.

There is a lot of talk about how we, too, are victims. To some degree, that may be true. But we are alive, our families and friends can visit us. I think a lot of us have forgotten about the real victims and their families. All that family members can do is stand over a piece of earth and try to remember what the smile of their son or daughter was like. What is done is done, but to forget the past is to ignore the future.

When we embrace the Noble Path and give it an honest try, we will find a peace we have never found before. When one lives in the present with a still heart, the past cannot haunt you, the future cannot scare you, and where you are at shouldn't bother you. Being at peace with one's circumstances is not determined by a certain location, or stature in society. It's inside all of us everywhere...just realize it.

—Frank Benson, Folsom State Prison, California

**Correction:**

In the Summer '99 *TW*, in Ralph Steele's "Open Letter on Diversity," his website was incorrectly given.

For information on Ralph's retreats, contact: <[www.lifetransition.com](http://www.lifetransition.com)>.

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## SHORT REPORTS

### *Cambodian Monk Worked Quietly for Peace*

Bhante Dharmawara Mahathera, a revered Cambodian monk, died this past June in Stockton, California, at the age of 110. Bhante had been the spiritual adviser to King Sihanouk of Cambodia and a friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, but he thought of himself as a simple monk. Those who met him spoke of experiencing true lovingkindness. In the last years of his life, Bhante was on the advisory board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

Born in Phnom Penh when Cambodia was a French colony, Bhante became a distinguished magistrate in the King's Court and an administrator. In 1924, at the age of 33, he resigned his position and left his wife and two-month-old daughter to become a monk. He spent seven years in the forests of Thailand, studying with Buddhist teachers and subsisting on wild plants and offerings from peasants in nearby villages.

Bhante then moved to India where he founded the Asoka Mission, which grew to include a monastery, temple, and health-care center. He studied, taught, and became known as a healer. During World War II, Bhante traveled on India's behalf to Japan, Germany, the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, seeking a peaceful end to the war. He met with government representatives and tried to awaken in each a deep understanding of the others' perspectives.

In the late 1970s, Bhante moved to Stockton to join his grandchildren and other relatives, most of whom had fled the war in Cambodia. There he built a temple for the growing Cambodian community. He continued to travel around the world to conduct meditation courses, healing work, and ceremonies. In 1989, he led a spiritual cleansing at a Stockton school, after a massacre left five children dead.

In recent months, Bhante had been in and out of the hospital. On June 26, Bhante took breakfast in his garden and came into the house. A friend said, "I asked if he wanted to go for a walk around Victory Park, and he nodded. And then he just breathed out, and did not breathe again."

### *Japanese Buddhist Sect Takes Stand Against Capital Punishment*

The Tendai Buddhist sect of Japan has called for the abolition of the death penalty, invoking Buddhist teachings that prohibit the taking of life and that call for compassion for all living beings. This is the first time the centuries-old sect has publicly expressed an opinion on capital punishment.

Between 1989 and 1993, there was a *de facto* moratorium on executions in Japan, with Ministers of Justice in office who were personally opposed to capital punishment. Executions resumed in 1993 and death sentences and executions have increased since. The Japanese government carried out six executions in 1998. Currently, about a hundred prisoners are under sentence of death. These prisoners often spend several decades awaiting execution, under extremely harsh conditions, with more stringent restrictions than other prisoners on exercise, correspondence, and visitation. Some have been held in almost complete solitude for years.

Execution is by hanging and is carried out in secret on the order of the Minister of Justice. Both the scheduling of the executions and the selection of victims appear to be arbitrary. No advance warning is given to the prisoners, their families, or their lawyers. Families generally learn that their relative has been executed by reading the press.

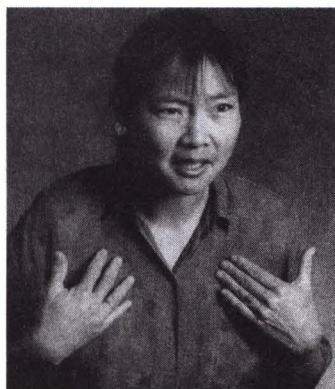
The Tendai sect, founded in the ninth century, accounts for about a third of the 96 million Japanese Buddhists in a country of 124 million. Although polls

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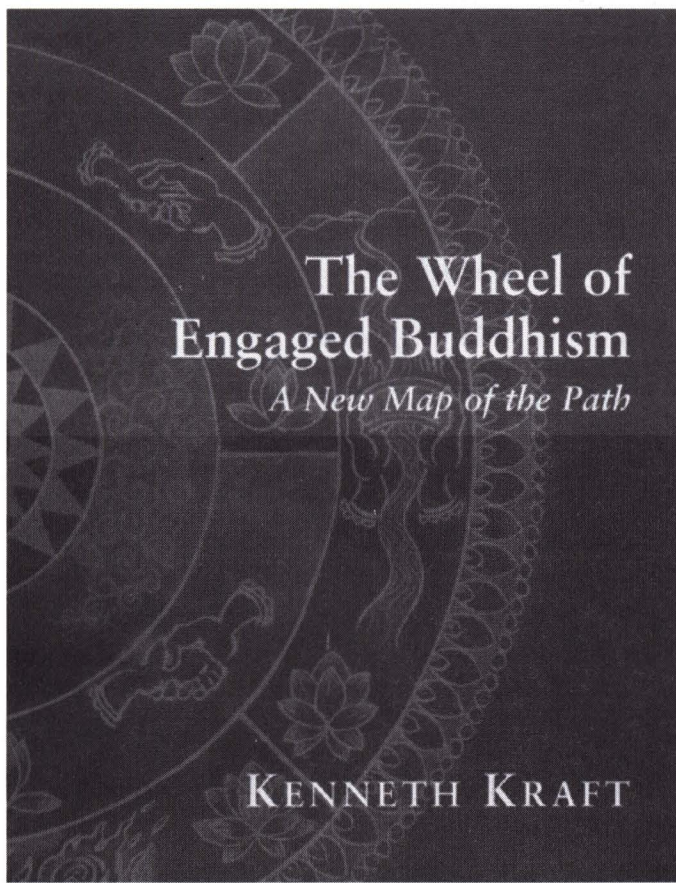
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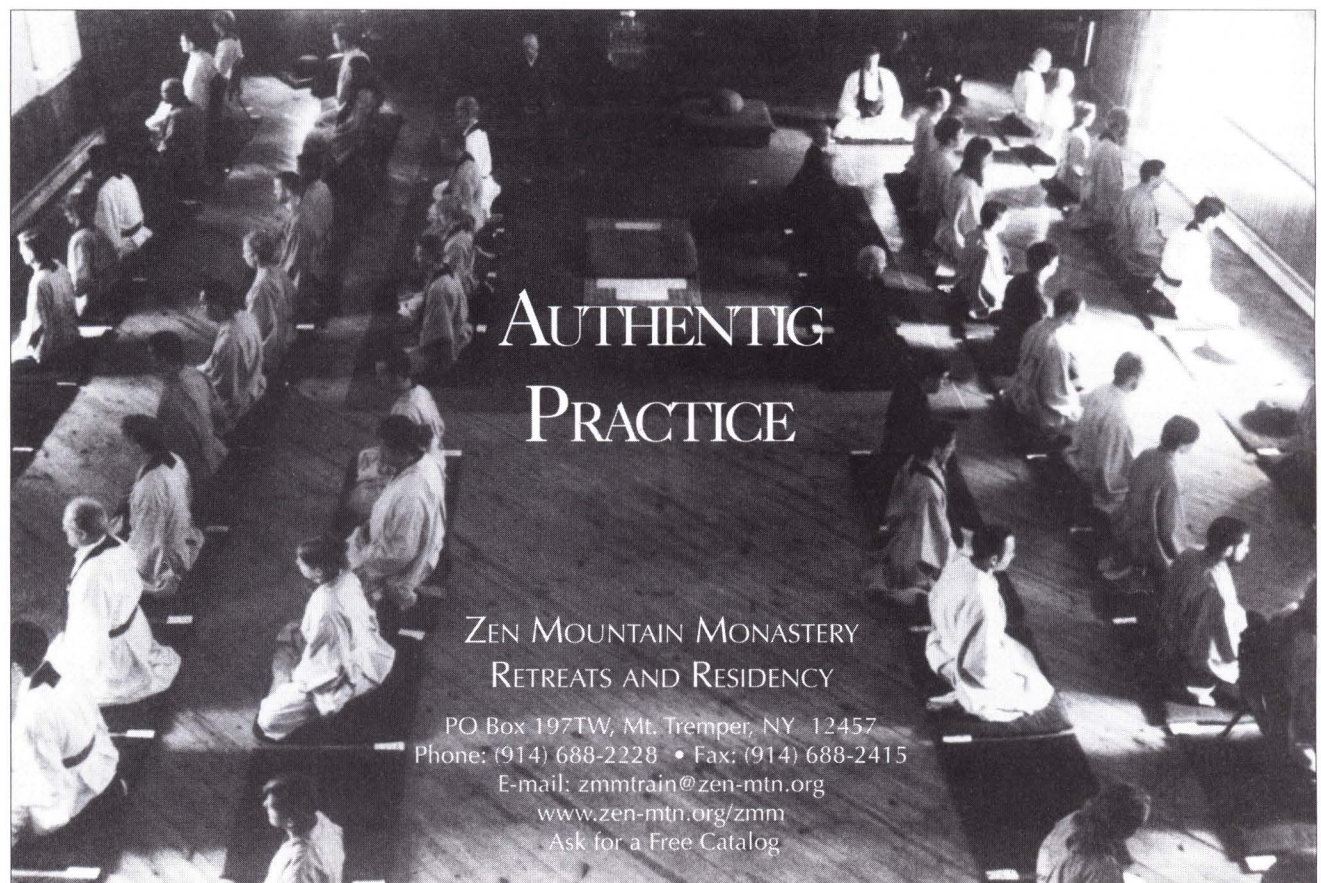
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show that a majority of the public support the death penalty, this move by a major Buddhist sect should help open up dialogue on the issue and perhaps even lead to a ban on capital punishment, as was the case in premodern Japan.

*Editor's Note: Don't worry about the hiatus in Stephanie Kaza's ecology column. Her clear voice is with us here in the book review on page 40, and we look forward to her column in the Winter 2000 Turning Wheel.*

### A NOTE ABOUT Y2K

One of the dangers of Y2K is the nuclear threat. The U.S. has many computer-dependent nuclear weapons systems set on hair-trigger alert. Our nuclear reactors are also hooked to computer systems which, if they crash, could cause melt-downs.

Please call President Clinton and ask him to take our nuclear weapons off alert, and to close down all our nuclear reactors on December 1, until it can be determined that they won't melt down. The White House comment line is: (202) 456-1414.

## IN MEMORIAM

Rick Fields, Buddhist writer and editor, died on June 6, 1999, in Fairfax, California, four years after he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He was 57.

Rick was the author of a half-dozen books, including *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*. He was the editor of the *Vajradhatu Sun* (the precursor to the *Shambhala Sun*), a founder and contributing editor of *Tricycle*, and for the last several years of his life, until he was too ill to work, he was editor of *Yoga Journal*. He was a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and had been a student of Chögyam Trungpa.

Completely unpretentious, Rick was Buddhist through and through, without putting on either airs or robes, without rejecting his own culture.

Rick joined the BPF Board and the *Turning Wheel* editorial committee in 1995. He was diagnosed with cancer shortly thereafter, and so was unable to continue in those capacities. Still, he was a good friend to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship to the end of his life, and was supportive of *Turning Wheel*, sharing ideas and suggestions with us.

I was grateful to be able to attend Rick's memorial service at Spirit Rock on August 1, 1999. One of the many devoted friends who spoke was Marc Barasch, a fellow Tibetan practitioner. To quote from Marc's tribute, Rick "was not into self-improvement for its own

### Interfaith Vigils Against Hate Violence

This past year, our nation was shaken by the terror and hate that killed Amadou Diallo, Matthew Shepard, and James Byrd. While these recent murders were unusual in severity, hate-motivated violence is neither unusual nor new. According to FBI statistics, in 1996, more than 11,000 Americans were victims of hate violence. Last year, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) sponsored interfaith vigils in more than 20 states in memory of James, Matthew, and all victims of hate violence in our society. This year the FOR and the Interfaith Alliance are co-sponsoring *Stop the Hate*, a national campaign for healing in the midst of hate violence. On October 7, 1999, religious communities will organize vigils against violence, bringing together ordinary people of faith and goodwill to make a change in their neighborhoods, local schools, workplaces, and houses of worship. For more information on how to organize *Stop The Hate* vigils, please contact the Fellowship of Reconciliation at 914/358-4601 or visit the Web site at [www.tialliance.org/sth.html](http://www.tialliance.org/sth.html). ❖

sake—he knew hopelessness and fearlessness were the only way to go—but always strove to deepen his practice without recourse to orthodoxy, and that in order to learn to be saner and kinder to others."

Rick married for the first time in his life less than a year before his death. Of the wedding, Marc wrote, "After their vows, Rick tottered to his feet to dance his wedding waltz on the dais. His face was suffused by a joy so incandescent it was hard to look at. He had, to the amazement of those who knew his romantic history, at last found love through commitment, and a commitment through love."

And another quote from Marc: "He stayed around for longer than he had to, I think, to share himself just a little more. He faded out slowly, incrementally, like some gorgeous sunset...leaving only an indelible imprint on your heart."

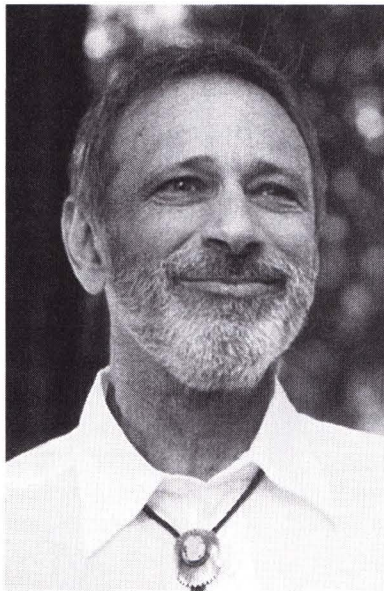
Rick's wife Marcia spoke of how present Rick was during the weeks and months of his dying. "I just want to help my friends," he told her. Marcia's gritty description of the particulars of

Rick's last days was unusual for a memorial service. It was a gift to us who were there to hear about the hard work of dying, the earthiness of it, the sound of the breathing and then of the silence.

Rick's practice really showed, she said. When he finally died, and the doctor came to sign the death certificate, she asked, "So what was the actual cause of death?"

"Letting go," said the doctor. ❖

—Susan Moon



## HISTORY COLUMN

*I-Ching*

by Diane Patenaude Ames

Just as Buddhism changed China, the Chinese inevitably changed Buddhism. Some characteristically Chinese innovations, such as a new emphasis on charity and good works, met with general approval from Chinese Buddhists. Others, however, alarmed some of the more thoughtful Buddhist clergy. In particular, the Chinese took all too literally a passage in an obscure sutra about offering one's very limbs and body to the Buddha. Not only did it come to be the norm for new monks and nuns to burn holes in their scalps at the time of ordination, but a surprising number of early Chinese Buddhists piously chopped off their fingers, starved themselves, or burned themselves to death.

Critics of these self-destructive practices pointed out that intentionally harming one's own precious human body was a clear violation of the *vinaya*, the traditional body of rules laid down for Buddhist clergy by the Buddha himself. The argument impressed a scholarly young monk named I-Ching (635-713 C.E.). The problem, he concluded, was that China still lacked a complete

vinaya. Someone would have to sail off to India in a small wooden boat, learn Sanskrit, collect the needed texts, study them with qualified Indian teachers, and translate them into Chinese. And why shouldn't it be he? After all, of the dozens of Chinese monks who had attempted to go to India and collect Buddhist texts, only two or three had survived to complete their missions.

So, in 671, I-Ching set off for Sumatra on a Persian merchant ship with another Chinese monk, who promptly died of some tropical disease. In Sumatra, I-Ching studied Sanskrit for six months before sailing to Tamralipti in India. There he studied Sanskrit for another year and met another Chinese monk, who also died of some tropical disease. However, before this companion succumbed, the two monks made pilgrimages to Bodh Gaya, Vulture Peak, the Jetavana monastery, and numerous other Buddhist sites. Everywhere, I-Ching took notes on the lifestyles of Indian monks, who, as he had expected, never mutilated themselves.

After these journeys, I-Ching studied at the famous Buddhist university at Nalanda for 10 years, collected a number of Indian Buddhist texts on the vinaya as well as sutras and commentaries, and translated some of these texts into Chinese. Finally he returned to China, via Sumatra, sending on ahead his record of monastic practices in India. For the rest of his life, in addition to translating texts and teaching Sanskrit, he advocated bringing Chinese monastic practices into line with the Buddha's original rules as he understood them, with some success. While he did not succeed in abolishing scalp-burning during ordinations (the practice lasted until 1983), his writings exerted, down through the centuries, an influence against some of the extreme practices he deplored. Incidentally, he was also instrumental in introducing the (Indian) umbrella into China. ❖

## MOON HAIKU

Poked in the eye by  
These fingers  
Pointing at the moon.

—Rick Fields



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## FAMILY PRACTICE COLUMN

### Family Visits to Buddhist Places

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

The middle-aged Vietnamese couple sitting at the little kitchen table both speak English. They want to tell me their story. It's Phoenix, Arizona, 1987, and I am visiting a Vietnamese Buddhist temple, a tract house with a Dharma hall in the garage.

"My husband was put into prison," the woman tells me. "I sent food and medicine to him, but the guards took all of it. And I couldn't get news about my husband, so I worried very much." She glances sideways at her husband.

"One day I sent our child to school," she continues. "It was immunization day. But the shot was contaminated. He was our only child. He didn't feel well when he came home. And three days later he was dead."

Her husband is angry at me. "You Americans," he says, "you had everything. You had weapons, money, power. You had *everything*. And you lost the war."

My visit to them was part of what I've come to think of as a pilgrimage. I've never forgotten that family, the mother and father who had lost their one child. As a student of Korean Zen, I was trained to view Buddhist pilgrimage as visiting places of Buddhist practice, meeting people, practicing with them whenever possible, sharing a meal, and listening to their stories. I consider these stories to be heart-teachings, expressions of ordinary people's struggles to survive and understand life.

In the U.S. we have Tibetan, Japanese, Burmese, Vietnamese, Korean, Cambodian, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Thai, and European-American Buddhist communities—rich, poor, rural, urban, monastic, lay. I want my son to be comfortable in Buddhist environments, and to respect them all as expressions of the Dharma. My husband and I both like adventures, and when we're on vacation we like to find local temples, call, and visit if possible.

When Josh was a toddler, we occasionally used to visit the garden of the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, marveling at the huge, electrically powered prayer wheels, prostrating in front of the stupa, and sitting on the little bridge to watch the goldfish in the tiny pond beneath. Before leaving, we would circumambulate the prayer wheel pavilion, walking slowly hand in hand.

We also used to visit our friend Bhante Suhita Dharma, the African American monk who later performed Chris' and my marriage ceremony, at his Metta Vihara hospice. Bhante had established his temple in Richmond, California, because so many poor people there were dying of AIDS. He would produce stuffed animals and sweets, and we would examine his collection of cactus plants in the backyard, or sit awhile in the shrine room with its

large golden Buddha figure. Through a half-open bedroom door we could see a dying man in a hospital bed, hooked to a respirator. Our family donated furniture, and Chris, who is an accountant, helped set up the temple's bookkeeping system on computer.

Because Josh is half Korean, it is fortunate for us that we have Dharma friends at the Sixth Patriarch Zen Center in Berkeley. They have a peaceful Korean-style meditation hall with a heated floor. When we visit, Josh plays with the dog Banya (Korean for "prajna"), and I have tea with my Dharma sister Jaguang if she has time. The teacher, Hyunoong Sunim, once invited Josh to a "tea" ceremony and formally served him Coca Cola in an exquisite ceramic cup! We always make bows to the Buddha figure in the Zen hall before we go home and sometimes offer fruit, flowers, or a donation envelope on the altar.

You don't have to wait for a special "family practice day"—many Buddhist centers, such as the Buddhist Churches of America (Jodo Shinshu), would welcome a visiting family if called in advance. For me, pilgrimage isn't so much about going to special places as it is making the effort to appreciate how people have made places special through their Buddhist practice and devotion.

I remember what the Vietnamese man said to me: "You have everything." He was right. I do have everything. I have heard there are 10,000 Dharma doors; some are in my neighborhood. I encourage you to make your own pilgrimage to the Buddhist temples and centers near you. ❖

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## PRISON PAGE

### *Doing Hard Time, Doing Easy Time*

*Here are some excerpts from an article we received from Robert DeHart, incarcerated in Pennsylvania:*

"I am a 39-year-old white male who spent 13 years on Death Row. I grew up in a broken family, raised by my father who was self-employed in construction. As an adolescent I abused drugs and alcohol.

In 1982, while serving time for burglary, I met a fellow prisoner who practiced Zen Buddhism. In 1983 I was arrested and convicted of escape and homicide and placed within maximum security segregation...I welcomed the thought of the death penalty while at the same time abhorred the fact that the government I despised would be imposing it upon me.

I wrote the World Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion and requested literature...They sent back the Diamond Sutra. I immediately read it through, and didn't understand a word of it. But I knew that this was something special: that the key to the comprehension of my very being lay therein.

Some months later, after having been sentenced to death, I was given the address of the City of 10,000 Buddhas. I had only \$25 a month, but I began purchasing individual volumes of the Lotus Sutra. What a wondrous thing! I read these sutras, and for the first time in my tortured life found peace and ease with myself. Over the next year or so, I purchased the first seven volumes. I began writing it out by hand until I had three copies, which I then gave away. I wasn't permitted candles or incense, so I collected butter from my food trays, heated and separated it, and made candles to burn on my home-made altar, where I read the sutras and recited the Buddha's name.

During this process, I came across the Shurangama Sutra as well as the Great Compassion Mantra. I again wrote the City of 10,000 Buddhas and they taped both mantras for me to listen to. To my amazement, the Prison Security Board agreed to allow me to receive the tape and even supplied me with a tape recorder. I spent hours every day trying to learn the 544 lines of the sutra. I had never felt better in my life. I enjoyed the cell that was my monastery.

As I sat in my cell and contemplated the bodhisattva precepts, I became increasingly aware of the suffering I had caused throughout my life. All my life I had eaten meat. My father raised sheep, pigs and chickens, which we butchered and ate. I hunted and fished, never giving a thought to it. The next thing I knew, I started refus-

ing meat-laden food trays. After a number of other prisoners and I began dropping our food trays on the floor, they started replacing them with non-meat trays. I then stopped eating all dairy products...After several years of being moved to different units [where vegetarian trays were not available], I found myself living on rice, peanuts, and peanut butter from the commissary, as well as some fruit from some sympathetic guards...

After a while I began to suffer pain in my feet. I clung so tightly to the need for purity that it never occurred to me that I could be suffering from malnutrition. A month later I could no longer move about and suffered pain so intense that I could only lay on the floor...I was unable to refuse trays again, with the memory still so vivid of the suffering I had just experienced.

Meanwhile, a woman in an anti-death penalty group had started visiting me. She was very concerned and could not bear the thought of my pending execution. I had concluded that if my karma mandated my death, my destiny was set. She never accepted that, and found me some pro-bono legal help which resulted in my sentence being vacated (commuted to life without parole).

My ordeal has taught me many things. Without compassion, we are doomed to suffer the continual wheel of births and deaths. The Buddha gave us the way out. It is a difficult path with many pitfalls. Every sentient being is replete with Buddha nature. The Buddhadharma is wonderful beyond expression...and reveals wonders that forever change your

life. When you fall down, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will always pick you back up and accompany you."

*I wasn't permitted candles or incense, so I collected butter from my food trays, heated and separated it, and made candles to burn on my home-made altar.*

### *News from the Prison Project*

- I recently co-taught a four-day Nonviolent Communication workshop in a Texas prison. To my surprise, every inmate in the workshop was a born-again Christian. We discovered an inspiring harmony between our Buddhist and Christian values of compassion, kindness, and patience.
- The first meeting of the post-prison/jail sangha took place in August. This new post-incarceration meditation group will follow the model we use inside (mindful movement, meditation, check-ins, and possibly some journal writing).
- We are interested in thoroughly mapping all current American Buddhist prison projects. If you are involved in one, or know someone who is, please call BPF's national office at (510) 655-6169 or email <prisons@bpf.org> and tell us about what you are doing.
- The Prison Project needs and welcomes volunteers to come in to the BPF office and offer time. ♦

—Diana Lion

# JOURNEY OF A BROKEN HEART

by Marianne Dresser

Photographs by Peter Cunningham

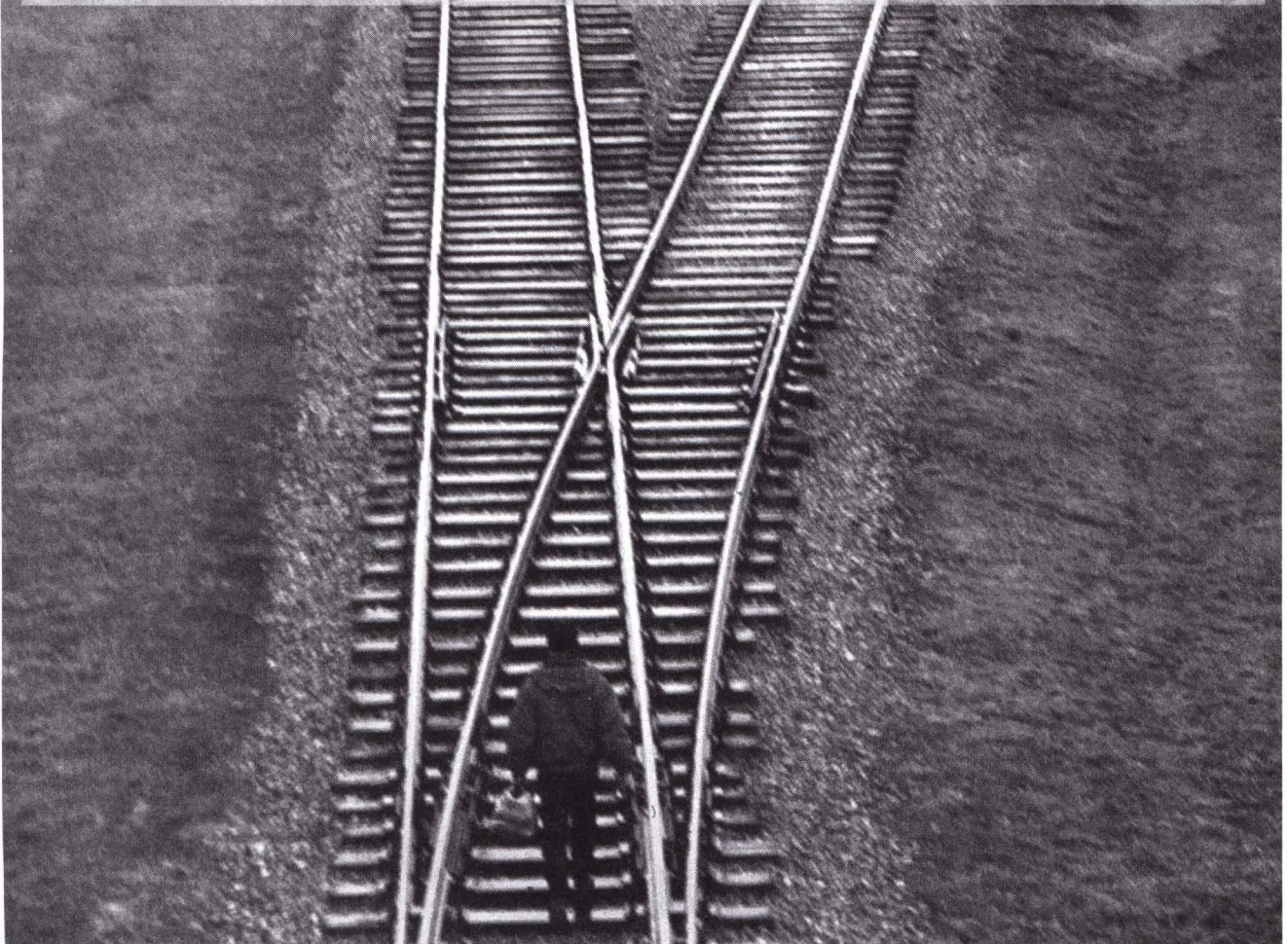
It is cold, damp, and gray in central Poland in November, and the most notorious Nazi death camp seems an unlikely place for a pilgrimage. Here I will find no glorious cathedral or sublime sacred images, no miraculous fountain or boon-bestowing guru. Just a carefully preserved monument to humanity's darkest potential: Auschwitz-Birkenau.

A hundred and fifty or so North Americans and Europeans have gathered here for the third annual Bearing Witness retreat organized by Roshi Bernie Glassman and the Zen Peacemaker Order. We will spend five days here, taking it "into our very marrow," living among the echoes of its history of immense cruelty and immense suffering. We have journeyed to a place of great spiritual presence.

The first morning is given over to a tour of Auschwitz I, the original camp. We break into small

groups and pass through the infamous iron gate with its cynical message: *Arbeit Macht Frei*. Work makes us free. I express surprise at how small the gate seems, compared to its mythic dimensions in my mind, and at the intimate scale of the camp itself, which resembles a tidy European hamlet with handsome brick buildings laid out in a neat grid. "Big enough," Peter remarks. He's been here before and knows what lies ahead. Our group's guide, a stylish, well-informed young Polish woman, leads us efficiently through several of the buildings, which house various exhibits. Entire rooms full of suitcases, shoes, household goods, hairbrushes and combs, and women's hair, which was to be used for stuffing mattresses. A massive accumulation of ordinary human objects that represents only a small fraction of the remnants of a million lives. This is our initiation into the physical reality, the true scale and scope, of Auschwitz.

The entire group reconvenes at the killing wall,





*In front of the killing wall at Auschwitz I, the group chants Kaddish in Hebrew and in English, French, German, Italian, Polish, and Spanish translations.*

an execution ground between two buildings with boarded-up windows. The ground in front of the wall is covered with bouquets and candles. We say *Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead, in the original Hebrew and in several translations. As we pray here, strong emotions break through the shock brought on by immersion in the atrocity exhibitions. Many weep openly. Others stand with heads bowed. We have gotten in touch with the task before us.

The rest of the retreat follows a simple schedule: after breakfast and small group discussions, we walk the two kilometers from our lodgings in Oswiecim, where Auschwitz I is located, to Birkenau, the larger of the two camps, a huge, efficient factory of death. We follow the railway tracks that bisect the grounds and that lead, ultimately, to the crematoria at the far end. We form a large circle at the former selection site along the tracks and sit in meditation all morning. People at four points along the circle take turns reading names, taken from Nazi archives, of individuals—and whole families—who were killed here. The voices sometimes catch on unfamiliar Eastern European names or break into weeping. The unusual cadence settles over us with the ground-hugging mist.

We break into smaller groups for prayer services—Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, and Sufi—then follow the haunting sound of the *shofar* (ram's horn) to the ruins

of one of the crematoria where we again chant *Kaddish*. The group disperses and slowly walks back the length of the camp to the main gate for the midday meal. Bread and a bowl of hot soup, served and eaten with no spoon—the way prisoners ate. Here, possession of a utensil ranked you among the very fortunate.

After lunch, we follow the tracks back into Birkenau. More sitting, more names. The heavy mist turns to a cold rain, so we crowd into one of the drafty barracks, which offers marginal protection. Candles are placed along the concrete latrine that runs down the center of the room. We sit on the packed earth floor and sing *Kaddish*. Then a Rom woman begins a plaintive song from the Gypsies who were brought here. She falters, and her husband quietly takes up the song. The rough wooden walls absorb the sound like parched earth soaking up rainwater.

One afternoon, as the group gathers to sit, a few people drift off toward the neat rows of buildings and the birch forest that lent Birkenau its name. I am among them. I walk for hours, pausing only occasionally to read one of the information panels placed around the camp. The former site of Mengele's "laboratory." A clearing in the woods where trainloads of new arrivals were forced to wait their turn, in sight of the crematoria operating at full capacity, smoke billowing from the chimneys.

Walking is a pilgrim's practice, but in Birkenau it feels



*After spending the morning in meditation at the selection site on the railway tracks at Birkenau, pilgrims offer prayers from Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, and Sufi traditions.*

like an escape attempt, as if by staying in motion I might outpace the anguish that permeates the very ground. I want to take the measure of this place: perhaps by walking its vastness I may be able to grasp its enormity in my mind. But understanding eludes me, and grief soon overtakes me.

All pilgrimages involve a degree of risk and sacrifice. But whatever discomfort I might experience pales in comparison to what hundreds of thousands endured in this place. It is hubris to think that I can truly imagine what it would have been like to have been imprisoned here. I am not Jewish, nor a member of one of the other European populations the Nazis deemed inferior and expendable.

The one characteristic I share with those “lives not worthy of being lived,” in their twisted ideology, is my homosexuality. Zen teacher Pat Enkyo O’Hara asked me to bear witness when I came here to “the latest incarnation of this kind of hatred in the world.” I honor her request and invoke the name of Matthew Shepard when it is my turn to read. But the difficulty of collapsing the wall between victim and perpetrator remains. It is far easier to identify with the oppressed than with the oppressor, especially here. The deepest challenge of Auschwitz-Birkenau is to recognize the human totality of this place, in all its guises and faces.

During an evening discussion, Roshi Bernie Glassman remarks that, for him, “The place is the

teacher.” We are encouraged to “become intimate” with Auschwitz-Birkenau. On my solitary walk I notice the unnerving formal beauty of the camp, the evidence of Bauhaus-era design in the stanchions and watchtowers. I seem to see semaphores in the shapes of twisted barbed wire; I take in the pastel hues of the stones lining the tracks, the delicate layer of moss on the caved-in roof of a crematorium, the reflection of stately birches on the glassy surface of a pond where the ashes of thousands were dumped. A friend tells me of Elie Wiesel’s comment, on returning to Auschwitz for a memorial ceremony: “I didn’t know it would be so beautiful.”

And I see too that the rigorous symmetry of the electric fences, the intersecting lines of tracks, the grid of the barracks, the precisely placed guard towers, support a specific function. The structure of the camp—physical and psychological—enforced separation of people: from their families and possessions; from their community, culture, religion, and language; from their dignity and integrity; from solidarity with others; and ultimately from their very lives. Genocidal programs, now as then, are based on the principle of radical separation, and are designed to cleave certain human beings from the body of humanity itself.

Reflecting on this, I grow to appreciate what our group—a diverse mix of personalities, ethnicities, nationalities, cultural and religious traditions, including Holocaust survivors, the relatives of survivors, and the

relatives of former Nazis—represents. Our pilgrimage here is a corrective response, a stance of resistance, to the deadly separation between people that feeds divisiveness, conflict, and violence throughout the world.

Over the course of the days here I also come to a deeper appreciation of the Zen Peacemaker Order's tenets that frame the retreat: Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, Healing. Never before has the classic Zen injunction to abide in "not knowing," with all its layers of meaning, felt so intensely palpable. I do not know, cannot fully know, the suffering held by this place. I cannot really even fathom it, yet I can bear witness to its lingering traces. Bearing witness calls me to complete presence, asks me to open, again and again, to the entire range of responses evoked by this place—disbelief, numbness, rage, guilt, despair, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, even joy.

Healing turns out to be the most difficult and subtle tenet of the three. For some, coming to terms with their own histories of denial, separation, and suffering brings a sense of wholeness; for others, whose lives have never been free of the shadow of the Holocaust, healing

remains elusive—especially if it demands forgiveness. But just as with bodily disease, being healed does not necessarily equal being cured. Healing the spirit may not require forgiving all wrongs and wrongdoers—an impossible task for some—but fully acknowledging suffering and its roots in hatred and delusion.

Healing, in whatever form it may take, is a divine blessing. Perhaps it is the hidden boon received by some from this uneasy place of pilgrimage. For me, the gift of Auschwitz is instead a new wound: a wider heart, stretched beyond what I believed was its capacity—a broken-open heart. ❖

*Marianne Dresser is the editor of Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier and the recently published The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred by Phil Cousineau. She lives in Oakland, California. New York-based photographer Peter Cunningham has attended and photographed the Zen Peacemaker Order's annual retreat at Auschwitz-Birkenau since its inception in 1996 and has documented other ZPO activities, including its street retreats.*

# JOURNEY TO MT. KAILASH

by Marija Duerr

His Holiness The Dalai Lama has written, "If people are so highly developed spiritually that they can practice their religions effectively by staying in one place, even in some unholy place, then a pilgrimage may not be important for them...Many ordinary people, however, especially those who find religion difficult to practice in a devout way in their normal lives, set off on long journeys with the hope of communicating virtue and gaining merit."

Clearly, I fall into the latter category. For much of my life, I have struggled to maintain a consistent meditation practice at home, but will happily go into debt to travel to far-off lands in search of sacred sites. When I learned that my friend and teacher Roshi Joan Halifax was planning a journey to Mt. Kailash in western Tibet, I knew I had to join the trip.

For both Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists, Mt. Kailash is the center of the universe, the axis around which the world revolves. In Hindu cosmology it is the abode of Shiva, the god of creation and destruction. For Tibetan Buddhists, it is the home of Demchog, the wrathful emanation of the Buddha. Many Buddhists and Hindus consider the pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash and

the circumambulation around it, called a *kora*, to be the pinnacle of spiritual life. Tradition has it that performing one *kora* will erase the bad karma of one lifetime, while 108 *koras* lead to full enlightenment.

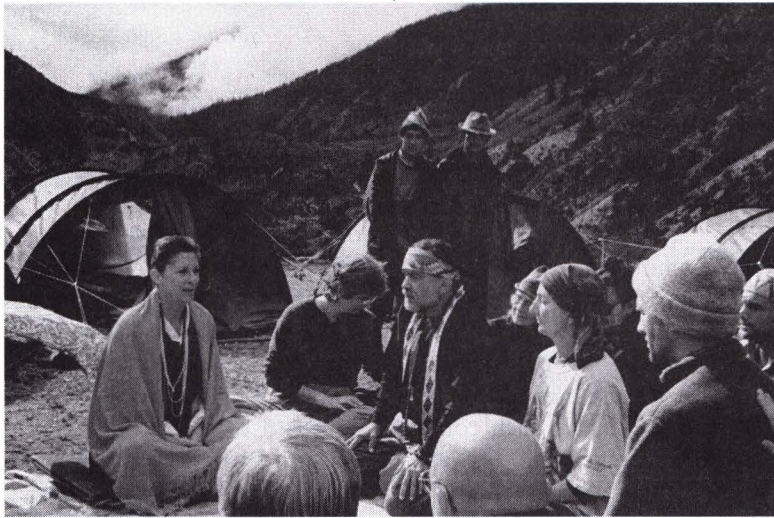
My own intentions were less lofty. Over the past five years, my practice with Joan had been in the mindfulness tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh and, more recently, as a member of Roshi Bernie Tetsugen Glassman's Zen Peacemaker Order (ZPO). Tibetan Buddhism was fascinating to me, but I didn't understand much about the rituals and symbolism. I simply wanted to make the journey to experience whatever the mountain had to teach me, and to try to live out the three tenets of the ZPO: Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Healing Ourselves and the World. It seemed especially important to bear witness to the courageous struggle of Tibetans to maintain their

culture and religious traditions in their own land.

This past May, on a warm, smoggy day in Southern California, a group of fellow pilgrims from all over the United States gathered at Los Angeles International Airport to begin the journey. When we arrived in Kathmandu two days later, we were joined by others from Denmark, Switzerland, and India. In all, there were 20 of us, ranging in age from 17 to 67.

We would not arrive at Mt. Kailash until nearly three weeks later. Located in a remote corner of western Tibet, there is no fast, direct way to get to the mountain, no major airport for hundreds of miles. The pilgrim has to earn his or her way there with every step. In the old days, pilgrims walked for months to reach Kailash. Now, the trip is slightly easier, but still entails either a multiple-day drive from Lhasa in Landcruisers, or walking a number of days overland from Nepal, as we

did. Lama Govinda wrote, "Nobody can approach the Throne of the Gods...without risking his life—and perhaps even the sanity of his mind." The mountain exudes supreme bliss, but it is not easily gained. The wrathful energy of Kailash acts like a sword to cut through any illusions—physical, mental, or emotional—that get in the way of directly facing reality. I hoped to use this quality of the



*Roshi Joan Halifax offering a Dharma talk in Nepal*

mountain to explore my bodhisattva nature and the obstacles that stood in the way of it shining forth.

A large number of our group had never traveled to Asia before, and our first two days in Kathmandu bowled us over. Garbage, urine, and shit mixed together in the streets, diseased children begged for money or food, and diesel fumes choked the air. Suffering and poverty were clearly in view; nothing was hidden. How could we possibly make a difference in the face of such overwhelming despair?

We flew from Kathmandu to Nepalganj, a smaller city in the southwestern part of Nepal, and then on to the Humla district in the northwest, where our trek would begin. Over the next seven days we trekked 35 miles through the high mountains, following the Karnali River, to the Tibetan border. We began at 9,000 feet and gradu-

ally worked our way up to nearly 15,000 feet. The trail was extremely mountainous. When Tenzin, our Tibetan guide, gave us a rundown of each day's terrain, he would sometimes tell us that the trail was *terzo*, the Nepali word for smooth. Then he slyly smiled and made a rolling motion with his hands. *Terzo* meant that the ups and downs were only slightly less steep than mountain passes that would terrify a goat. Day after day, we walked through terraced fields of barley, meadows of wild cannabis and nettles, and pine forests laced with waterfalls.

The morning of the third day, I woke up feeling nauseous. Soon I began vomiting, but there was really no choice except to walk toward the next campsite, even though I couldn't imagine hiking for seven miles. I lagged behind everyone else, accompanied by Tenzin and two sherpas who were saintly enough to stay with me the entire day. They carried my pack and stopped with me when I threw up every half hour or so. Ted, a fellow pilgrim and also a doctor, gave me some medication which stopped the nausea later that afternoon. Until then, I just put one foot in front of the other and sweated my way along every inch of the trail. Demchog's sword was cutting through my illusions of being invulnerable and not needing any help, assisting me in literally purging myself before approaching Kailash.

On our final day before reaching Tibet, we had to cross Nara La, a mountain pass that we affectionately came to call Gnarly La. At altitudes near 15,000 feet, everyone's breathing was labored and our pace became very slow. I understood why Tibetans use mantras so profusely; the only way to successfully walk in such conditions is to synchronize breathing with walking. My own mantra, with every step, became, "Just this, just this." We finally reached the top of the pass, and were rewarded by the sight of a pile of stones and prayer flags flying against a sapphire sky. Following the Tibetan tradition, we each added a rock to the cairn and cried out, "*So so so!*" a Tibetan saying requesting the gods to bless our journey and that of the pilgrims who would come after us.

Having summited the pass, I thought the way down would be easy. Another illusion waiting to be skewered! Going down the trail from the top of Nara La to the border turned out to be one of the most difficult and terrifying episodes of my life. After the pass, we skidded down a steep slope for about an hour and then traversed the side of an immense canyon. The slope below us angled down sharply several thousand feet to the bottom. Some sections of the trail were no more than five inches wide, and those inches were not solid ground but rather loose rock and scree. While the sherpas virtually danced across these sections, we inched our way along and prayed we wouldn't slip. Meanwhile, Joan, on

horseback because of a toe broken earlier on the trek, was four feet higher off the ground than the rest of us. Her horse's every step sent showers of rocks cascading down the mountainside into the abyss. Every so often, a herd of yaks would come from the opposite direction, and we stepped off the trail and clung to the canyon wall to let them pass. After this traverse was finished, we descended an extremely steep serpentine grade, slipping and sliding nearly 2,000 feet down to the river and the border town of Hilsa.

We had barely caught our breath when we realized that we would have to return over the same trail in a couple of weeks. The downhill we had just descended would be even more forbidding on the way back up, and the motivation of getting to Kailash would be gone. But there was no other way to get home. We conjured up ideas about how to fake an illness that would necessitate a helicopter evacuation to avoid the return trek. Ted, who had practiced in Thich Nhat Hanh's tradition, lifted one of Thây's favorite phrases to remind us that "fun is made up of non-fun elements."

We were allowed to cross the border into China/Tibet with no problems, a blessing considering that the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia had taken place a couple of weeks before we arrived. We continued

*We stopped at a burial ground.  
Along with other pilgrims,  
we lay down and visualized  
our own deaths.*

over the Tibetan high plateau, a harsh country resembling a moonscape, to Lake Manosarovar. Surely one of the most beautiful places on earth, the lake stretches across the vast, empty desert plain as far as the eye can see. We spent five days on the north shore in solitude and silence, preparing ourselves for the kora that lay ahead of us. Most mornings, the water was absolutely calm and still, like the surface of a mirror. By the afternoon, the wind began to rise and waves rolled onto the shore. This land was elemental: extreme sun, unrelenting wind, no trees for shade, and the earth littered with the bones of sheep and yak who had expired here. From a hillside high above the lake, I looked out and marveled at the gradations of color that changed with the water's depth—turquoise to light green to dark emerald to deep lapis blue—and considered the unknowable depths and mysteries of our own souls.

We finally reached Darchen, the beginning point of our kora, on May 29. The next day, Sagadawa (when Tibetan Buddhists celebrate Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana), we emerged from our tents into several inches of fresh snow. From that point on, snow fell on each of the five days we took to circle the 32-mile perimeter of Kailash. By the time we reached the north side of the mountain, the nighttime temperature dropped to about 20 degrees below zero. The daytime temperature was warmer, but still well below freezing—our water bottles froze as we walked. I turned to my



tentmate and good friend Andrea and wondered aloud whether we would ever be warm again.

We didn't sit in zazen very much on the trip; the walk and the trail itself became our meditation. The *Kan Ro Mon*, a Soto Zen service adapted by Tetsugen Glassman to include Tibetan and Jewish elements, was the keystone of our journey. In the ceremony, we chant, "By this practice I sincerely wish to extend all my love to my own being, friends, enemies, family, and community and to all creation, for so much done on my behalf...May those suffering on the three paths come to atonement and be cleansed of all their ills. May they be liberated from *samsara* and arrive in the Pure Land together." We are asked to put our whole bodies on the line to feed the hungry ghosts, to heal suffering in ourselves and in the world.

We performed the service twice—once in Nepal at the convergence of two powerful rivers, and then at a sky-burial ground at the foot

of Mt. Kailash, amidst butcher knives, pools of blood, and fragments of bone and flesh. For Tibetans, a sky burial is a very honored ritual. The body is dismembered and then left for vultures and the elements to consume.

As we circled the mountain, Joan taught us about the mandala of Mount Kailash. Each direction of the mountain, including the center, is home to one of the Five Buddha Families. Perhaps most importantly, we were reminded that Zen is about bringing every element into the mandala of our practice, excluding nothing. Walking around the mountain, we entered this living mandala and reflected on parts of ourselves and the world around us that we had rejected.

On the third day of the kora, we ascended through a snowstorm to the Dolma La pass, the highest point of the route at 18,600 feet. Several hundred feet before the top of the pass, we stopped at another burial ground. Along with other pilgrims, we lay down and visualized our own deaths, meditating on the truth of impermanence.

The symbolic meaning of the kora is that we die to our old way of being, and as we cross over the Dolma La, we are reborn. When we reached the top of the pass, faint from altitude, we helped each other to climb up on the Tara rock to leave prayer flags and wishes for peace in a world torn apart by war. Joan had brought the ashes of her father who had died the year before, and Pam, another pilgrim, brought her brother's ashes. As the snow and wind pelted us, we chanted to Kanzeon and

conducted a ceremony for Werner, one of our group who was entering the Zen Peacemaker Order. Tears of gratitude and exhaustion washed over me. We tumbled down the trail to our next campsite on the east side of Kailash, weary but renewed.

After the kora was finished, we slowly made our way back towards Kathmandu, retracing our steps back to the Tibetan border, over the dreaded Nara La, and through the mountainous Humla area. Strangely, Nara La no longer seemed so treacherous. I marveled at my lack of fear and my ability to walk the trail with strength and confidence.

A few days before the end of our trek, the monsoons set in and rain fell day and night. The last day's walk was very easy, no more than two hours, descending through lush pine forests, rhododendron groves, and jasmine. Although I had been longing for a hot bath and a dry place to sleep, the sudden realization that I was about to leave the realm of mountains,

rivers, trees, and clouds saddened me greatly. I was leaving a world where time is measured by how long it takes for the burning sensation of stinging nettles to fade away and how many days it takes to walk from one village to another. I wanted to carry some sense of that wildness with me—the raw beauty of the mountain that mirrors our unadorned selves, the fearlessness and complete trust that permeates nature.

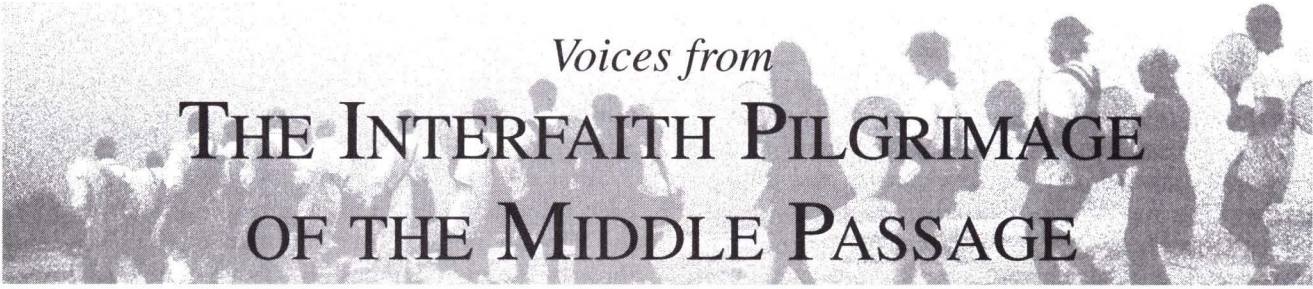
When we finally returned to Kathmandu, I noticed that I did not turn away from the eyes of a hungry child, or avoid breathing the polluted air, as I had done before. Aversion had been replaced by openness and curiosity, by a much greater receptivity to the full spectrum of suffering and joy present in life. And with this openness came a yearning to alleviate the sufferings and celebrate the joys. What a great gift Kailash had bestowed upon me!

I am sure that His Holiness is right when he says that people can practice their religion effectively by staying home. But for me, the Dharma came vividly alive through this journey to a sacred mountain, and through immersion in another culture that forced me to let go of all I knew. The words of Milarepa, the great Tibetan yogi and poet, echoed through my mind: "Just to leave home is half the dharma." ❖

*Marija Duerr is a cultural anthropologist, and a member of the Order of Interbeing and the Zen Peacemaker Order. She is the new Assistant Editor for Turning Wheel.*



*Pilgrims climbing to Dolma La pass, Mount Kailash*



Voices from  
**THE INTERFAITH PILGRIMAGE  
OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE**

*In May, 1998, a group of pilgrims began a year-long journey that retraced the steps of slavery from Massachusetts, through the South, and across the ocean to South Africa. These five writers participated in the pilgrimage, which was organized in part by the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Order.*

Walking through the South this past summer with the Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage, many of us thought of Martin Luther King, Jr., at the Lincoln Memorial 35 years ago. "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." This part of the dream always brings tears to my eyes, in part because I am a daughter of slave-owners, but more because there is some deep universal appeal about unity after difference.

Although it was not one of our explicit goals, the idea of walking together touched many of the pilgrims I got to know during my two and a half months on the journey. Yet the harmony of Dr. King's vision eluded us as we struggled—young and old, black and white, male and female—with the divisions set in place by our common history and all too alive in our own community. White pilgrims often seemed locked into feeling that there should be unity, whether or not we were doing our homework on our own racism. Our privilege as white Americans and our difficulty in seeing and acknowledging this privilege were central obstacles to unity on the pilgrimage. Some pilgrims of African descent, quite understandably, did not feel safe journeying into so painful a history with white people who seemed unaware of their own racism. As James Baldwin once said, from the other side of the color line, "We cannot be free until they are free."

The day we were to walk into Dr. King's home city, we made a predawn ascent of a holy mountain. Stone Mountain, a huge, anomalous dome of pinkish granite rising out of the Georgia pine forest twenty miles northeast of Atlanta, was once a sacred site for indigenous Cherokee, Chickasaw, and other peoples. But the mountain was desecrated, as European settlers claimed it and Southern whites carved giant, Rushmoresque images of Confederate generals in the steepest of its rock faces (which we could not see from the top). Most shameful of all, the town at the base of the mountain became the center of Klan revival in the early twentieth century. The awesome granite-slab summit became the

site of torture and death in that era of the lynch mob. But a cleansing has begun: the town of Stone Mountain now has an activist black mayor who invited us to the top for prayer at sunrise.

In this most holy place, many pilgrims seemed to receive messages from the felt histories we sought to heal. Yet I think none of us felt like sons and daughters at the "table of brotherhood." In but a few minutes, the prayer circle we usually formed at sites of suffering began to dissolve into small clusters; individuals scattered here and there on the vast summit or wandered toward or away from each other, whipped by wind and veiled in surreal mists. An African American lay prone on the rock, her white robes fluttering in the wind, while another stood in a yoga pose some distance away; a local Baptist minister preached into the wind; two indigenous pilgrims found a small grassy spot for prayer; seven Buddhist monks chanted above the site of the Confederate carving and white photographers roamed from place to place looking for shots. Many, including myself, felt power in these experiences, but many others felt daunted, discouraged, that in more than three months of walking together we had not grown more united and powerful as a community. (Excerpted from *Peacework*, Dec. 98/Jan. 99, page 18.)

~ Louise Dunlap

\* \* \*

### December, 1998

(One month after my return from the American portion of the pilgrimage.)

Returning to the so-called "real world" after participating for six months with The Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage, I realize that I am still on a pilgrimage. After walking and drumming across America, retracing slavery and engaging in a deep process of reflection on the conditions of African people, I am not sure quite how to re-integrate into society's normality. I met the spirits of Africans at particular sites of suffering, and there is no doubt that I have carried more than one of these spirits back with me to New England from the South. Looking at the world around me through the eyes of another spirit, situations appear more pronounced—particularly my encounters with racism in Boston. The pilgrimage gave me the inner strength and clarity to confront the legacy of slavery up close—a legacy that has been a taboo topic of discussion in this society.

My inner rage as an African-American female in America is intricately related to the cellular memory of the enslavement of my ancestors. Slavery: how can something which was so central to the creation of American society be so blatantly dismissed from educational curricula, social discourse and understanding? Revisiting these numerous sites, hearing the stories, taking part in serious discourse on race matters with people of all nationalities (particularly with those of European descent), all necessitated a willingness to engage with the past—despite the reluctance by some participants to do so. To look at each other in the present, to question our history, to grieve, to remember the enslaved and the enslavers is an integral part of this retracing of slavery. Not a day goes by when I do not reflect on the pilgrimage experience and what it did for me. My Ashiko drum “Shango” sits in my room now as a reminder of my linkage with the Ancestors.

This drum took on a life of its own, sometimes beating its own rhythm, speaking and talking, crying and screaming through my hands. Drumming in the heat across America was a healing, spiritual force for me. On this pilgrimage, I have garnered the energies of the past and present through the spirit of the drum. In decaying inner city neighborhoods, rural communities, upper-middle class suburbs, and bustling metropolitan areas, Shango spoke in tongues, carrying a message of hope and a healing of the wounds of the past. The message is now deeply ingrained in my being.

July 12, 1999

James Farmer, one of the founding fathers of the Civil Rights Movement, passed away last Friday from heart failure. I had the honor of meeting Mr. Farmer in his home last July with the Interfaith Pilgrimage. We listened as he told us about his own pilgrimage during the Civil Rights Movement and his recollections of the earlier years of American apartheid. He was completely blind and unable to walk because both of his legs had been amputated (as a result of diabetes). But he had that same deep, rich voice filled with strength and conviction. Mr. Farmer recalled his years with the Congress of Racial Equality, the organization that he founded in 1942 when he was 22 years old. He shared stories of the Freedom Rides that he was instrumental in orchestrating throughout the South. He told us how he was almost lynched by an angry KKK mob in Plaquemine, Louisiana. Mr. Farmer retraced his history for us, careful not to skip over important details, as if he was reliving it in his mind's eye. He paused occasionally as we gave him water to sip through a straw.

This man was truly a *griot*, exercising his gift in the oral tradition of storytelling. He asked us about our pilgrimage and wanted each of us to introduce ourselves to him as he repeated our names, listening to our voices to determine the face of our souls. I asked Mr. Farmer if he had any advice for us as we prepared to journey deeper South. He told us that we would find that the South had not changed in many ways over the years, even though



“Family photo” taken in the Slave House on Gorée Island

there had been much progress on the surface. Many elements of the past were still entrenched in the present day. He told us to work together, to stay together, and he admired our courage in undertaking the task of addressing the legacy of slavery and racism in America. Mr. Farmer was intrigued by the Buddhist sojourners and was curious about their drum. The monks and nuns played for him and then let Mr. Farmer play the drum. At the end of our time together, we sang to him: "Thank you for your love, brother, thank you for your love. Your healing, your healing, your healing love!" and then took turns hugging him, kissing him on his cheek, shaking his hands while he lay there in his bed, with tears streaming down his face.

James Farmer was a pilgrim in the truest sense—risking his life organizing bus rides to the deep South in the face of racial hatred and bigotry. He confronted the ugly face of injustice and racism in American society during a volatile period. We are the pilgrims of the twenty-first century—retracing the journey of slavery and its legacy. Now, we must carry on this work of addressing social injustice and healing the wounds of our collective past and present. We must hold fast in our struggle to construct a more humane and just future in the next century. ~ Teresa Williams

\* \* \*

I joined the pilgrimage in South Carolina and ended in New Orleans. In the Deep South, in the heat of early September, we were educated by the gentle people we met as we walked. In many places, the local people would take us to a plot of ground or a tree, some unmarked space, and tell us what happened there: a lynching, a small rebellion. In some places there were plaques to commemorate killings from slave times to the present. We met brave people who helped to launch the Civil Rights Movement. We talked to elders whose parents or grandparents were slaves or who themselves worked on plantations in the early part of this century. With the yellow-robed Buddhist monks and nuns, we drummed and chanted down the streets bordered by handsome old buildings where slave brokers once practiced.

During the days that we walked (an average of 15 to 20 miles a day), it was hard on everyone because of the extreme heat. We slept on gym floors or most often in the small African American churches which welcomed us with love and generosity. We spread out our mats on the pews or in the aisles. Our water use was limited due to a paucity of bathroom and shower facilities for the 60 or more of us who would descend upon these small communities of faith. But we kept in good health because of the generous meals we were fed, and also

because of the presence of the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist monks and nuns. Their commitment to the work of peace and reconciliation was profound. They doctored our blisters, cuts, and bruises; they gave us massages when our bodies ached; they expressed a respect, kindness, and humor that was universal in its inclusion; they walked far and worked hard; and they prayed all along the way.

There was a further reason that our spirits were kept up. We weary, smelly pilgrims had never been so hugged and kissed as we were by the members of these churches. Many of these communities of faith have suffered consistently since the days of slavery, through segregation and into the present time with racism. They have not only maintained themselves but

have deepened through their prayer and faithfulness. Because they have lost so much over the generations, they have lost also the filters and buffers between themselves and their God. They know that the only important thing is relationship. Having experienced this, their love goes out to everyone—all the time.

In the spirit of the Buddha, whose monks and nuns were an inspiration throughout the journey, we sought to alleviate, in some way, a history of suffering by walking, praying, and chanting, and by remembering who suffered and why. We became more aware that the ancestors hovered over us: the Euro-Americans seeking forgiveness; the Afro-Americans seeking honor; and both urging peace and reconciliation for us, their children.

~ Dan Turner

\* \* \*

### i give thanks

*This prayer was written as a reminder to myself, upon my return, as to how I could continue walking my prayer and the truth I gleaned on the Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage.*

My dearest Ancestors, i thank you for the great sacrifice you've made to the continuation of life—especially mine...i acknowledge you for your endurance of the unimaginable and unfathomable cruelties of slavery...i acknowledge you for your unfaltering commitment to survival and life—even when death was imminent...i thank you for the thousands upon thousands of gifts you brought to humanity through your suffering...i desire to always be conscious of your truths thus: in my life, to demonstrate your profound courage and determination for freedom and the equality of all life...recognizing at times you have been both victim and perpetrator of the most heinous acts, i dedicate my life to stand for the healing, Divine justice, peace and balance needed to transform and transmute the energies that created your oppression and mine.

Aho Mitakuye Oyasin Aché

by Akiba Onada-Sikwoia

**November 29, 1998: Havana, Cuba**

This pilgrimage was a moving miracle. Many times a person came to the walk at just the time we needed them most. Early in the morning, pilgrims piled into an old school bus donated by my home state, Minnesota. Our destination, La Cueva Del Agua—the water caves. Here, escaped enslaved African people hid for 50 years. Drawings decorated on the ceiling above sleeping places remain as records of a people focused on freedom.

Driven by a volunteer from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Havana, our bus chugged and choked its way across deserted highways toward our destination several hours away. Motor traffic was eerily lacking. Pedestrians, bicycles, and wagons driven by horses travel these roadways. With the caves still six miles away, our bus came to a stop. Efforts at revival failed. We could wait or walk. The decision to walk came swiftly to some. Government officials had forbade our walking, fearful that our procession would seem like a rebellion. Now, our broken bus in the middle of the countryside seemed the only chance to “walk our talk.”

“But waiting may be what the ancestors have in mind,” I said, as pilgrims took to the road. After a few minutes rest, our bus driver got the bus moving forward. Excited cheers turned into exasperated sighs when we stopped again, this time in front of a house in a tiny village.

An elderly man came toward us. Through our interpreter, this man told us of his morning prayer. In his quiet time with God, just moments before our arrival, he'd asked for a sign that would give him hope for divine peace and divine justice. And there we were, The Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage. We visited long enough for him to present us with two ceramic birds that he called “Divine Peace and Divine Justice” and to eat our lunch. We continued on to the caves, and had no other troubles with our bus.

Every time I think of this day, I recognize that a miracle happened! Had our bus not stopped, we would have rolled on past the village and never met this man, who refused to offer his name, saying, “I'm just a humble man. I'm not meant to be big like the trees.”

**February 22, 1999: Gorée Island, Senegal**

On Friday, we held a ceremony on Gorée Island, Senegal with many people of this island community. The prison here had been the final departure point for thousands of slaves. Several traditional drummers led our procession around the small island, culminating at the seaside in front of the so-called “Door of No Return.” Walking back with us through the slave house were the thousands of ancestral spirits we had collected as we came through the U.S. and the Caribbean, as well as those raised up as we drummed our way around the island. Reversing the exit of our ancestors and coming back through the Door of No Return had a deep impact on the African-Americans and the Africans in our entourage. As one young man

remarked, “Never has anyone come back through that door. Thank you, this should become an annual event.”

Imagine Africans from the Diaspora and Africans from the motherland reentering the door that so many thousands of our ancestors departed from, expecting never to return again. Imagine the tears which flowed from our eyes, the rejoicing which ensued, the whoops and shouts, the rhythmic beat of the drums celebrating our return home. In the vestibule of the house of slaves pilgrims and community members danced and rejoiced—smiling, laughing, crying all mixed up together. Then we took a “family photo.”

There is so much work to be done to undo the legacy of slavery, so much to bring the world together in unity. If only this walk, reversing the slave trade journey, will but begin the process of reversing the tide, then our work will be accomplished. Our prayer is that this will be so.

~ Kathleen Anderson

*Louise Dunlap teaches yoga and writing for social change. She is a member of the Old Path Sangha of the Community of Interbeing in Boston. Dan Turner is a writer and social justice activist who lives with his wife, Elizabeth, in Oakland, California. Teresa Williams is a peace educator and a graduate student in the field of human services living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Kathleen Anderson, a single mother of two who works as an instructional librarian, lives in Amherst, Massachusetts. Akiba Onada-Sikwoia, a Two-Spirited woman of African, Native American, and Irish ancestry, resides in Durham, North Carolina, living life as a healer, writer, and artist. ❖*

<b>DOGEN ZEN AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR OUR TIME</b>		In Celebration of the 800 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founder of Soto Zen Buddhism in Japan, Dogen Zenji
<b>S</b>	<b>Kresge Auditorium</b> Stanford University, California	
<b>Y</b>	<b>Saturday, October 23, 1999</b>	
<b>M</b>	<b>To Transmit Dogen Zenji's Dharma</b>	Otani Tetsuo
<b>P</b>	<b>The Relevance of Dogen's Thought</b>	Carl Bielefeldt
<b>O</b>	<b>Dogen Zenji's Zazen</b>	Zenkei Blanche Hartman
<b>S</b>	<b>Dogen Zenji's Standards for Community Practice</b>	Okumura Shohaku
<b>I</b>	<b>Dogen's 300 Koans and Kana Shobogenzo</b>	Daido John Looi
<b>U</b>	<b>Sunday, October 24, 1999</b>	
<b>M</b>	<b>History of Soto Zen School</b>	Griffith Foulk
<b>i</b>	<b>Soto Zen School in Modern Japan</b>	Nara Yasuaki
	<b>Soto Zen in America</b>	Sojun Mel Weitsman
	<b>Dreaming Peace in an Age of War</b>	Hozan Alan Senauke
	<b>Mountains hidden in Mountains: Dogen's Nature</b>	Gary Snyder
	<b>9AM - 5PM each day</b>	<b>Free Admission</b>
	<b>Co-Sponsors: Soto Zen School in Japan; Daihonzan Eiheiiji and Sojiji; Stanford Center for Buddhist Studies</b>	
	<b>Soto Zen Education Center</b> e-mail: info@sotozen.com Phone: 415-567-7686 http://www.stanford.edu/group/scbs/SCBS	

# WALKING FOR CHANGE

## New York Prisons and Beyond

by Louise Dunlap

In early April, I joined the Prison Reform Walk organized by Jun-san Yasuda, a Buddhist nun, known affectionately by the Japanese honorific Jun-san. For a month, the walk had been making its way through upstate New York. Now it was heading down the east side of the Hudson River. I was to join the ten walkers for three days, as we went past Sing Sing Prison and into the white suburbs of Westchester County.

I longed for Tizita and Teresa, two African American women from the Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage, who had wanted to come with me today. I longed, especially, for Teresa's savvy. She is studying the "prison industrial system" in a master's program, and she knows the same shocking and painful facts that I do: one out of three African American males will go to prison in his lifetime, and 70 percent of our prison population consists of people of color, with nearly half of them African American. Teresa also under-

stands the deeper story. Her writings have helped me see the alarming racism of the system. "Prisons are the new slavery," she tells me, "and also the place for a new flowering of the civil rights movement. We need to ally all the other movements under this struggle for justice." But serious issues of economic survival had come up for both Teresa and Tizita. At the last moment, it was only I—the white, middle-class woman—who was free to go.

As I near the Hudson River on Interstate 84, a sign says "New York Correctional Facility." Squat new cement buildings glow oddly in the bright spring sun. On the right is another, older prison coiled in barbed wire. These are the warehouses for people the Empire State doesn't want. If Teresa's research is correct, about three quarters of them are African American and Latino. None are receiving rehabilitative care.

That morning, I had left home distressed by the news of our country's efforts to resolve what we call "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo by bombing. I now see more clearly what we do not learn in school—that our own

country was founded and continues to thrive on ethnic cleansing. Until we recognize and grieve our own history, we will continue to make problems worse with "solutions" such as bombing and violent prison systems.

I feel my breath growing shallow at the brutality of the place. I recognize these feelings as a call, an opening of the heart. At last I am out of my head and into the present moment, ready to walk and chant for the next three days.

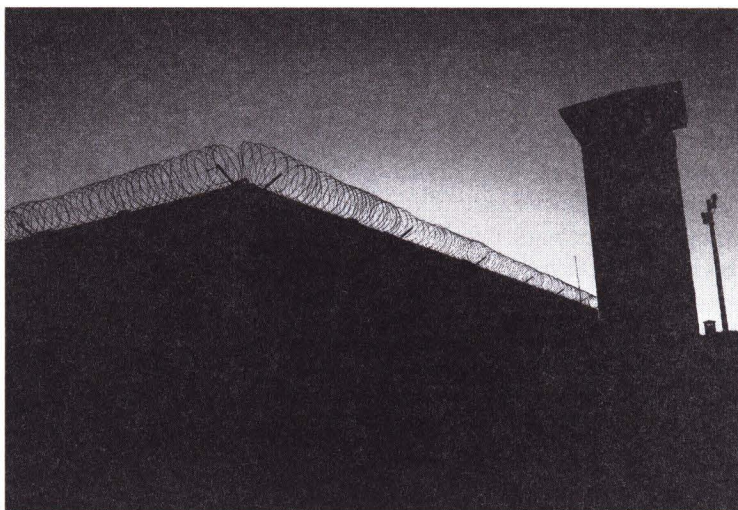
You don't need facts or analysis when you walk; you just need to be present to the experience in all its dimensions. For me, the chanting and drumming help with that. The chant is antiphonal, like the call and response of African music. Small hand-drums reinforce our voices.

The rhythm of walking also helps the mind stay open. Mostly, we don't converse as we walk. This way, we can take in everything: the prisons, the people and their stories, new leaves on the trees, daffodils, forsythia, weeds growing in the toxic places around abandoned factories, and Victorian mansions along the Hudson that once belonged to the rich. People in passing vehi-

cles give us the thumbs-up surprisingly often, along with an occasional third finger or angry swerve.

Everything carries the potential for both obstacle and change. A group of mostly white high-school kids rushes out at lunchtime in their platform shoes to snap a picture of our tall purple banner and our simple sign, "Prison Reform Walk: Abolish the Death Penalty." Do these kids know that the prison down the road touches them too? All of this is what Thich Nhat Hanh would call the "inter-being" of prisons, and of racism itself. All of it becomes the subject of our walking meditation and prayer.

We usually don't try to translate or explain our chant: *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, which literally means, "Homage to the law of the great Lotus Sutra." This is the central prayer of Jun-san's order, Nipponzan Myohoji, a small activist order begun by a follower of Nichiren, a Japanese Buddhist reformer of the thirteenth century. Nichiren embraced the Lotus Sutra and the Buddha's promise that all people could find peace in themselves and in their society, not just in a distant par-



adise. When I have to explain, I say we are chanting for “respect for all beings.”

Jun-san’s teacher, Reverend Nichidatsu Fujii (1884-1984), known affectionately as Gurujii, began drumming and chanting to bring this teaching to people of the twentieth century. Walking, especially in areas beset by violence, became part of his practice after Gurujii’s exchange with Mahatma Gandhi in 1933. It is said that Gurujii walked for India’s independence and the Mahatma beat Gurujii’s drum. The World War II devastation of Hiroshima, Gurujii’s birthplace, deepened his practice, enlarged his following, and launched the building of stupas or peace pagodas with volunteer labor. Today, the order consists of some 150 monks and nuns in small centers in troubled parts of the earth.

The 10 of us on the prison walk are either white or Japanese. Greg, a young man younger than 20, tells me that he started out believing it was mostly “your own fault” if you got into trouble with the law. After a visit with a 24-year-old prisoner who had never had a visitor, Greg came to see that “the breaks don’t break evenly for everyone.” An older walker, Toby, tells a story about the time Jun-san bowed to a hostile guard at Coxackie Maximum Security Prison, and the man paused to reflect, then bowed back. The guards don’t usually understand that our action is not a demonstration against them, but rather a prayer.

The next day, we hold a vigil at Sing Sing, the prison so deeply associated with the electric chair. It has been raining all afternoon and most of us are soaked to the skin as we approach this grim fortress on the Hudson. The place was once a marble quarry where prisoners labored (its name means “stone upon stone”). A Franciscan sister, who is chaplain at Attica prison, offers a prayer and notes the songs of birds even at this place of pain. Here, the guards observe us from distant towers, this time without bowing.

I am 60 and getting ready for the twenty-first century. As a political activist for many years, it’s no longer a discipline of walking, the practice of chanting with the drum, the melting together of social justice with the weather and the land forms, the deeper awareness of feelings, Jun-san’s exemplary bodhicitta, the stories of people we meet—all these become my “cushion,” the grounding from which I draw new energy and insight. The demons are ever-present. It’s not always easy to get along with other walkers, to deal with blisters, changes of plan, wet weather, or thirst. But there is also learning and transformation—perhaps of the guards in their towers, but more crucially of what is within ourselves.

\* \* \*

Six weeks later, I am nearly blinded by glare at another prison quarry. Walls of limestone on South Africa’s once-infamous Robben Island reflect the sun so harshly that many of the world’s most revered political prisoners damaged their eyes, laboring here year after year. I

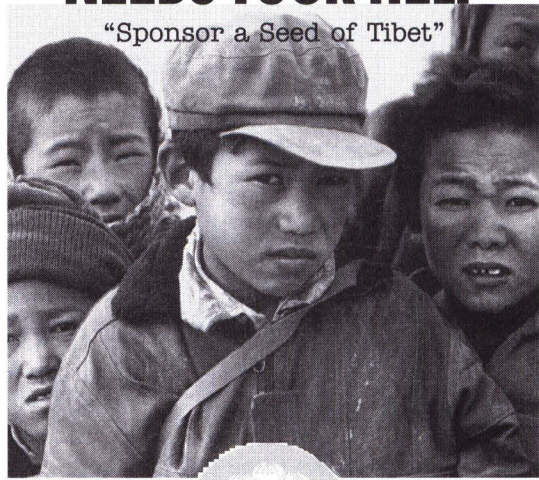
have come to this island for three days of reflection with the Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage, now ending its year-long walk. Here the towers no longer hold guards. The island where Nelson Mandela and other freedom fighters served sentences has become a museum and cultural center where artists create healing works of remembrance, and former inmates serve as guides and interpreters of a history the new South Africa wants never to repeat. Ferry loads of travelers come daily to hear the stories of political prisoners who faced the apparently unchangeable and found ways to change it. One former inmate, artist Lionel Davis, tells of cellblock alliances between generations of radicals—black and white, political prisoner and “criminal.” He tells of the “university” that evolved here, of hunger strikes that led to change in repressive prison practices and eventually in the world outside. Another former political prisoner, Vnsumzi, glows with love as he tells of embracing his white warder—who now helps to interpret the painful story of apartheid for visitors to the island.

In the early 1980s, some of us began wearing a black ribbon that said “Free Mandela and all political prisoners.” Now we are talking with some of these same prisoners and sharing ideas about transformation. If such change is possible, what is not? ♦

*Please see page 21 for Louise Dunlap’s biographical statement.*

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# PILGRIMAGE TO LA BREA BOULEVARD

by Sarah Forth

When Los Angeles police shot a homeless, African American woman this spring during a confrontation over a shopping cart, I felt angry, helpless, confused. For days, I nursed a stunned grief at the tragedy: the needless death, the bereavement of family members, the career of a young police officer jeopardized, and, in the threadbare quilt of trust between the African American community and police, another tear.

A week after the shooting, not knowing what else to do, my partner Joe Maizlish and I made a pilgrimage half-way across Los Angeles to the site of the shooting, to do an hour of walking meditation. I hoped it would bring comfort and clarity: comfort to me and perhaps to others on the street, and clarity to help me understand how best to respond to the vast needs of L.A.'s homeless people. I e-mailed our intentions to other BPF members and every dharma center in L.A. for which I had an address.

The site of the shooting, Hancock Park, is one of L.A.'s prouder neighborhoods. Shade trees line streets of large frame or stucco houses with manicured green lawns. Bisecting the neighborhood is La Brea Boulevard, a major north-south artery. Upscale boutiques, restaurants and automobile showrooms fill its commercial district. We assemble in front of one of these showrooms, on the southwest corner of Fourth and La Brea, where a makeshift memorial dominates the broad sidewalk.

An empty shopping cart marks the site of the shooting. Surrounding it are pots of yellow and white chrysanthemums, teddy bears, and other stuffed animals, a painting dedicated to "Mary," a hand-lettered sign of lament, and many, many votive candles in tall, narrow glass containers, some still flickering in the stiff breeze. It is a remarkable outpouring, considering it honors a woman who, although she lived publicly, was known to only a few until she died.

\* \* \*

The dead woman was Margaret Laverne Mitchell, 54, a college-educated former bank employee who single-handedly raised her son, Richard, after her husband died. Richard, now 35, remembers that his mother enjoyed golf and Sunday Mass, and saw that he got to his little

league games and Big Brother events on the weekends.

According to Richard, about five years ago his mother began to exhibit signs of mental illness, most likely paranoid schizophrenia. Not believing she was ill, Mrs. Mitchell would not see a doctor. She lost her housing and began to live on the streets, intermittently staying at church shelters and with her son. During the past two years, she became a familiar figure to the merchants on La Brea, who reported that she did not panhandle or bother their customers. She slept on the bench of a bus kiosk. According to *The L.A. Weekly*, one shop clerk remembered her as "a little kooky"—she sometimes waved her arms and shouted—"but harmless." Another merchant said Mrs. Mitchell regularly came by her women's clothing store to assess her window display.

"She would do thumbs up or thumbs down, to let us know what she thought."

Richard Mitchell attempted to get care for his mother but was told she had to become "a threat to herself or others" before she could be involuntarily committed for psychiatric observation. On Friday, May 21, 1999, she became that threat. About 4 PM, two LAPD bicycle patrol officers, Edward Larrigan, 27, and Kathy Clark, 29, stopped Mrs. Mitchell, wanting to know if the shopping cart she pushed was stolen. Mrs. Mitchell became agitated. There was shouting—by all parties—and Mrs. Mitchell brandished a screwdriver. The officers drew their guns.

\* \* \*

According to Larrigan, when Mrs. Mitchell lunged at him, he stumbled as he attempted to get out of her way, and fired once, striking Mrs. Mitchell in the chest. She was five feet, one inch tall and weighed 102 pounds.

Sunlight glints off chrome and asphalt. Buses whoosh by. A bright red sports car, top down, speeds away from the light, its driver honking her support for the two men standing on the corner with hand-written signs calling for an end to police brutality. As we wait to begin our walk, Joe and I chat with protesters who have set up an organizing table next to the memorial. Suddenly, a line of men troops out the front door of the car dealer's showroom. Some wear suits, others polo shirts embroidered with the dealership name. We pause. The men approach the table—and ask to sign the petition for better oversight of police misconduct.



"Crushed can scan #3" by Lawrence Watson



When the hour to begin arrives, Joe and I constitute the entire parade. My stomach is heavy with dread. To tell the truth, I've done all of ten minutes of walking meditation before today. Plus, Joe is midway through a bad head cold and I'm just starting one. But we've told half the city we're doing this, so we can't back out.

*A homeless man named Shawn*

*commands our attention:*

*"People come and they're angry, but they're not really interested in us."*

The route for the walking part of our pilgrimage is very short: from the corner south to the dealer's driveway, and back again, maybe 30 yards. Back and forth, back and forth. I lead, moving very, very slowly, as much from head-cold haze as from principled concentration. Half-step, half-step, half-step, my hands held lightly together at my waist. I focus on everything and nothing. I try to be aware of my feet as they move across the pavement, but I'm wearing sneakers and they feel large and clumsy, like clown shoes.

Nowhere else to be, nothing to think, everything to behold. I relax into the slow, steady movement. A few feet from my elbow, expensive cars and SUVs gleam quietly in the protection of the showroom portico. I feel open to the street like Mrs. Mitchell was for so many years: open to the noise, the glare, the constant movement, and the smell of exhaust.

At our third turn, I realize there's another body in line with us. I feel a leap of joy but keep walking. At last, Joe, our appointed timekeeper, whispers the hour. Returning to our beginning point, I come to a halt, but too abruptly and we bang into one another.

I talk with our lone compatriot. She received a forwarded e-mail and drove some miles to be here. "I guess I came because my own mother is paranoid schizophrenic," she tells me. We talk about how it was to grow up with a mother who was present but absent. Finally I ask, "Is she okay? Is she getting treatment?"

Hesitation. "Well, it's kind of complicated," she says. "She's in prison."

Two members of BPF who were detained by other business join us on the corner. We talk quietly, looking over the makeshift memorial. "Thank you for bringing us here," one says.

A homeless man named Shawn, bronzed by the sun, commands our attention. "I knew her to see her but she didn't say much," he says of Mrs. Mitchell. "You try to look out for the ladies on the street." He has a lot to say about the shooting and subsequent events. He's not happy about the demonstrations and press conferences held on the site since her death. "People come and they're angry, but they're just coming to espouse their

own causes. They're not really interested in us."

*They're not really interested in us.* His words stay with me after we leave. Like many other people of good will and enough to eat, I've often felt helpless about the many begging, homeless people I see on L.A.'s streets. I smile, I say hello, sometimes give money or food. But what else can I do?

I make a point to attend the next meeting of the city-wide coalition of service providers and advocates for homeless people. The room is packed, and a nervous tension buzzes in the air as activists and representatives of elected officials, service providers and street people wrestle with Mrs. Mitchell's death. The delegate from the LAPD comes in for some sharp questioning, and the group drafts demands for better police training.

At the next BPF chapter meeting, I suggest that we speak with some service providers to the homeless community and formulate ways in which we can be allies, through service or advocacy projects. Other members, equally passionate, want to focus on other social concerns, but one or two people express interest in joining me. A member who works for a funding agency offers to help put us in touch with the right people.

This feels good: a direction, some companions, and some assistance. My pilgrimage did not end on La Brea. It's still a steady half-step, half-step, half-step. ❖

*Sarah Forth teaches and writes about women's studies, ethics, and religion. She practices with the Zen Center of Los Angeles.*

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# CIRCUMAMBULATING IN BODH GAYA

by Joanna Macy

Soon after sunrise, the marble is already warm under our bare feet. It's freshly washed and wet when we enter through the eastern gate. Below us is a many-acred mandala of shrines and memorials, trees and flowering shrubs, with the towering temple in its center, yellow in the early sun. But we don't pause for long; like the other pilgrims, we have our circumambulations to make, and in another two hours the walkways not in shadow will be hot as griddles. We don't descend the stairways yet to walk the lower paths; we like to start out on the highest level. Opening our striped umbrella, whose shade can cover us both, we smile to each other and begin.

I have been to Bodh Gaya before, and treasure each visit to this spot of Gautama's enlightenment. But I never came with Fran. I never thought he wanted to come. Now here we are, in the fifth decade of our marriage, on either side of 70, giving 10 whole days to the enjoyment of this place.

At the tail end of the monsoon season, it is sweltering—off-season for tourists. Our fellow pilgrims are so few, their faces grow distinct and familiar. With a smile and a bow, we greet the regulars—the slender, bespectacled Japanese girl; the orange-robed Sinhalese bhikku, so sternly concentrated on his solo chanting; the radiant, round-faced Burmese woman; the tall, fast-walking Tibetan monk, easily as old as we are. Like them, we come mostly in the mornings and again after sunset, to sit in our favorite contemplative spots and walk round and round the encircling pathways.

It is the bodhi tree, not the grand, nine-story temple above it, that holds the center. In the course of the morning, Fran and I move ever closer to it, until its rustling, heart-shaped leaves are overhead and we can touch the mammoth, gold-flecked trunk. Here, two and a half millennia ago, under an ancestor tree to this one, Siddhartha Gautama sat in vigil, became the Buddha. Here the pilgrims cluster, as they have through the ages, offering flowers, intoning prayers, sitting in silence.

Fran moves off to sit on the petal-strewn pavement, knee to knee with a family of Thais, and closes his eyes. Leaning back against the stone railing, I stare up into the thick green canopy.

On our first morning, I tell Fran about the Buddhist practice of "transferring the merit." On a three-month

vipassana retreat, I dedicated each day to a being who mattered to me. When the long hours on the meditation cushion became scary, I discovered that the one to whose benefit I had offered the day buoyed me up. Or at least my love for them did.

Fran likes the idea; it gives added purpose to our earnest pleasures. So here in Bodh Gaya we dedicate each day to someone we hold in our hearts: friends with a teenage child in trouble, a couple struggling with their marriage, a neighbor in surgery, colleagues in Moscow caught in the collapse of the Russian economy. As we start out, clockwise from the eastern gate, we decide who it will be this day, then settle into the silence of mindful walking. It is such a luxury to be able to reflect at length on those who have graced our lives. Soon our concerns and intentions for them give way to thanksgiving for their existence.

We give a day, of course, to each of our children—Peggy, Jack, Chris. And the same magic happens. We start out picturing their lives back in Berkeley, focusing on the particular challenges they face. Soon they seem to be walking beside us in the bright, green morning. I

pretend they can see through my eyes the emerald parakeets swooping by the red hibiscus blossoms, and feel through my soles how the marble cools in the shade.

The innermost walkway around the bodhi tree is enclosed by a stone rail fence. It was built, they say, by King Ashoka, 2,200 years ago. Each pillar is carved with medallions, and on this day dedicated to Peggy and her family, I see that most of the medallions are lotuses, that many of the lotuses enclose sculpted faces, and all of the faces are smiling. I see Peggy's smile, and Mama's too, for whom she was named. Peggy never seems to lose her buoyancy, though many of the children she has cared for in the pediatric AIDS program of Oakland Children's Hospital have died.

My fingers caress the eroded face in the stone lotus. I see Peggy sitting in the backyard of the two-flat house that Fran and I bought with her and her husband Grégoire. She is making a quilt for the 30 children she has lost, a differently colored and patterned square for each one. It is an act of completion, and also an act of hope, because the quilt is for the child she hopes to conceive.

And in a later image, I see her smile as she holds her baby boy, and Grégoire's as he roars home on his motorcycle to greet his "petit poussin." And it is baby

*We dedicate a day to each of our children... And soon they seem to be walking beside us in the bright, green morning. I pretend they can see through my eyes the emerald parakeets swooping by the red hibiscus blossoms.*

Julien's smile, too, as he climbs the stairs to our flat and heads to the toy basket, as if he owns the place.

On Jack's day, after sunset, when the heat is spent, we return to the bodhi tree, walk through pools of darkness and lamplight. A tide of chanting Sri Lankan pilgrims sweeps around us, sets the banks of oil-cups ablaze. Jack loves south Asia, too—our earnest, blue-eyed son. I stop before a smoke-blackened deity in the temple wall, glinting in candlelight. Who is this son, who has accompanied me into danger and discovery? As I stare into the stone face, I can almost see Jack, grime-streaked at the encampment around the Seabrook nuclear reactor. And I'm crying a little, knowing how he impelled me to learn what I needed to learn about this time in which we live.

I move on to find Fran. He is on the temple's western side; he is easy to find, being so tall, with silver hair glistening in the light of the oil lamps. We take each other's arm for one last go-round. We don't need to speak, for we know each other's gratitude: for Jack, for his decision to take a job in San Francisco and settle in Berkeley close to our house, for beloved Charlotte who followed him from Boston, and for their child, year-old Eliza.

Bodh Gaya was once anchored in wealth and prestige—monasteries and monuments crowding together, extending for a mile and a half around the sacred tree. But assaults by the Hindu priesthood and invasions by the Moghuls drove Buddhism from the land of its birth. I find it hard, in the stable serenity of this place, to imagine the long centuries when it lay neglected, desolate, piled with refuse. Or to think that it was only in the last 60 years, shorter than my own lifetime, that it was restored as a pilgrimage site. I think of these reversals of history on the day we walk for Chris.

As Fran and I head out on our rounds, we step into our old patterns of worry on Chris's behalf. How deeply we want for Chris the fulfillment of his dreams. But once again, as happens to us so repeatedly here, concerns give way to gratitude. Chris is no longer lost to us, drifted out of sight. When he came down from Oregon to paint the rooms of our house, he stayed on. Now, with his wolfdog, Esther, he lives and works nearby, an integral part of our lives.

Today, in the Mahabodhi morning, Fran and I branch off the south side of the perimeter to the Muchilinda pond, where a carved Buddha sits amidst the water lilies, protected by the serpent king, whose hood spreads above him like a parasol. The scene fades into images of Chris in Nigeria, with his royal pythons around his shoulders; Chris in the flea markets of cities, at home among what is broken and discarded; Chris, the survivor, who may help us pick our way some day through the ruins of our civilization.

It's our last night in Bodh Gaya, and out of a clear sky falls a light rain. Fran is sitting right under the bodhi tree with a passel of pilgrims; he sits as quietly as they

do, though he's not used to the posture and his knees stick up. His big hands hold the prayer beads that Choegyal Rinpoche blessed for him two weeks ago; his eyes are closed. I imagine him hearing the rain on the leaves, as we used to on the roof of our tent when we camped in the Adirondacks. As I walk past him on my way around the temple, I seem to be dedicating these last circles to him—to us. I let myself be thankful, once again, that we never turned our marriage into a prison, from which I would have needed to escape.

Tired, I sit on a low ledge in view of the tree. All those for whom we have walked come again to my mind, and others as well. They hover so close I can almost see their faces, hear their voices in the patter of rain on leaves.

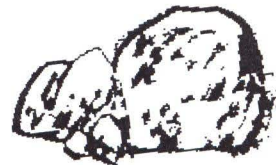
The tall Tibetan monk strides by me, his lined face catching the lamplight. And there is the young Japanese woman, still as a stone, and the Sri Lankan bhikku rearranging his robe and his sheaf of texts. For 10 days their devotions have enriched my own. I want to say good-bye to them, to tell them that tomorrow I will be gone. But I don't. I only thank them, silently, for their company. ❖

*Joanna Macy, a teacher and trainer in socially engaged Buddhism, is on the Advisory Board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. Her books include World as Lover, World as Self (Parallax), and the most recent, with Molly Young Brown, Coming Back to Life (New Society). We have excerpted this piece from her memoir in process.*

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# A TIME FOR QUESTIONS

by Vicki Cohn Pollard

I sit on a hilltop outside of Sravasti, India, as the day comes to a close and the sun goes down. Graceful women in brilliantly colored saris return from working in the fields; men follow oxcarts filled with hay; cows and goats amble back to their homes. I can see a great distance, across lush green fields splashed with yellow mustard and blue coriander. Suddenly I am startled by a bicycle riding across the irrigation dikes. Anything faster than walking seems too fast. I feel transported to another time by the slowness of the pace of life.

I traveled to India with 11 other Americans, our guide, Shantum Seth, and his wife, Gitanjali Varma, on a three-week pilgrimage called "In the Footsteps of the Buddha." During our journey, we visited Nalanda, Vulture Peak, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushnigar, Lumbini, Kapilavastu, and Sravasti.

Pilgrimage, for me, involves making a journey into the unknown, opening to the possibility of seeing in a different way. It means wandering around, often lost—internally or externally—traveling in sacred territories, asking sacred questions. These are some of the questions I asked while I followed the path where the Buddha walked.

## *Who Was the Buddha?*

Before this pilgrimage, I had been a devotee of Buddhism but not of Buddha, the person. Still, it was moving to see the tremendous amount of devotion displayed towards this historical man. Our first major stop was Vulture Peak, a hill upon which the Buddha liked to teach and watch the sunset. As we slowly climbed the path, I imagined the Buddha covering the same ground, looking out at similar trees, breathing similar air.

At the top, in an enclosed area, was an altar filled with marigolds and burning incense. A group of Burmese monks and nuns were chanting the Metta Sutta in Pali. After they left, a Japanese group dashed up, sat down, and chanted the Heart Sutra. With their cameras flash-

ing wildly, they appeared to be typical crass tourists, even here. But as they settled into their practice, I felt their sincerity. Listening to them, my heart filled with a sense of how many people's lives have been touched by the Buddha's teachings.

Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, is in Bihar, the poorest state in India. Bodh Gaya is a celebration of Buddhism: a complex, multi-faceted, energy center with fabulous temples built by practitioners from all over the world. Lumbini, just across the Nepalese border and festooned with thousands of prayer flags, is also a celebration of a particular moment—the Buddha's birth. Great joy radiates around that moment. In contrast, the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya has more the feeling of awe, acknowledging lifetimes of practice culminating in enlightenment.

During our five days in Bodh Gaya, I returned to the Mahabodhi Temple and the bodhi tree many times. Each time, my connection with the Buddha and with myself deepened. One morning, meditating close to the bodhi tree and breathing in the fragrance of the myriad marigold offerings, I understood, viscerally, something basic in the Buddha's teachings. My experience was far beyond intellectual comprehension. I could feel, deep within, the suffering of "I want" or "I don't want," and the pain of self-centeredness which doesn't allow the flow of the river of life. The teachings are so utterly simple. I felt such gratitude for the Dharma.

## *What is Suffering?*

At the beginning of the trip, I wrote in my journal a list of intentions for this pilgrimage. Among them was my aspiration to open my heart to suffering. From the moment we walked out of the gate at our Buddhist guest house in Bodh Gaya until we entered the grounds of the Temple, we were surrounded by beggars and hawkers. Many were children; some were adults with leprosy or deformed limbs. In their desperation, they wouldn't accept "no" for an answer. They kept repeating, "Mama, mama," or "Eat, eat," or "Want some post cards? I give you good price."

Every evening, after dinner, our group would gather to share our "strucks," that which had most struck us during the day. When we were in Bodh Gaya, most of our "strucks" pertained to the beggars. One person in the group cried, saying that he was completely bewildered about what it meant that one week of his salary could probably feed the entire population of Bodh Gaya for several days. It was difficult not to be overwhelmed with guilt and to stay open to the suffering.

Because I work as an acupuncturist, I am constantly touching people. I like to be physically connected to the person with whom I'm working. My practice with the beggars was to touch them as we spoke, with a hand on

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the shoulder and a look in the eyes. Direct contact helped me remain open, rather than hardening to the pressure and the pain. It required a lot of focus to manage this touching, and it was easier to do with children than with adults. When I was too tired, I cut myself off from the humanity of the beggars and wanted to avoid them. But when I could do it, this tool of touching helped me to feel something was shared between us.

One day, our group visited a village just outside Bodh Gaya. While others were talking to some of the villagers, I wandered off to take photos, holding hands with several of the children who accompanied me everywhere. Having heard that it is nice to have something special to give to children, I had packed large boxes of pencils. I brought them along to this village, thinking it would be a good place to hand them out because we would have a more personal connection with the children here. As we were ending our visit, I dug into my backpack to bring out the pencils and handed them out to the few children who were nearby. Within moments, I was surrounded. The atmosphere, which had been quiet and easy-going, became frightening. If one of the adults hadn't intervened, it is quite possible that I would have been hurt in the children's desperate push to have something. I was shocked at how quickly a moment of connection turned into greed and suffering. I became aware that my lack of understanding of what these people's lives are like had produced this painful scene.

#### *What is Death?*

In India, many aspects of life and death that are considered private in the West are available to be seen. From the windows of our bus, we saw dead animals lying by the side of the road, with vultures and dogs picking the meat off the bones. In other places, stacks of bones turned white in the sun.

Varanasi is the holiest place for a Hindu to die. One member of our group had brought the ashes of her friend to scatter into the Ganges. As we rowed up the river at dawn, we saw carcasses of animals and the enshrouded bodies of children float by. Several categories of people, including small children, are not allowed to be cremated and so their bodies are put directly into the river.

Later that day, a few of us returned to the river just before sunset, to the cremation ghats. I walked to a pathway between the cremation ghats, where seven funeral pyres burned brightly—three were just above me, four below. At each one, men and boys huddled near the fire of their loved one. They seemed to be chatting. Our guide explained that the women were at home wailing while the men came here. The men cry before they come to the ghats and they will cry afterwards, but while they are here, they are able to feel the utter naturalness of death. In this large community of mourners, they seemed to be comforted by the universal aspect of death.

I was touched by the sight of a young boy, about 14, who, as the eldest son in his family, performed a Hindu ritual. His head was shaved and he was wearing the white garment of mourning. Several older family members surrounded him closely, leaning into him, almost holding him. It was his job to smash the skull with a long stick, as part of breaking the body down. Then the attendants poked and prodded at the bones until the body coalesced into a small black glob, perhaps six inches long and an inch or so in diameter. The son then used two long sticks to pick up the black substance from the fire, carry it down to the Ganges, walk out waist deep and toss the remains of his mother or father as far out into the water as possible, for a good rebirth. I couldn't imagine what it was like for the boy to be so tangibly connected to his parent's death.

#### *Who Am I?*

Pilgrimage continues for me, in my inner exploration of what I have learned from this outer journey. I feel different from who I was before this sojourn. My eyes are more open and so is my heart. I appreciate nature in a far deeper way than I ever have. When I attended a fundraiser recently, I found myself drawn to a group of physically and mentally disabled people who were on the periphery. I am able to see suffering and touch it more easily. I remember the slow pace of life in India and move my own life more in that direction. I don't know where these changes will lead, but I feel quite happy to remain in the river of life, to watch the continual unfolding. ❖

*Vicki Cohn Pollard lives in Blue Hill, Maine, where she teaches and practices acupuncture and leads occasional retreats.*

#### THANKSGIVING

My buddy stopped  
& sat down beside  
the homeless beggar  
& giving him some  
small change they talked

whereupon the battered guy  
said, "Thank you for stopping,  
man! I mean, the money's  
great but I thought I was gonna  
like lose my mind! Nobody's even

looked at me all week! I was like  
starting to feel like I was on  
Mars!" - whereupon my buddy  
smiled and thought, "Thank you -  
for giving me an opportunity

to practice compassion."

—Gary Gach



*Photos by Valentina DuBasky from a peace pilgrimage in Cambodia*  
*Top: Buddhist nun, Aun, age 72, journeys up a sacred mountain. Bottom: A little girl plays among the stones at Angkor Wat.*



# ON BEGGARS

by Susan Moon

When I was ten, on a family vacation, my father and I took a walk through the narrow cobbled streets of Quebec city. A band of barefoot children danced along beside us, chanting in French. Was this an invitation to play? My father, blushing slightly, ignored them. After they were gone, I asked him what their song meant, and he said they were poor children begging for money. I was ashamed for him, that he had not given them any—I knew he had money in his pocket. But I said nothing, sensing discomfort on my father's part.

*How contagious is leprosy?*

*I wondered this and was ashamed  
to catch myself wondering.*

For Buddhist monks in Asia, begging is honorable. They may not till the soil—lest they break the first precept by killing insects—so they beg for their food from the villagers, and in exchange they offer prayers and meditations for them. They must beg each day, as they can't keep food overnight. Begging makes them intimate with the people around them. Everybody gets merit. Everybody is giving something to somebody else, in accordance with their situation in life.

In California we don't call it begging, we call it pan-handling.

Years ago I had a boyfriend, an alcoholic in recovery, from whom I parted when he went back to drinking. He soon became jobless and homeless. I'd come out of the Safeway and practically trip over him sitting at the edge of the parking lot. Or he'd be on the sidewalk by the drugstore, his upside-down blue beret beside him, smelling so strongly of alcohol that I didn't even have to lean over to notice it.

Sometimes he played the flute, if he hadn't pawned it, but mostly he sat and waited, and when someone gave him money he would say, "God bless you," as if he was giving something back. He told me begging was his way of earning a living. It was hard work, he said. Just like everybody else, he was making the money to buy what he needed to get through the day—in his case fortified wine and a muffin. And like a Buddhist monk, he was not hoarding anything overnight. He shared his spoils with his friends on the street. Still, when I passed him on my way to the drugstore, I felt angry at him, knowing he'd traded a job and a comfortable rented room for this besotted life on the sidewalk.

I didn't put any money in his blue beret—I didn't want his blessing—but I knew he slept under some boards behind the bakery, and once, that rainy winter, when nobody was looking, I left a blanket there for him.

Last December, I was fortunate to be part of a "Buddhist-Christian Pilgrimage" to India. The center-point of our trip was a meeting in Bodh Gaya, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Benedictine monk Father Laurence Freeman engaged in a dialogue for several days, in a small Tibetan meditation center.

Before I left for India, an American friend who had lived in Bodh Gaya advised me to make up my mind ahead of time as to whether I would give to beggars or not, so that I wouldn't have to make a decision every time. She told me about parents who maimed their children to make them better beggars, about lepers walking away from a cure for the same reason, about gang leaders who took the most crippled people they could find in the village and put them down to beg in the middle of a busy intersection in town, and then took away their earnings, à la *Oliver Twist*. She said that if you gave to one beggar, you were immediately surrounded by dozens more. She told me begging was an industry she

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had decided she didn't want to support. So before I left for India I decided I wouldn't give to beggars.

On the way to Bodh Gaya, our group stopped in the holy city of Varanasi. On the steps by the river, there were many lepers. I'd never seen a leper before. The way the flesh is gone is not the clean cut of an amputation, but a gradual eating away, like a worn-down pencil stub. Leprosy is a scary reminder of impermanence: time eats the victim alive, too impatient to wait until death for the body's meat. The invisible truth is made visible. This body of mine will also be disassembled.

A woman walked along beside me, sideways, as I went down the steps to the river. Her dark face was framed by a bright pink sari, her mouth looked moth-eaten, and on the hand that reached out to me were little bumps where her fingers used to be, not long enough to grasp anything. She stuck right with me, thrusting her hand in front of me all the way to the river. How contagious *is* leprosy? I wondered this and was ashamed to catch myself wondering. "Good morning," I said to her, looking into her eyes. This became my three-part vow: to look into the eyes of every beggar who approached me, to speak to them, and to remember that I could be in their bare feet instead of my shoes.

There are more beggars in Bodh Gaya than in most

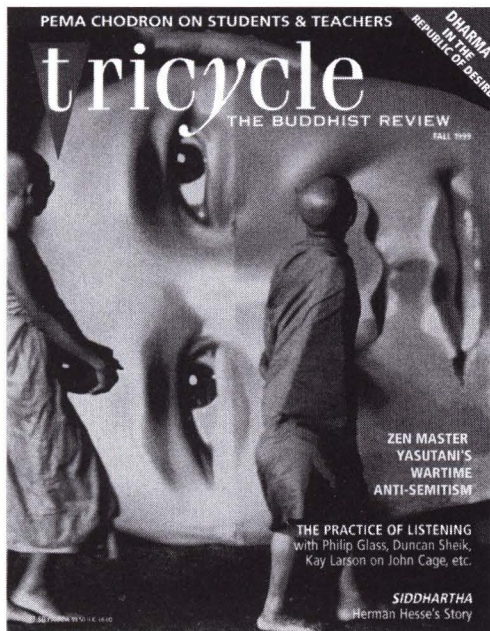
parts of India, because it is a Buddhist pilgrimage site, and pilgrims often give money to beggars in order to gain merit. During our dialogue meeting in Bodh Gaya, questions were invited, and Ven. Santikaro Bikkhu, an American monk and teacher in Thailand, commented that being confronted by so many beggars was a disturbing experience for visiting Westerners, and he asked how we might respond to them.

The Dalai Lama spoke of the importance of social programs that can provide education, health care, job training and a sense of personal dignity for people, so that they don't have to

become beggars. He mentioned intentional communities formed to help disabled people. He said that he gave some of his Nobel Prize money to a self-help community of lepers. He said that politicians lack a sense of responsibility for poor people. There is too great a gap between rich and poor, he said, not only in Bihar, but in the world, between rich nations and poor ones, and this is the cause of many problems. He said there is something morally wrong when there is that much of a gap, and that giving money to beggars does not change the situation.

At first this came as a relief, seeming to get me off the hook. It was okay for me not to give to beggars! But really, it's a big hook, and we're all on it. Each time I

*The gaping hole of her mouth opened wider and wider, so that I felt I was looking straight into the mouth of hunger.*



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meet a beggar, we demonstrate, in street-theater form, the global economy. As Buddha said: Because there is this, there is that.

But interconnectedness is complicated. There's not having enough, there's having what you need, and there's having *more* than you need. You can guess which category I fall into. There's also the fact that poverty is relative, and there's the truth—a truth that shouldn't keep on surprising us, but does—that material wealth doesn't bring happiness.

After the teachings were over, my friend Diana and I sat on our suitcases on the platform of the Gaya train station, waiting for our train to Varanasi. It was three hours late. We were the only Westerners in the crowded station. A small ragged boy with the face of a teenager

dragged himself toward us on hands and knees along the filthy platform. His bare legs were twisted like a pretzel. When he reached Diana, he put his hand firmly on her shoe. We remained in this silent tableau for a moment, and then he gripped her ankle with both hands and laid his head against her thigh. "Hey," Diana said. "No."

He pushed his face into her, the way a cat rubs its nose against your leg, but unlike a cat, there was no affection in his movements. No feeling other than: *I'm here. Give me something.* He made no appeal to pity. He was not cute. But perhaps the attempt to bury his head in Diana's lap was a misapplication of something he'd seen, his version of a gesture of supplication.

Diana looked frightened, and this worried me further. An experienced traveler, she'd been living in Asia for a year and a half, and I took my cues from her. She stood up, but he still held on to her ankle. He made a strange, sharp, sipping noise with his lips and tongue, over and over—a hissing, kissing, sucking noise, like a blind baby goat looking for the nipple. She moved her foot, but he wouldn't be dislodged. She moved her foot more vigorously. He let go and grabbed *my* ankle instead, in the same vise-like grip, and buried his face in *my* thigh. I stood up too, but he didn't let go.

Suddenly I noticed that a dozen Indian men stood in a semi-circle on the platform in front of us, watching with amusement. Their stares were neither hostile nor friendly. I moved my foot, tentatively. The boy held on.

Diana offered him a banana from our bag of food for the train. He shook his head almost angrily, and nodded at the whole bag. Diana addressed the staring men. "Can you help us?"

One of them stepped forward, shouted at the child, and raised his arm to threaten a beating. As the boy scrambled away he took the banana after all. He split the peel with one hand and squeezed the whole banana into

his mouth like toothpaste, then hurled the peel down onto the train tracks, and retreated, crab-like.

"I've spent years in India," said Diana, "and I've never had that happen. I completely left my body."

Now, at a safe distance, on the other side of the globe, I can wonder: Was he an orphan? Did he live in the train station? Did he have a relationship with anybody at all? How did he keep warm on cold nights?

On Christmas Day I sat on another train platform, by myself, in Varanasi, waiting for the train to Delhi. The train was late and I had a long wait. There were many beggars in the crowded station, and as the only Westerner in sight, I was the most obvious target. I only had two small coins in my purse, and if I gave to one beggar, the others would all surround me in a crescendo of requests, and I'd have to fend them off till my train came, which could be another two or three hours.

An old woman, bent over almost at a ninety-degree angle, hobbled over to me, leaning on a stick. Her brown hand reached out from the folds of a brown

shawl. Her brown face twisted into mine, and the gaping hole of her mouth opened wider and wider, so that I felt I was looking straight into the mouth of hunger. She was so wrinkled and toothless, so archetypal, she could have walked out of a Shakespeare play, a dream, a dharma talk by the Buddha. She wasn't dead, but she looked like she might keel over in front of me at any moment.

And it was Christmas, the birthday of the man who said, "Inasmuch as you have given unto the least of these, you have given unto me." My wallet in my pocket was full of bills, and I shook my head. The old woman looked again into my face, pleading, then faded back and disappeared down the platform.

"God forgive me!" I said out loud.

Then a boy of six or seven came up to me, not visibly disabled but with a glazed look. He stood before me, held out his hand, and waited, without aggression. His eyes were dull. In his face I saw no anger, no hope, no despair, no disappointment.

I shook my head and he walked dazedly on down the platform. I saw him stop in front of a food cart. The vendor handed him a samosa. Perhaps he lived in the station and survived on what he was given by the food vendors. He walked on, eating his somosa. There didn't seem to be anyone with him.

A woman in a bright sari squatted before me with her two children, a boy and a girl. These children, about four and five, were very cute. The woman's sari was so pretty—bright purple and orange—but dirty at the bottom. She pointed to my water bottle. Afraid of germs,

*For 49 days after my father's death, I gave money to every person on the street who asked me for money.*

I didn't want to share it with her, so I bought her a bottle of water from a nearby cart. She tucked it under her shawl, and she and her children continued to squat before me and stare and smile at me. She didn't seem to be asking me for anything more, though I wasn't sure. I smiled at the kids, pointed to myself, said my name, pointed to them, asked their names. They didn't say anything, but seemed to enjoy my meaningless antics.

I heard a charming sound of wooden clackers, and a man walked by carrying a big tray on his head piled high with colorful wooden toys and noisemakers. I went after him, and bought two brightly painted wooden dolls who nodded their heads: a soldier and a fat woman. I gave them to the two children according to their sex.

"Merry Christmas," I said.

They grinned, examined the toys, showed them to their mother, clutched them. This was how I celebrated Christmas.

My blanket decision not to give money to beggars while I was in India was supposed to save me from "dealing with it" every time. But it saved me from nothing. A pilgrimage is a double journey: inner and outer. Each time I looked into a hungry face, I felt my own longing. Each time I turned away from a beggar, what *was* that turning? Now it seems to me that my decision not to give to beggars brought me face to face with their poverty in a way that giving wouldn't have done. I don't say this to justify it, but in saying no, I felt their situation more keenly. I entered into the NO that their lives were made of.

Whether I give to a beggar or not, the moment of turning away still comes, and the beggar is still in need. My own longing is still unsatisfied. The beggars are everywhere, inside and out, real and metaphorical. I can't feed them all. What *can* I do?

Seven years ago, when my father died, I took a vow. According to Tibetan Buddhist beliefs, for 49 days after death, the departed are in a sort of limbo state called the *bardo*, and they need all the help they can get from the living. So for 49 days after my father's death, I gave money to every person on the street who asked me for money. This was no small matter in Berkeley, though it would have been a much bigger commitment in Varanasi or Bodh Gaya. I tried always to have change in my pocket. Usually I gave a quarter. But if I didn't have change, I'd have to give something bigger in order to keep my vow. I dedicated the merit of my giving to my father. It made me feel better, even though he might not have wanted this kind of merit. He would have agreed with the Dalai Lama that poverty has to be addressed at the systemic level; he worked for social justice all his life. Only now, as I write, does it occur to me that there could be a connection between my vow and the beggar children in Quebec to whom my father gave nothing. Because there is this, there is that. ❖

## Back Road to the Orchard

I am that woman you reported  
feeling sorry for, waking  
alone to the house-of-every-morning,  
making so much of the company  
of birds, making crumbs  
into cake, carrying  
breakfast back to bed  
beside the carved Tibetan figure  
whose hands meet  
perpetually in prayer, its soles  
taped to the nightstand  
to keep it from falling  
on its face again.

I am the woman with no children  
leading neighborhood children  
in the promised, annual  
carrot-pulling brigade,  
when on our knees inside the garden  
we all look up and claim  
to see it—one dispersing,  
threadbare angel  
sketched against sky  
out of vapor and wind.

I am the woman rebuilding  
the four steps to the porch,  
where rips in the screen  
are patched with squares  
of screen—the one walking  
past dusk up this hill,  
interrupting, like any animal,  
the beam of your headlights.

I am that woman, setting out for it  
day after day, reaching  
the orchard and catching my breath  
before swerving toward home again.

—L.R. Berger

Previously published in *The American Voice*

L.R. Berger is a poet living in New Hampshire.

# NOT THE DUTY (*KICCA*) OF MONKS

by Ven. Santikaro Bhikku

*The fourth pilgrimage, or Dhamma-Yatra, around Songkhla Lake in northern Thailand took place in the spring of 1999. The walk was organized by local Buddhists, with the support of monks, including the author, who are concerned about the environmental devastation and community breakdown in the lake basin caused by "development." This year's walk took two weeks, and hundreds of people joined in for some part of the way. —Ed.*

For years, these words—"not the duty of monks"—have been used to warn monks off of activities and work that are deemed inappropriate. But deemed inappropriate by whom? Sometimes "inappropriate" means they go against the *vinaya*, the monastic discipline that we monks have accepted by ordaining. Often, however, "inappropriate" means anything that goes against the interests and profits of social elites. Especially in the anti-communist years, anything political was "not the duty of monks," and these words meant, "Stay away, don't pay attention, and keep your mouths shut." Many monks were scared off in this way. Nonetheless, they fared better than lay people, who were simply shot (with American-supplied bullets). On the other hand, if you took the government *cum* military's side, you could say as much as you wanted, and would be chauffeured around to do it, and receive nifty perks for it.

## Silencing the Sangha

This silencing of the monks has a devastating impact. First, it removes an important protection from lay people involved in legitimate political work. When monks and religious leaders speak out on behalf of justice and human rights, and on behalf of those who work for these values, an important safety net is created. When monks remain silent, the lives of social activists are more at risk.

Second, the many legitimate ways that monks can contribute to the alleviation of social problems are suppressed. As traditional community leaders, monks once played a central role in all aspects of community life. Few initiatives were taken without their blessing. Their participation eased divisions within the community. Without the monks, village cohesion and the villagers' ability to stand up for their own interests was weakened. Monkish silence has contributed to the very disintegration of Thai society that the monks themselves lament.

Third, whenever we blind ourselves to one aspect of

reality we tend to have trouble seeing other aspects as well. Blindness in the social sphere of life contributes to blindness in spiritual matters. When the Sangha, out of fear, looks only to itself, spiritual life is stunted. No wonder the mainstream (male) Sanghas throughout the Buddhist world are spiritually derelict.

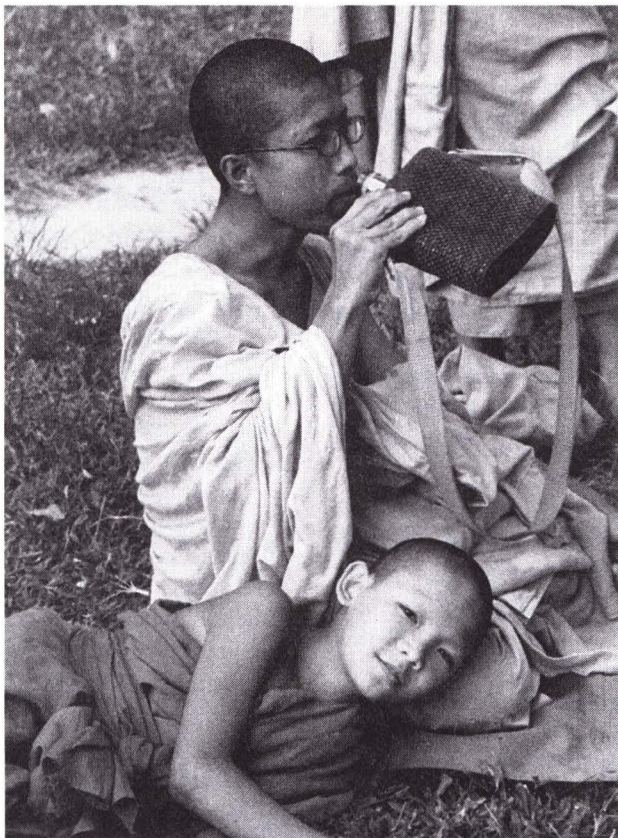
Fourth, when the Sangha focuses all its energies on itself, its relevance to society decreases, and this ultimately undercuts support for it. A sangha cut off from its social context devotes itself to increasingly meaningless pursuits, such as chasing after titles, ritualism, and obsequious courting of the rich and powerful.

Lastly, to justify their isolation and silence, the monks preach a disembodied Dhamma. Thus, the vitality of

Buddha-Dhamma is petrified into abstract principles without any meaningful linkage to real life. But where else does suffering occur but in real life? And where else can it be addressed? We are told of some *nibbana* floating in the clouds, found only after countless lifetimes. How is that relevant to our lives?

Since *dukkha* cannot be alleviated except where it arises, disembodied Dhamma is pseudo-Dhamma. The silence of monks slowly squeezes the life out of Buddhism, in both its centralized institutions and its popular manifestations. We end up with superstition, the science of sleeping rather than awakening.

Fortunately, the social and political climate in Siam



*tired and thirsty*

has changed since the '60s and '70s, but monks are still warned off of many activities. Stay in the temple, chant, perform blessings and other rituals, watch TV, eat, sleep, smoke cigarettes, and drink Nescafe, but don't do anything political. Better yet, serve the latest ideology: Consumerism. And many willingly do.

It is convenient for corrupt elites, whether business or political or religious, to paint a picture of a Buddha who sits passively in meditation and never leaves the Wat. However, this is not the Buddha story that we most need today, and it is not the whole story.

### Another Buddha Story

The Dhamma-Yatra is another telling of the story, one that starts with the Buddha sending out his first 60 disciples to teach the Dhamma. "Go forth, brothers, for the well-being of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing of *devas* and humans. Let no two of you go by the same way. Preach the Dhamma that is splendid in the beginning, middle, and end."

This alternative story honors the great distances the Buddha walked to bring the Dhamma to those who were open to it. In dawn meditation he surveyed the world, then set off to instruct those who were ripe for waking up. Even at the age of eighty, he walked in order to share his message and his life, and died doing so. Silence, meditation, debate, preaching, versifying, walking: the Lord Buddha manifested himself in this world in many ways. He conversed with Kings but did not allow them to dictate to him.

Our saffron and white robes (ordained) and banners (lay) are a symbol of bringing the Dhammas of mindfulness, truth, community, and social relevance into the villages, cities, swamps, forests, and temples.

The Dhamma-Yatra is a pilgrimage of mindfulness. In air-conditioned cars it is now possible to whizz past all kinds of suffering without noticing it. Not so easy when walking through acres of moonscapes, former mangroves, devastated by tiger prawn farms. Not so easy when the ditches give off ugly odors. Not so pleasant when we see the poverty of people whose livelihood has been taken away by the market economy.

Walking also lets us feel the beauty of nature and of village life, a beauty that hangs on tenaciously. Walking teaches us things about these strange mind-bodies of ours. None of what we learn fits into our preconceptions and theories very well, but it is fresh and alive. For many of the young cityfolk who have walked with us, the Dhamma-Yatra has been their first taste of mindfulness practice—a pilgrimage of truth.

During the walk, we have created forums where local people can tell us about what is going on in their neighborhoods, how things have changed over the years, how they are suffering, and how they are responding. The villagers, too, suffer from imposed silences. Local officials are invited, too, but not allowed to dominate. A

well-chosen monk facilitator can keep the balance. Like the storytellers of old, we retell these stories in other villages. The divide-and-rule tactics of the government often blame the problems of one area on the people living along another part of the lake. These are almost always distortions. We counter the disinformation with true stories we have heard. Thus we hope to nurture solidarity and networks of response.

The Dhamma-Yatra is a pilgrimage for the integrity of local communities. Our explicit goals have been the rejuvenation of the lake as a viable ecosystem and of the communities around it as sustainable homes. The two are interdependent, and the obstacles are huge. We have tried to affirm the local communities' right to self-determination and control of local resources. We hope we have partially countered the modern message that devalues almost everything that is local or traditional.

The Dhamma-Yatra is a pilgrimage of social relevance. Our vision of Buddha-Dhamma is that it must respond to the real life problems and suffering of other beings (including Muslims!). For this, we must leave the emotional comfort of the temple walls and get a little hot, dusty, and thirsty, shed a few pounds and lots of sweat. While unable to claim clear material successes—immensely difficult in a country falling apart morally and culturally—we at least validate the experiences and feelings of the people we visit.

### Discovering Our Duties With The People

We have shown that Buddha-Dhamma and its practitioners still have a place within society. A group of monks walking through the countryside and not asking for money! Old cultural norms bring people out to greet and feed us; our lack of pecuniary interest earns trust. Dhamma teachings, river blessings, tree ordinations, and meditations give people ways to participate, rather than just watching. When we ask people to walk with us, many do for a kilometer or two, even to the next village and beyond (though the youth—spoiled by motorcycles and TVs—are conspicuously absent). And it is *sanuk*—fun!

How can they say it isn't our duty, isn't proper, when the Buddha himself did it? The Buddha spent most of his teaching career walking from village to village throughout the Ganges valley. We spoke to our various hosts of following that tradition. Wherever Buddha was received, he talked with the people. We, too, have been well received wherever we have gone, and have learned as much as we have taught. The people still have hope. The Buddha's purpose was the end of suffering for all, not just for himself or a chosen elite. Let's share in that purpose. ❖

*Ven. Santikaro Bikkhu first went to Thailand in the Peace Corps. He has been an ordained monk there for 15 years, and studied at Suan Mokkh with the late Buddhadasa Bhikku. He has been active with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. He plans to relocate to the U.S. to start a sangha for lay and ordained Buddhist activists.*

## *Buddha's Nature: Evolution as a Practical Guide to Enlightenment*

by Wes Nisker

Bantam Books, 1998, 242 pages, \$23.95, hardcover

Reviewed by Barbara Hirshkowitz

One of Buddhism's claims to fame is that it is grounded in scientific thought. *Buddha's Nature: Evolution as a Practical Guide to Enlightenment* is a book for people who are puzzled but interested in understanding that fundamental Buddhist teaching—dependent co-arising. Using the Four Foundations of Mindfulness as a structure, Nisker takes us on a journey through evolutionary biology, with an eye toward understanding ourselves by understanding our development.

The most striking aspect of this book is the wit and humor Nisker brings to the complex ideas he discusses. Here's an example from the section on "Die Before You Die" on page 80.

The sages say that only by learning how to die do we finally learn how to live. Such a deal—two lessons in one! But there's a catch. Many of those sages will also tell you that once you have learned how to die, and hence how to live, you finally are free of the wheel of rebirths; you will not be born again. In other words, just when you get it right the journey is over. Oh, well. That's life.

Ever wonder why the mind wanders during meditation, not to mention when walking down the street? Here you will discover the answer, traced all the way back to the primal soup.

Nisker draws lessons and stories from his long experience as a practitioner, teacher, and writer. Author of *Crazy Wisdom* and co-editor of *Inquiring Mind*, he is no stranger to the science of psychology, having served as secretary to the International Transpersonal Association. He relates the Buddha's teaching to contemporary scientific thought with seamless prose and thorough documentation. The reader is provided with exercises at various junctures to check out the ideas for him- or herself.

The one problem with the book is that Nisker quotes from so many other interesting texts that I had a hard time not putting *this* book down and rushing off to find another. I leave you with one that tempted me: "Life is the story of bodies that learned to contain the sea," says William Bryant Logan in *Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*. ❖

*Barbara Hirshkowitz lives in Philadelphia, where she practices Buddhism, gardens, and works as Publications Coordinator for the Friends General Conference. She has been a BPF member for many years.*

## *The Hungry Tigress: Buddhist Myths, Legends & Jataka Tales*

As told by Rafe Martin

Completely Revised & Expanded Edition

Yellow Moon Press, 1999, 261 pages, \$16.95

Reviewed by Robin Hart

As a child, I loved fairy tales. As an adult, I acknowledge the values impressed upon me through such stories, and particularly the belief that virtue is rewarded. When I picked up *The Hungry Tigress*, I hoped my fledgling understanding of Buddhism (gained thus far through texts, commentary, and interaction with other Buddhists) would be expanded by these Buddhist fables and morality tales, and that I would have as much fun reading them as I did when I was a child immersing myself in western fairy tales. I was not disappointed.

This new edition of *The Hungry Tigress* is revised and expanded. In the foreword, Roshi Philip Kapleau says that Rafe Martin rewrote the stories in the light of his "deepening and evolving understanding of narrative and of the Buddhist tradition."

As the reader may know, the Buddha lived an infinite number of lifetimes before he was born into the one in which he would attain enlightenment. Jatakas are tales about the Buddha in his various incarnations. They show his compassion, courage, patience, and selflessness, which, of course, led to his becoming awakened. These delightful animal stories gave me examples of how to live the Buddhist way, not simply to mouth its principles or perform its rituals. I also discovered that there were other Buddhas throughout time. Although we call him the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama is only one in a long line of Buddhas.

Along with the old stories, the book also contains material to satisfy the scholar. Commentary on each jataka appears in a separate section in the back of the book. Sometimes I read the commentary immediately after reading the jataka, but many times I enjoyed the fables one after another and turned to the back of the book only when more seriously minded.

The jataka with which I most identify, perhaps because of my current life circumstances, is "The Brave Moment." In it, a non-teaching Buddha entered a city and stood in front of a merchant's house. (According to the commentary, the merchant was Shakyamuni Buddha in the life just before his Enlightenment.) The merchant saw that the Buddha was a man at peace with himself and the world, and determined to make an offering to him for the sake of Buddha-knowledge. Mara, the tempter, knew that if the merchant made the offering, his faith would increase until he was beyond Mara's power. As the merchant walked to the gate to give the

(Continued on page 39)

# THE RED LEASH OF THE LINEAGE

by Tofu Roshi

[Editor's Note: Tofu Roshi is the Abbot of No Way Zen Center in Berkeley, California. The following article is based on a dharma talk given at No Way by Tofu Roshi, and is his contribution to Turning Wheel's ongoing discourse on the subject of the lineage, and the transmission of the lineage.]

I want to talk to you today about the very important and misunderstood matter of The Lineage, and explain to you where we stand in that regard, here at No Way Zen Center.

As you may be aware, we have had some trouble with the official confirmation of our lineage. We belong to the Toto Zen tradition, but in the generations since the Toto teaching came to the West, we have lost our connection with the parent organization in Asia, and our papers are no longer accredited by them.

We know, however, that while the red thread of our teaching may be frayed, it is not broken. In an effort to renew our credibility, we have turned to a Western organization that has a deep understanding of the meaning

*Documents with the American Kennel Club seal of approval are virtually as valid as documents bearing the seal of the head Toto Temple.*

of lineage; we have appealed to the American Kennel Club for confirmation of our pedigree. I want to tell you today what the result of this effort has been.

The model followed by the American Kennel Club is so similar to that used by the Toto lineage that documents with the AKC seal of approval are virtually as valid as documents bearing the seal of the head Toto Temple. AKC papers are widely recognized throughout the world, perhaps even more widely than Toto transmission papers.

As you know, our lineage is passed from teacher to student through mind-to-mind transmission. My own teacher was Master Baba Wawa, out of Aha Woof Woof, who received transmission in Japan. We trace the red leash of our lineage all the way back to the ancient Chinese Master, Zed Bow Chew.



Mind-to-mind transmission is not visible to the naked eye. Just as the sperm that contains the complete genetic code of a full-blooded miniature poodle swims in the dark to meet the ovum that perfectly mirrors it, so master and disciple meet in the realm beyond the opposites, and the dharma is transmitted in secret. In the light, the whelp is born, and steps forth to utter the dog-ma. Only a dog whose lineage is fully confirmed can transmit that lineage, and his papers along with it, to the next generation.

Sometimes there are questions about gaps in the bloodline. In such cases, the dog owner must apply to the AKC and submit evidence to affirm the pedigree.

In the present case, I am very happy indeed to report to you that in yesterday's mail I received official AKC papers recognizing the Toto breed, tracing our bloodline all the way back to Shakyamuni.

The piece of paper is important, for it is the mind-seal made manifest. Yes, it is only a piece of paper, but it is the visible evidence of the invisible fact that I am Buddha. Now I have the papers to prove it.

Of course we are all Buddha, lineage papers or not. The Buddha has no marks. Still, you want to know who the ancestors of your teacher are, don't you? When you get a dog, you want to know its sire and dam. You don't go to the pound if you seek the true teaching.

I don't want you to think that I'm being exclusive in my attitudes. The good thing about Toto Zen is that, unlike miniature poodles, a place in the lineage is gained not by biological birth but by spiritual birth. You can attain this mystery and this pedigree when you deeply understand that there is no picking and choosing. When you equally accept either kibbles or horsemeat, then you can carry on the red thread.

To prepare for dharma transmission, you must be able to write out your own papers, to copy out in calligraphy the names of all the ancestors who have gone before you. A dog can't hold a brush and write out his or her own pedigree, so, unable to receive transmission through calligraphy, he must attain it through birth. This is one reason we are grateful for the precious opportunity of human birth.



Shall we go to the dog show? Bring your red thread, your red leash. What are the signs of the breed? Not cropped tail or clipped ears, but dangling lobes and ringlets of hair. Check your teacher's gums. They should be rubbery, not spongy. Look at the teeth, and make sure the upper incisors come in front of the lower canines.

You can get charts from the AKC listing the features of different breeds. ❖

*Mari, whose art appears on these pages, lives with her husband and other animals in Southern Medford, Oregon, on Ffoshelyg Parc Farm, where they raise cer-*

*tified organic culinary herbs. She teaches both yoga and vipassana meditation. Her book *The Buddha Smiles, drawings and Dharma quotes*, is forthcoming from White Cloud Press.*

### Jataka Tales, continued

Buddha his offering, Mara surrounded him with flames, demons, and terrible moans. The merchant was full of terror, but kept walking for what seemed like forever through unmentionable horror. Suddenly the sky cleared and he was in front of the Buddha. His dreadful walk had actually taken only one minute. Trembling, he made his offering and received the Buddha's blessing. The jataka ends with the following, which I have passed on to my friends in times of struggle: "Gains and losses pass swiftly by, even as the drifting clouds pass silently overhead. But to those who walk on despite obstacles and fears, success comes at last, a triumph beyond all dreaming and doubt."

Not all of the jatakas affected me so. Martin wrote two of these jatakas himself, setting them in the twentieth century, and I didn't think they flowed with the tone of the others. As well, some of the commentaries seemed to ramble on with no apparent point. On the whole, however, Martin's observations provided much appreciated background information, and the jatakas were a joy to read. I highly recommend this engaging book for both the young and the young at heart. ❖

*Robin Hart is a practicing attorney, Buddhist, and writer, and lives in Alameda, California.*

## *The Wheel Of Engaged Buddhism: A Map of the Path*

by *Kenneth Kraft*

Weatherhill, 1999, 104 pages, illustrated, \$12.95

### Reviewed by *Stephanie Kaza*

Every so often a book comes along that you want to give to all your Buddhist friends. Ken Kraft's little gem, *The Wheel of Engaged Buddhism*, is just such a book. For those struggling to apply compassionate action in everyday life or political activism or environmental work, this beautifully produced volume has many words of wisdom to offer. Yet it does not preach. Instead, the author invites readers to explore a new map of the path specifically for socially engaged practice.

Maps of Buddhist practice are not new; Kraft reviews the ancient Wheel of Life mandala and the Path of Calm from the Tibetan tradition, as well as the Ten Ox-herding Pictures of Zen. Each offers a route through stages of practice, with guideposts along the way. Despite their various merits, none of the paths effectively addresses the contemporary challenges of socially engaged Buddhism. Hoping that "someone wiser and more qualified" might have taken on such a project, Kraft found "alas, silence." So he embarked on the exploration himself.

As a Buddhist scholar, a former BPF board member, and a long-time Zen practitioner trained by Philip Kapleau, Kraft has considerable experience to offer. However, in this volume he emphasizes the inspiring examples of others who are following the bodhisattva way. The stories are told simply and without praise; in this they are gently encouraging. Kraft's writing is clear and direct, yet artfully deft. He provides the reader with useful models of practice and, at the same time, creates a coherent picture of engaged Buddhism as a whole.

The gift of this book is its conception of a new path. Kraft lays out a mandala-like hub of interrelated activity, with "moving into the world" at the center. As he points out, "A wheel format makes it possible to envision ten paths simultaneously and give them equal weight, and to consider their mutual relatedness." The first ring is the foundational "cultivating awareness in daily life"; the next ring includes four fields of practice—family, work, politics, and caring for the earth. The outermost ring suggests modes of practice—extending compassionate action, exploring new terrain, at ease amid activity, and spreading joy in ten directions. Kraft describes each of the ten domains in depth, showing how each can function independently as a path. On "Embracing Family," he writes:

Commitments to one's family and commitments beyond family must be adjusted and balanced all the time. Concern for the world's far-flung conflagrations does not justify neglect of the hearth close at hand...In a period of familial disintegration and social fragmentation, the most radical course may not be to abandon a family, but to embrace one.

The paths are illustrated with hand mudras and lotus flowers. The genius of this map is that engaged practice can be entered at any point on the mandala, a true reflection of real life. Moreover, the map gives meaning and structure to what might appear in one's own life to be disconnected practice.

Kraft grounds the wheel in the bodhisattva ideal and the root practice of compassion. In the five fields of practice, he offers exercises and suggested activities, even as he explores new definitions of traditional concepts. Mindfulness, for example, "combines wholehearted involvement in the here-and-now, steady attentiveness to the task at hand, and a tolerant openness to the elements of inner and outer experience." Kraft suggests ways to cultivate spiritual strength and awareness even in the midst of difficult activity, and shows how social action is linked with development of character.

This book succeeds in tying many strands of thought together around engaged Buddhism. In its simple and familiar style, it is accessible to anyone, Buddhist or not. For those who wish more depth, the Notes section is filled with useful references. This book is not only conceptually creative but well researched. It is ideal for personal reflection, engaged Buddhist discussion groups, or college courses. May it have a long life!

*Stephanie Kaza is a writer, a scholar, and a professor in the environmental studies program at the University of Vermont. She is a long-time BPF member, and former President of the BPF Board.*

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Pilgrimage

Walking is central to Buddhist practice, a close second to sitting meditation. Pilgrimage also has a long history as a form of spiritual practice, and indeed as a form of engaged spiritual practice. In fact, pilgrimage as a form of nonviolent social action has been a powerful tool used by many campaigns for social justice in our time. Gandhi's Salt March, or the walks and bus rides for freedom during the American civil rights era, could be seen as pilgrimages. While one is walking for one's cause, there is also an internal pilgrimage that occurs, as one walks deeper into oneself along the way.

In this column, I want to offer some examples of the ways that people have walked for peace and justice: to connect with their bio-region, to remember their dead, to bear witness, to offer safety. Each of us can make pilgrimage. Through this powerful form of nonviolent action, we can deepen both our selves and our work for peace.

#### I. Spiritual Practice.

Walking brings us in touch with our surroundings and with other sentient beings in a very immediate way. Meditative walking can reveal to us the sacredness of a place, be it our neighborhood or a local mountain. Try making one of your regular walks a meditative one that highlights an area of concern or interest.

Pilgrimage can also be an internal process, the journey we take to come to a new place of understanding. Think about your inner "pilgrimage" to engaged Buddhism; where you have come from and where you are going. Have a discussion in your sangha or BPF chapter in which each person can share their journey.

#### II. Be Inspired!

So many have made pilgrimage. The Middle Passage Pilgrimage written about in this issue was a massive undertaking, but there are countless smaller ways we can incorporate pilgrimage into our work. Use the articles in this *TW* as inspiration for organizing a pilgrimage around the issues that matter to you.

#### Some resources:

- *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words*, (Ocean Tree Books, 1982). An inspiring account of one woman walking more than 25,000 miles for peace.
- *Circling the Sacred Mountain: A Spiritual Adventure Through the Himalayas*, by Robert Thurman and Tad Wise (Bantam, 1999).
- *Altars in the Street*, by Melody Ermachild Chavis (Belltower, 1997). A BPF member's account of her struggles to build community in a neighborhood being

taken over by drugs. The narrative includes a pilgrimage to the sites of the many shootings in the neighborhood.

- *Bearing Witness, A Zen Master's Lessons in Making Peace*, by Roshi Bernie Glassman (Bell Tower, 1998).

#### Examples that can be adapted to your own interests:

- On the "Stone Walk" from Massachusetts to Arlington, Virginia, in memory of all civilians killed in war, pilgrims carried a one-ton stone.
- Monks and lay people made a pilgrimage to a 1000-year-old redwood tree and visited with Julia Butterfly, who has lived high in the tree for a year and a half. See article in *TW*, Summer '99.
- Small groups have done pilgrimage when there is a violent death in the neighborhood to bear witness and offer prayers.
- Watershed walks are held at Green Gulch Zen Center in Muir Beach, California, every fall and spring.
- An annual walking pilgrimage goes from one town in North Carolina to another to highlight the U.S. involvement in Central American wars and the plight of refugees and immigrants.
- A Buddhist group walked eight miles in silence to arrive at the site of a five-day retreat.
- Deep Ecology Walks are led by Santi Prachadhamma in Thailand and by the Arcata, California Zen Center in the ancient redwoods of Headwaters Forest.

#### III. Join a Walk

- The 10 different U.S. temples of the Nipponzan Myohoji order of Buddhist monks and nuns regularly plan walks. Drumming and chanting, they walk many miles a year for peace. Contact Sister Clare Carter at Leverett Peace Pagoda for upcoming pilgrimages: 413/367-2202. In November they will walk from Atlanta to Fort Benning, Georgia, to join the annual demonstration to close the School of the Americas. Contact Sister Denise Laffan at 404/627-8948.
- The Dhammayietra in Cambodia is an annual peace walk led by Ven. Maha Ghosananda. Contact CPR, P.O. Box 60, Bungthong Lang Post Office, Bangkok 10242, Thailand. To order a video about the Dhammayietra, *An Army of Peace*, see classified ad on page 44.
- Millennium 2000, Religious Action for Disarmament. Join 1000 people in a candlelight procession onto the Nevada Test Site at midnight, December 31. Nevada Desert Experience: 702/646-4814. See ad, page 44.
- Zen Peacemaker Order offers regular "street retreats" "as well as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Bearing Witness Retreat, Nov. 8-13, 1999. (See article on page 11.) Contact Peacemaker Community, Box 2583, Westwood, CA 96137. 530/596-4552. ❖

—Margaret Howe

*Margaret Howe is a long-time BPF member. She currently lives in Mendocino with her husband, Gary Pace, and their daughter, Maya.*

## BPF ACTIVIST NEWS

### Chapter & Activist News

Diana Winston, BASE (Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement) founder, is back from Asia. She will be coordinating BASE as part of her new role as BPF's Program Director. I will continue to be the Chapter Coordinator and will be BPF's first Development Director. Both of us will be contributing to this column.

Welcome to new BPF contacts, John Martone in Central Illinois and Patrick Ejo McMullen in Portland, Oregon. We also welcome the new Los Angeles Chapter Coordinator, Andrew Rasmussen, and thank Kara Steiniger for her leadership in the last two years.

The new **Green Gulch Farm Zen Center Chapter** meets weekly, writes Lee Lipp, "to discuss the function and form of our lively, committed group." The group holds "educational programs and weekly letter-writing sessions addressing local, national and global issues. Some of our members are actively involved in correspondence with inmates, while others have been going into jails to teach meditation. Others are active in informing our community about the death penalty."

The **San Francisco Chapter** has been focusing on four activities: twice weekly soup distribution to people living on the streets around Civic Center, monthly bag-lunch distribution to people in need, monthly outings with children and their mothers from a transitional shelter, and prison correspondence.

The **New York Chapter** sponsored a performance by the First Light Project to commemorate the 54th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. The First Light Project is a group of multicultural performing artists who are on a ceremonial pilgrimage from New Mexico, the site of the first nuclear bomb test, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In **Spokane, Washington**, chapter members are preparing for a two-and-a-half-day residential retreat in late September with Jason and Jacqueline Siff, vipassana teachers. Merry Armstrong writes: "We have two sittings a week and are looking for community projects that fit schedules (not easy)."

In **Twin Cities, Minnesota**, chapter members held an all-day sitting at Stillwater prison in July. Volunteers are working in hospice, disabled, and drug settings.

The **Texas Hill Country Chapter** showed the video "Doing Time, Doing Vipassana" at its June meeting, and in August had a speaker from the Austin Shambhala Center's Prison Committee. The chapter decided to get involved in prison work.

I am looking forward to traveling to Australia in September, where I'll give talks sponsored by the Sydney and Melbourne BPF Chapters. In October I'll go to Texas to offer a one-day "Introduction to Engaged Buddhism" workshop organized by the Texas Hill Country Chapter.—*Tova Green*

### BASE News

On my return to BPF after a year and a half in Asia, I find a BASE that has matured and grown. Tova Green has nurtured the strong grassroots vision of BASE. Various people have been inspired to start BASE groups, a few are ongoing, and others are winding down, one after several years of meetings.

BASE is now at a crossroads. Where are we going next? What is BASE's role in the larger socially engaged Buddhist movement? How can we best meet the needs of the BASE community?

To explore this question, local BASE members held a visioning day in June that combined a "historical" look at BASE with envisioning the future: where did we come from, where are we going? The discussion was rich and moving as well as vast in its scope. A BASE visioning committee is following up, aiming to clarify our purpose so that we can make choices about where to put our energy in the coming years. We are focusing in four different areas: ongoing community for BASE graduates, Buddhist social analysis, development of new BASE forms and focus groups, and further education and training in the wider community. I'll keep you posted.

Some ongoing BASE manifestations include the upcoming (third) issue of "Touching BASE" (the BASE alumni newsletter), and monthly BASE community retreat days. The most recent retreat examined the sense of self that comes from "being" an activist.

BASE alumni have formed a graduate BASE group to learn how to better apply what we get from BASE to our work in the world; to read and study the works of other practitioners of socially engaged spirituality; to inquire honestly into what's most alive for us in our emotional lives; and to refine our process as a group."

This September marks the start of the "Educator's BASE" for teachers and others in the education field. It will run a full nine months to coincide with the academic year. BASE graduate Beth Levine will be coordinating it, and BPF board member Lyn Fine is the mentor.

Additionally, a "Caregiver's" BASE will be starting up in Marin County, CA. This will be a local group for people who are already working in social work and related fields in Marin. BASE graduate Brenda Frechette is coordinating it and will be accepting applications through the end of the year. Contact the BPF office for more information.

See box below for a new BASE program.

—*Diana Winston*

**BPF ANNOUNCES A SIX-MONTH BASE PROGRAM FOCUSING ON HOMELESSNESS, IN SAN FRANCISCO, BEGINNING EARLY IN 2000.**

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For more information, contact Diana Winston or Tova Green at the BPF office: 510/655-6169.

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Columbine, Atlanta, Granada Hills Jewish Community Center—the level of armed violence in this country seems to escalate daily. The violence that fills our newspapers, magazines, and television screens is unfolding in wealthy suburbs and corporate offices, not in the ghettos, where the structural violence of poverty and despair is less sensational, but every bit as deadly.

It seems self-evident that the availability of weapons multiplies tragedy. Never before have there been so many guns in people's hands. Let's urge our legislators and civic officials to put an end to this madness. The violence that the U.S. government and others have been purveying with arms sales around the world is, as Malcolm X bitterly quipped, like "the chickens coming home to roost." Our vow not to take life or to allow others to take life means vocally opposing the arms and military industries, and it means not knowingly benefiting from their corporate profits.

Much of this killing is being done by adults and youth who are white and come from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds. The illusion of American prosperity has gaping holes in it. Our culture of consumption and spectacle cannot sustain itself. Meaningful work is hard to come by, and corporate greed threatens real connection between people.

I wish I had strategies to suggest in order to reclaim our society quickly. Practicing Dharma is a slow revolution, and sometimes no revolution at all. I don't say this cynically, but in hopes that you, BPF members and friends, will keep discussing and experimenting with radical solutions to our systemic greed and violence.

The midsummer news in Berkeley was a painful conflict between the staff of listener-sponsored progressive radio station KPFA and the board of its parent organization, the Pacifica Foundation. After KPFA's popular station manager Nicole Sawaya was summarily fired by Pacifica, programmers Larry Bensky, Robbie Osman, and Dennis Bernstein spoke about her firing and were fired themselves. Things escalated, and to everyone's dismay, armed guards were brought in by Pacifica to "protect station property." In mid-July the station was boarded up and the staff was locked out. An amazing diversity of community people demonstrated and camped outside the station in support of KPFA and its staff.

There is no space here to go into the complexities of the conflict. (For more information, see the website <[www.savepacific.net](http://www.savepacific.net)>.) But KPFA has always been there for BPF, providing airtime to publicize events, interviewing Buddhist activists, and co-sponsoring and broadcasting Thich Nhat Hanh's Berkeley talks. BPF has tried to be there for KPFA in this conflict. We took part in rallies and marches, and we organized silent sit-

tings outside the closed KPFA studios (an expression of support that translates poorly into the medium of radio). As Buddhists we try to practice right speech, but there can be no right speech without free speech.

After three weeks of lockout, KPFA is back on the air, but the struggle for local community control continues.

Well, it's time to say some more about our ongoing staff reorganization. Tova Green and Diana Winston are settling into their new positions. Tova is our development director, overseeing BPF's fundraising and working with chapters. Diana Winston is our program director. She coordinates the BASE program, works with me on international projects, and directs our "futures" process, which is creating a strategic plan for BPF's future work.

The newest member of our staff, Paul LeMay, began full-time work in late August as Administrative Coordinator. He will handle all the financial tasks that Lewis Woods so ably managed, as well as maintaining our computer equipment and helping to design and implement new bookkeeping and database systems. Paul is a Tibetan monk, long affiliated with Lama Zopa and the Foundation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition. Everyone in the office is happy to have a coworker who is equally at home with Dharma and technology.

And Lewis Woods is leaving the BPF staff after nearly six years. He is beginning a graduate program in philosophy, something he has wanted to do for a long time. I know that Lewis will continue to be closely connected to a life of liberation, and to the work of BPF. But still, we won't be working together day by day as we have over these last years. It is impossible to enumerate all that Lewis has brought to BPF, or to convey how different it is today thanks to his passionate participation. This applies to financial policy and procedures, personnel issues, soliciting new memberships, fundraising letters, computer troubleshooting, and so many other administrative tasks. But his real gift to BPF has been to show us how our vision, our actions, and our heart must all intersect for the sake of an engaged Buddhism that really helps things change. Lewis has always been willing to do his homework, and his drive compels me to do my own. I hope he will keep keeping me on my toes. ❖ —Alan Senauke

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLASSIFIEDS

**ANNUAL BPF MEMBERSHIP MEETING!** Sunday, December 12, in the Berkeley area. Dinner and brief reports, followed by a screening of "Rabbit in the Moon," directed by Emiko Omori, a documentary about the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. The film raises questions about history, citizenship, and racism, which we will explore in a post-film discussion. For details, call 510/655-6169.

**HEALING RACISM IN OUR SANGHAS.** How can we make our Western sanghas truly welcoming to people of all ethnic and racial groups? This question is the focus of monthly gatherings for Buddhist practitioners of color and of European American origin, at Empty Gate Zen Center, 2200 Parker St. in Berkeley, on the first Friday evening of each month from 7:00-9:30 PM. Info: 510/464-3012.

**SANGHA FOR BUDDHISTS OF COLOR** meets monthly in the San Francisco Bay Area, for meditation, dharma talks, and mutual support. For information, or to be placed on their email list, contact Lauren Leslie: 415/642-7202 or email: <bebuddha@hotmail.com>.

**THE UNTRAINING** is designed to help you "untrain" the subtle programming of white liberal racism. Put your meditative awareness to work for all beings. Ongoing groups: 510/235-6134.

**PRISON SANGHA.** Zen group in Ohio needs books, tapes, robes, incense, candles, malas. Please send to: Lotus Prison Sangha, c/o Ven. Shih Ying-Fa, Cloudwater Zendo, 21562 Lorain Rd., Fairview Park, OH 44126.

**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 on request. (See inside back cover for address).

**DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE SANGHA.** A sangha for those interested in blending mindfulness practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh with social change work meets weekly in Oakland. Contact Rosa at 510/534-6302.

**HOMELESS AND HOUSED** people meet weekly in Berkeley, CA, for meditation and discussion. Volunteers from Berkeley Zen Center and East Bay Insight Meditation facilitate sessions oriented toward stress reduction. Tea and cookies. Mondays, 7:30-9 PM, off the courtyard on the west side of Dana between Durant and Channing. For more info, call 510/548-0551.

**HELP HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN** by donating needed personal care items—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.

**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.

**CAMBODIAN VIDEO.** "An Army of Peace," 52-minute video in English, about Ven. Maha Ghosananda and the annual Dhammayietra (peace walk) across Cambodia. Send \$25 check payable to "CPR" to: CPR, P.O. Box 60, Bungthong Lang Post Office, Bangkok 10242, Thailand. Proceeds support CPR—the Committee for Peace and Reconciliation.

**BPF VOLUNTEERS NEEDED, WANTED, LOVED.** In particular, we need help organizing our library of books and tapes—Come have a biblioblast! Also, *Turning Wheel* can use your help. Call the office: 510/655-6169.

**INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY WALK IN NORTHERN THAILAND** in support of indigenous people, Dec. 7-17, 1999. Contact the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit, 1314 8th St., Boulder, CO 80302. 303/939/8398, <invoke@dimensional.com>.

**POSITION OPEN:** The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a national interfaith peace organization, seeks a Nonviolence Education & Training Coordinator. Application deadline: Oct. 1, 1999. Send resumes and contact Yvonne Royster: FOR, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960. 914/358-4601, fax: 914/358-4924.

**PRISON CHAPLAIN** is attempting to establish regular Buddhist services and activities. To offer assistance, please contact Friar Ponchie Vasquez, OFM, at North Kern State Prison, P.O. Box 567, Delano, CA 93216, 661/721-2345 ext. 6862, <ponchie@lightspeed.net>.

**INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM** on Buddhism and the Future of Humanity will be held Oct. 29-31, 1999, in Chittagong, Bangladesh. To register or present, contact Dr. Sadananda Misra, Hon. Secretary General, IAFH, 5 Professors' Colony, Talabania, Puri 752002, Orissa, India. Tel/Fax: 91/0/6752-22290.

**PRISON DHARMA NETWORK (PDN)** is now located in Boulder, CO. PDN needs your donations of dollars and used Dharma books to continue making the Dharma available to prisoners. If you are interested in forming local or regional chapters to facilitate contemplative prison ministry, contact: PDN, P.O. Box 4623, Boulder, CO 80306-4623, 303/544-5952, <pdn@indra.com>.

**FOR SALE:** 20-acre organic farm in northern New Mexico. Contact Paul Michel, <ojitopaul@yahoo.com> Web site: www.geocities.com/rainforest/jungle/9202.



**NEVADA DESERT EXPERIENCE** presents Millennium 2000: Walking the Ways of Peace, Religious Action for Disarmament. Dec. 29, 1999-Jan 2, 2000, in Las Vegas and at the Nevada Test Site, including special youth program. Co-sponsored by Fellowship of Reconciliation and other groups. Bring in a new millennium of peace and justice with a candlelight procession onto the test site! For info: Nevada Desert Experience, P.O. Box 4487, Las Vegas, NV 89127. 702/646-4814. <nde@igc.apc.org>

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# BPF CHAPTERS & AFFILIATES

## CHAPTERS

### BOSTON, MA

Rob Weiland  
62 Three Pond Rd.  
Wayland, MA 01778  
508/358-0145

### COLORADO

Bob Knott, 1930 Niagara St.  
Denver, CO 80220  
303/388-0808

### EAST BAY, CA

Sandy Hunter  
510/548-7843

### GREEN GULCH, CA

Nancy Petrin, Jeremy Levie  
1601 Shoreline Highway  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
415/383-3134

### HONOLULU, HI

Karma Lekshe Tsoomo  
400 Hobron Lane, #2615  
Honolulu, HI 96815  
808/944-6294

### LOS ANGELES, CA

Andrew Rasmussen  
1166 N. Canyon Trail  
Topanga, CA 90290-3604  
310/455-3578

### MILWAUKEE, WI

Paul Norton  
3238 N. Shepard Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53211  
414/961-9281

### NEW YORK, NY

Val DuBasky  
463 West St., #G111  
New York, NY 10014  
212/691-2543

### PRAIRIE BUDDHA

Karuna Maduva  
201 Forest Knoll Dr.  
Palatine, IL 60745

### SACRAMENTO, CA

Steve Walker  
3550 Watt Ave. #2  
Sacramento, CA 95821  
916/481-0424

### SAN DIEGO, CA

Ava Torre-Bucno  
POB 33110,  
San Diego, CA 92163  
619/266-2442

### SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Paul Haller, S. F. Zen Center  
300 Page St., S.F., CA 94102  
415/863-3136

### SEATTLE, WA

Rick Harlan, 911 29th St. So.  
Seattle, WA 98144-3123  
206/324-4153

### SONOMA COUNTY, CA

Ella Rozett, POB 646  
Grayton, CA 95444  
707/874-3397

### SPOKANE, WA

Merry Armstrong  
POB 31124  
Spokane, WA 99223-3018  
509/455-3987

### TASSAJARA, CA

Cristina Cruz  
39171 Tassajara Rd.  
Carmel Valley, CA 93924  
408/659-2229

### TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Travis Donoho  
5412 Meg Brauer Way  
Austin, TX 78749-2178  
512/899-2537

### TRIANGLE AREA, NC

Hans Henning  
558 East Road  
Pittsboro, NC 27312  
919/542-6060

### TWIN CITIES, MN

Lee Lewis  
1493 Lincoln Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55105  
612/699-1330

## CONTACTS

### ARCATA, CA

Mark Pringle,  
POB 2085  
Trinidad, CA 95570  
707/677-0429

### CENTRAL IL

John P. Martone  
325 W. Tyler, Apt. B  
Charleston IL 61920-1865  
217/345-3915

### CHICAGO, IL

Dave Reszak  
9125 Mango Ave.  
Morton Grove, IL 60053  
847/966-1475

### CORVALLIS, OR

Meghan Caughey  
25111 Webster Ave.  
Monroe, OR 97456  
541/424-2215

### EUGENE, OR

Patrick Ejo McMullen  
POB 744  
Eugene, OR 97440  
541/607-0772

### GREENSBORO, NC

Daniel Rhodes,  
6 Branch Ct.  
Greensboro, NC 27408  
336/274-7907

### HOUSTON, TX

Wallace Craft  
11260 FM 1488  
Conroe, TX 77384  
409/321-2444

### MARIN COUNTY, CA

Ken Homer, 83B Clark St.  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
415/457-1360

### MID S.F. PENINSULA, CA

Lance Miller  
181 Second Ave., Suite 450  
San Mateo, CA 94401  
650/340-9698

### NEVADA CITY, CA

Daniel Flanigan  
16874 Jackass Flats Rd.  
Nevada City, CA 95959  
916/292-1801

### NEW JERSEY (CENTRAL)

Dodie Murphy  
2 Windingbrook Rd.  
Bordontown, NJ 08501  
609/291-1412

### NEW YORK CAPITAL AREA

Michael Fallarino  
POB 178  
Stuyvesant Falls, NY 12174  
518/799-2118

### NORTHERN OHIO

Matt Wascovich, POB 65921,  
Cleveland, OH 44101  
216/556-2847

### OKLAHOMA

Katherine Williams  
1021 Harding St.  
Seminole, OK 74868  
405/382-5723

### PHILADELPHIA, PA

Barbara Hirshkowitz  
4709 Windsor  
Philadelphila, PA 19143  
215/724-8131

### PORTLAND, OR

Bob Ryan  
1845 Southeast Ladd Ave.  
Portland, OR 97214  
503/234-7713

### RHODE ISLAND, S.E. MA

Rebecca Capolungo-Hartman  
Providence Zen Center,  
99 Pound Rd.  
Cumberland, RI 02864  
401/658-2499

### SANTA FE, NM

Ann Dasburg  
50C LaBarbaria Trail  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
505/982-8179

### VERMONT

Richard Dunworth  
45 Pleasant St. Ext.  
Ludlow, VT 05149  
802/228-2476

### YAKIMA, WA

Douglas C. Ray  
261 Rowberry Way  
Topenish, WA 98948  
509/865-6045

### YELLOW SPRINGS, OH

Eric Lang  
743 W. Sparrow Rd.  
Springfield, OH 45502  
937/327-9491

## AFFILIATES

### AUSTRALIA (MELBOURNE)

Jill Jameson, 50 Daveys Lane  
Hoddles Creek, VIC 3139  
tel: 61-3-596-74-372

### BPF AUSTRALIA (SYDNEY)

Gillian Coote, 31 Bonncfin St.  
Hunters Hill, NSW 2110

### BPF BANGLADESH

Brother Jarlath D'Souza  
St. Joseph's School  
Hsad Gate, Mohammedpur  
Dhaka, 1207 Bangladesh

### BUDDHIST SOCIAL ACTION NETWORK OF B.C.

Valerie Goodale  
#24-710 West 15th St.  
North Vancouver, B.C.  
Canada V7M3K6

### BPF LADAKH

Ven. Bhikku Sanghasena  
c/o Mahabodhi Centre  
POB 22, Leh, Ladakh  
194101 Himalaya, India

### BUDDHIST AIDS PROJECT

555 John Muir Drive #803  
San Francisco, CA 94132  
415/522-7473

### GAY BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP

2236 Market St. #9  
San Francisco, CA 94114  
415/974-9878

### INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ENGAGED BUDDHISTS

POB 19, Mahadthai Post Office  
Bangkok, 10206, Siam  
tel/fax: 662-433-7169

### INEB JAPAN

Suzuki Ryowa  
81 Honyashiki  
Minowa Anjo, Aichi 446  
Japan. 81-566-76-2486

### KARUNA CENTER

Paula Green  
49 Richardson Rd.  
Leverett, MA 01054  
413/367-9520

### LEEDS NETWORK OF ENGAGED BUDDHISTS

91 Clarendon Rd.  
Leeds LS29LY  
West Yorkshire, U.K.  
0113-2444-289

### LESBIAN BUDDHIST SANGHA

Carol Osmer-Newhouse  
510/222-7787

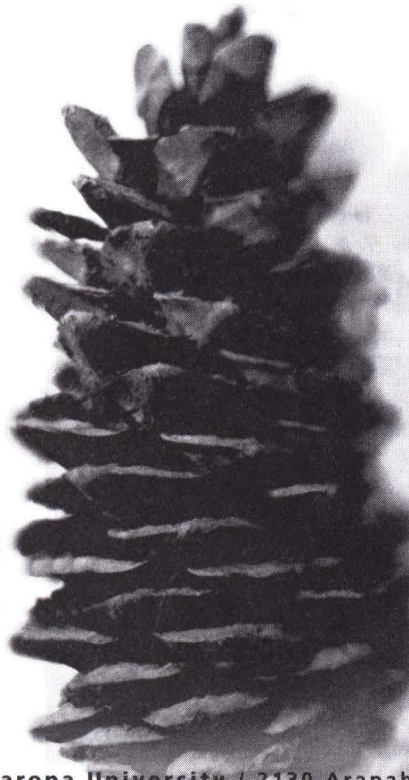
### NETWORK OF ENGAGED BUDDHISTS

Ken Jones, Plas Plwca,  
Cwmrheidol, Aberystwyth,  
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