

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism

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Peace walker in Seattle

YOUTH & BUDDHIST ACTIVISM

**5 Young Buddhists Get Passionate About Liberation
Flamewalkers Walk Their Talk • Hip Hop Poetry**

PLUS: David Hartsough & Joanna Macy on the Nonviolent Peaceforce

BUDDHIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP
P.O. BOX 3470
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Guest Editorial

Loud, withdrawn, idealistic, skeptical, humorous, sexual, overwhelmed, joyous, justice-seeking. We are the collective shadow of the adult world. We are the "Other" that everyone once was.

This society demands that young people be less than we are. From the moment we enter the school system, we are pressured to shut down, be still, stop asking questions, follow the rules, stop dreaming, be "realistic," be productive.

Until we are taught our place in the social system we are a threat. We rage against the system and its injustices. Sometimes we just cry. Other times we educate, overturn, create new possibilities.

Buddhist communities offer an interesting home to young people, alternately welcoming, inspiring, confining and uptight. I've been finding a sometimes-home in various Buddhist communities since I was 16. Often frustrating but offering the treasures I seek: practice, awareness, relief from dualism.

Before I came to the West Coast and found BPF, those communities were always apolitical. During the Gulf War it was fine to send *metta* to the victims of our bombs, but to want to get off my cushion and *do something* showed attachment. There was no place in my sanghas for outrage. I can't count the times a grown-up shook his head at me, saying, "When I was your age I was like that, too" (read: Don't worry, honey, you'll grow out of it).

Fortunately, I've also encountered those people who are always busy being born. My stepdad is a 60-year-old perpetual teenager, using hip hop and Zen in his high school classes. At 81, my grandmother has breakthroughs using imagery and meditation to help kids with disabilities learn to read.

We young people can't keep our spirits alive in this society without the support of elders who know the struggle and are able to keep their hearts and minds open. I realized when I met vipassana teacher Sylvia Boorstein last year that I needed to cry on this grandmother's lap. She offered that lap, didn't try to fix me, just held me and cried with me.

So when Sue Moon asked me what I'd like to tell older people with this editorial, I thought of Sylvia and other friends and came up with this recipe. Here are a few things everyone can do to be an ally to younger generations:

1) Listen to and engage young people. Take us seriously. We are teachers as well as students. Don't be afraid to offer support, but also don't assume we want advice. Ask what is needed to make y/our sangha welcoming to us. Help us take positions of leadership.

2) Cultivate your own wholeness. As a teacher of mine once said, if you can fully feel your own outrage, grief, fear, joy, sexuality, love, then the scapegoats of society—youth, people of color, people with mental illness, seniors and others—don't have to hold those feelings for you.

3) Educate yourself about your identity in our oppressive social system. In what ways are you targeted? How are you privileged? Do you remember the ageism you experienced as a child or teen? Maybe you are suffering from it again as a senior. If you are white and liberal, have you learned about how your "color blindness" can cause suffering? Meditation alone will not teach you these things. Books, groups, and allies are necessary. It's not enough to say, "We're all human," and ignore power differentials.

In closing, I give a deep bow of gratitude to all of you and say farewell, as I will be leaving my position as Development Director of BPF shortly. I have felt respected and heard as a young person here and I know I have made a difference. I am glad to be part of this community that uses spiritual practice to make our world a more humane place. ❖ —*Swan Keyes*

Coming themes for *Turning Wheel*:

Spring '03: **African American Buddhists**. Deadline: December 2, 2002

Summer '03: **Food**. Deadline: March 3, 2003

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



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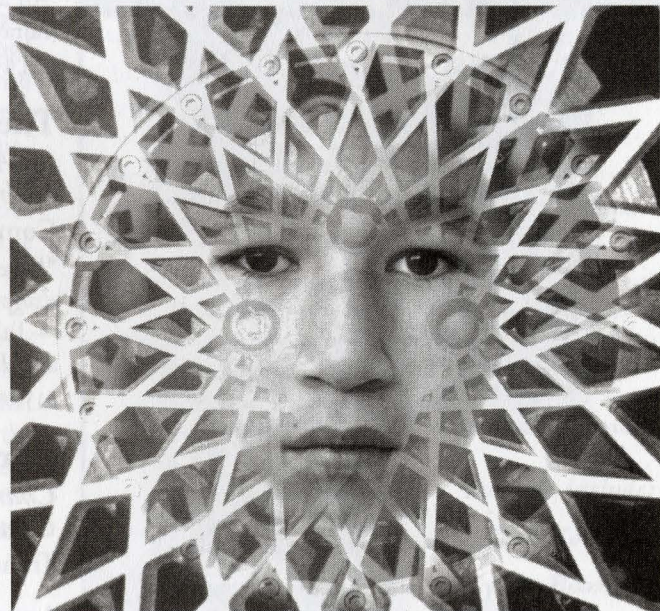
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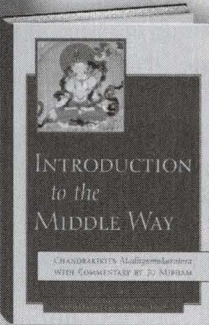
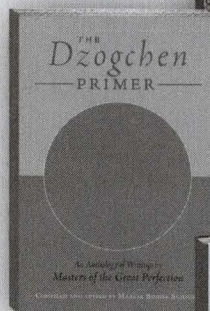
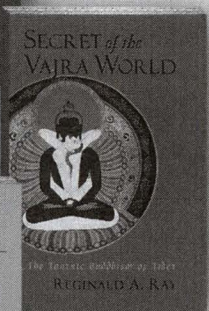
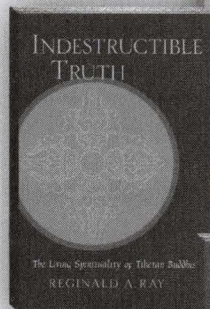
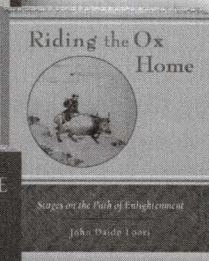
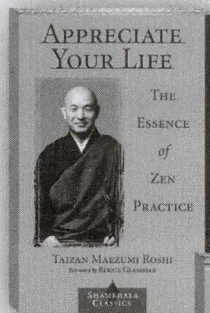
"Buddha-To-Be" by Barbara Parmet

Cover photo by Louise Dunlap.
Hiroshi Kawamata carries a banner
in the Nipponzan Myohoji Hiroshima
Flame Interfaith Pilgrimage.
See article on page 21.

Barbara Parmet has been photographing people in their environments for over 30 years. The "Buddha-To-Be" series combines the faces of teenagers from South Central Los Angeles with natural and architectural patterns and structures. More images of her work may be seen at www.barbaraparmet.com.

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Letters

We welcome your responses to what we print. Write to Turning Wheel, P. O. Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704, or send e-mail to <turningwheel@bpf.org>. Letters may be edited.

Coalition Building

☞ In our Open Letter in the last issue of *Turning Wheel*, BPF-Pioneer Valley (western Massachusetts) urged the Buddhist Peace Fellowship to participate in creating a mass movement to end the "war on terrorism." We encouraged fellow engaged Buddhists to send ideas on steps to build a national movement as members of an organization that synthesizes Buddhist principles with social justice activism. In response, the BPF national office provided several examples of peace-building steps it has taken (see *TW*, Summer 2002, page 7).

We would like to follow up on our letter by summarizing the themes from the responses we received, which were supportive of the call for a collective Buddhist movement for peace. Suggestions included: coalition-building with groups representing people who face social and economic marginalization and oppression; raising awareness of those experiencing socioeconomic oppression at multiple levels; committing to work together and avoid fragmentation; looking deeply into the cultural pull toward dualistic thinking that undermines the overall peace movement (polarization, blame, judgment); educational outreach, such as offering a Buddhist perspective on radio shows discussing national issues or donating tapes of Buddhist teachings to local libraries.

Pioneer Valley BPF has organized an Interfaith Coalition for Peace, with the focus on raising awareness about the U.S. government's stated plan to invade Iraq. We have worked with local faith communities, and we encourage other Buddhist groups and BPF chapters to connect with their local faith and peace organizations. For our first large event, we have invited the western Massachusetts coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee, Jo Comerford, to speak to religious leaders and activists about her recent trip to Iraq and the impact of U.S. policy on the Iraqi people. This event will mark the beginning of an organizing campaign among coalition members.

We wish to thank all those who responded to our previous letter, and we are pleased that we have encouraged discussion and action on these pressing concerns. We hope that those who responded and those who would like to join the dialogue will send their thoughts to *Turning Wheel* directly and that the dialogue can continue in its pages.

—Pioneer Valley BPF

War Tax Resistance

☞ In response to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's appeal for peacebuilding ideas (*Turning Wheel*, Summer 2002), I'd like to raise awareness of war tax resistance, which is practiced by people who feel that peaceful ends are best achieved through peaceful means. War tax resistance involves the withholding of federal taxes in protest of war and military spending. To learn more about this strategy of

civil disobedience, visit the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee Web site, www.nwtrcc.org, or contact them at 800/269-7464.

—Shira Newman, Ithaca, NY

Room for Different Points of View

☞ I was about to send in my donation to BPF to renew my membership when I read the political message enclosed with its appeal [of March 2002], branding my country's present policy toward its enemies as "aggression." I find that term extremely offensive in this context. My opinion is that the United States was attacked on 9/11 by an organization that is worldwide and will attack us again if we do not put it out of business first, and that should we fail and suffer another attack, Buddhists aren't going to be spared either. And that means that Buddhism itself will be injured. With all due respect for the rights of others to hold opinions different from mine, I ask that my opinion also be given room and not be shunned by such marginalizing statements as that.

I call upon BPF not to shrink the organization into one political viewpoint so that it repels all the rest of us from wanting to support it, too, in view of all its other good work. Just as there are many schools of Buddhism in the world, so should there be room for many differing points of view within BPF.

—Name withheld by request

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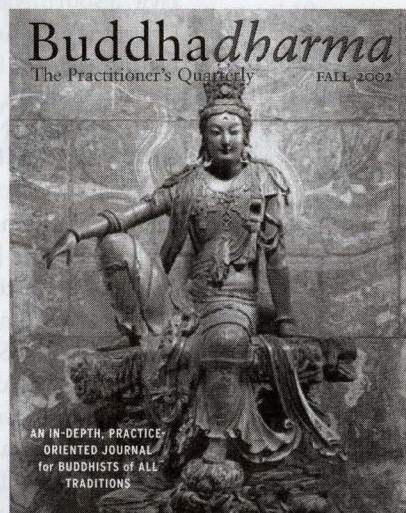
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FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF THE SHAMBHALA SUN.

Indra's Net

In the image of the "jeweled net of Indra" found in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the universe is represented as an infinite network of jewels, each of which reflects all the others.

Iraqis' Long Wait for War

President Bush's mind is set on removing Saddam Hussein from power. Various strategies to achieve this goal have been leaked to the public, including an attack on Baghdad combining air strikes with massive assaults by airborne troops—this on a city where 4 million people live.

Although the Bush Administration says the war on Iraq is part of the campaign to "stamp out terrorism," it has presented no evidence showing Iraq was involved in the 9/11 attacks. In fact, Hussein savagely suppressed Islamists within Iraq, and Osama bin Laden viewed Hussein as "an apostate." The "money trail" leads only to Saudi Arabia.

Serious experts believe Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose no threat to the U.S. or to Iraq's neighbors. Scott Ritter, a Republican and former U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq, says the "'Iraqi threat' is built on a network of lies" and that a U.S. invasion would be principally designed to serve the political ambitions of "a handful of neoconservatives." Iraq's ambassador to the U.N. offered to let weapons inspectors return in exchange for an end to sanctions, but the U.S. government ignored his offer—it wants a "regime change."

All U.S. allies in both the Middle East and Europe (Tony Blair sometimes excepted) oppose an invasion. Within Iraq, Kurdish leaders in the north will not cooperate. Said one: "The Iraq issue won't be solved by military or covert action." The Kurds have bitter memories of U.S. betrayal—first in 1988 when they were gassed by Hussein (then a U.S. friend), and second when they rose up at the end of the Gulf War, encouraged by then-President Bush the senior. And neither will the southern Shi'a Muslims, also massacred by Hussein's troops in 1991, cooperate.

Neither discussions by U.S. government leaders nor media accounts show any concern for ordinary Iraqi men, women, and children who live in fear day by day as they await massive bombing by the earth's most powerful military power.

It is unlikely that an informed American public would want an immoral and illegal war, sure to bring about deadly regional destabilization. Here are ways to help stop it:

- Get involved with a nearby group working to prevent a war with Iraq; the National Network to End the War Against Iraq (650/326-9057; www.endthewar.org) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) (215/241-7170; <askaboutiraq@afsc.org>) will help.
- Get an expert speaker from the Iraq Speakers Bureau (202/543-6176; www.epic-usa.org) to lecture in your sanha or larger community.
- Join the Campaign of Conscience for the People of Iraq (an initiative of the AFSC, FOR, and Pax Christi-U.S.A.), which delivers aid to Iraq, sometimes in violation of U.S. law, and sign its Peace Pledge (www.afsc.org).

- Organize a campaign to flood your representatives in Congress with letters opposing war and asking for diplomatic engagement with Iraq.
- Voices in the Wilderness has pledged to send a Peace Team to Iraq if U.S. attack seems imminent (773/784-8065; www.nonviolence.org/vitw). —A.H.

A Peacemakers' Meeting

Peacemakers from around the world came to the Fellowship of Reconciliation's (FOR) conference, "The Power of Nonviolence: Exploring Alternatives," in New York City in June. Participants included several members of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, an affiliate of FOR.

FOR was founded in 1914 at the start of World War I. Its first campaign was a fight for the rights of conscientious objectors, who could then be sentenced to life in prison. In the years since, FOR has played a leading role in many campaigns of the labor and civil rights movements.

At this year's conference, longtime social change workers mingled with a sizable number of younger activists. Speakers provided many reasons to be both outraged and inspired, and used the illuminating power of personal stories.

Javier Sanchez, from Colombia, told of how his village, San Jose de Apartado, declared itself a "Peace Community" five years ago. Caught between guerrillas and government-sponsored paramilitary troops, villagers have vowed to remain on their own land—and to carry no guns, take no sides, and practice nonviolent resistance. They have remained steadfast despite suffering more than 100 assassinations. FOR and other organizations, responding to villagers' requests, have sent people to accompany and help protect them.

Sami Awad of the Holy Land Trust in Palestine (www.holylandtrust.org) said that more and more young Palestinians are asking him to teach them nonviolent techniques as a way to continue their resistance to the occupation of their land, realizing that suicide bombings do not help their cause.

Pamela Meidell, a longtime BPF member, gave a workshop about the Atomic Mirror, a project that uses the arts to advocate the abolition of nuclear weapons and power. The group has organized pilgrimages to sacred places and



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nuclear sites in the U.S., Japan, and the British Isles, and offered performances, films, and poetry slams focusing on nuclear issues (www.earthways.org/atomicmirror).

Richard Deats, editor of FOR's *Fellowship* magazine, told a story illustrating the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action. In the 1950s, when the Eisenhower administration was considering a preemptive strike against China, FOR organized people to mail small bags of rice to the president along with a note suggesting that rice would be more effective than bombs. When Eisenhower learned that more than 40,000 bags of rice had been received, he commented, "If that many Americans want us to feed them instead of bomb them, we won't bomb."

FOR's current areas of focus include the Campaign of Conscience for the People of Iraq and a Nonviolence Training Program (845/358-4601; www.forusa.org). —Maia Duerr

Nepal's Indentured Girls

There is more to Nepal than magical mountains: 60 percent of its children are malnourished, and almost a third of children age 5 to 14 work outside their home, many in domestic work, one of the "worst forms of child labor" according to the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Many girl domestic workers come from the Tharu ethnic group, an indigenous people of the Terai, Nepal's jungle lowlands. Tharus used to practice shifting cultivation—burning a forest area to plant fields, then moving on after a few years. But settlers from Nepal's hills gradually appro-

priated land and many Tharus ended up as bonded laborers (*kamiyas*), owing the landlord an ever-growing debt passed on to the next generation.

In July 2000, Nepal abolished the *kamiya* system. But former *kamiyas* remain landless and extremely poor, and "selling" young girls continues to provide an indispensable portion of family income, which averages \$170 to \$200 yearly.

Traditionally the mid-January festival of Maghe Sankranti—when Nepalis give thanks for the return of warm weather—was the day when Tharu bonded laborers could free themselves by paying off their debt, though most renewed their bond. Still now, contractors come to the villages and offer parents \$15 to \$70 for one year of their daughter's labor. The girls, some as young as seven, are taken to work for a family in a distant urban area. Bound by their parents' debt, they cannot leave their employer.

The girls complain of being "punished" for mistakes and sometimes sexually abused, but mostly they complain of loneliness. They typically work from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM, are confined to their employers' homes, and often do not see their families for years—parents sign new contracts in their absence at the next Maghe Sankranti.

While the ILO is working with Nepal's government to end domestic child labor, the Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF) is providing immediate help to the children and their families in the villages. NYOF's director, Som Paneru, began by urging the families of one village to bring their daughters home during the January 2000 festival, promising that he would pay for the girls' schooling and compensate the families for lost wages.

That first January, 32 girls enlisted in the program. Paneru did not use cash to replace the lost income. Instead, after learning that alcoholism is rife among men and listening to mothers' worries that the money would go for drink, NYOF offered each family a piglet. Piglets bring good income; they are easy to raise on scraps, and they bear young. Participating families also receive a kerosene lamp, and the girl is given a beautiful Tharu dress to counter the lure of the city, as labor contractors often bring a girl dressed in fancy clothes with them to entice the village girls.

The program now numbers 329 girls, from several villages in a valley with an estimated 2,000 indentured girls. In the Terai, the literacy rate for girls is half that of boys', but NYOF believes that women's education is the surest way to improve families' welfare. The yearly cost of freeing one girl is \$100.

Opposition to the practice of girls' bondage has begun to take root in the community. The best advocates against it are the freed girls themselves. They have hand-lettered and posted signs throughout the villages saying "Send daughters to school" or "This village free from bonded laborers—the pride of our community." —A.H.

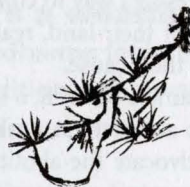
• To help NYOF free indentured girls, see www.nyof.org or call 415/331-8585. ❖

Indra's Net is researched and compiled by Annette Herskovits.

Christopher Ikeda-Nash, CPA

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* IN MEMORIAM *

Two of our leading Western Zen teachers died recently. Zenshin Philip Whalen, 81, passed away in San Francisco on June 26, after a long illness. Kobun Chino Otagawa, 64—teacher at Jikoji in Los Gatos, California, and at Hokogi in Taos, New Mexico—died along with his young daughter Maya in Engleberg, Switzerland, on July 26. Kobun drowned while trying to save his daughter. Both were lost.

Philip Whalen was born October 20, 1923, in Portland, Oregon, and was ordained a priest in 1973 at the San Francisco Zen Center. In later years, after a long life of practice, he was teacher in residence at the Hartford Street Zen Center. To much of the world Philip was known as a poet and novelist, one of the early Beats, and an inspiring writer to the end. His keen intelligence, sharp ear, wit, and big heart will be missed.

Kobun Chino Otagawa Roshi came to the U.S. from Japan in 1967, and assisted Shunryu Suzuki Roshi at Sokoji temple in San Francisco, Tassajara Zen Monastery, and the San Francisco Zen Center. Kobun was an iconoclastic teacher, a mystic, fluid as water. He was one of those unique figures who brought the true spirit of Soto Zen to America at just the moment when we could accept it. This year he was appointed to the World Wisdom Chair at Naropa University in Colorado. He leaves behind his wife Katrine, daughter Tatsuko (7), son Alyosha (3), and two grown children, Yoshiko of Albuquerque, NM, and Taido of Washington state.
—Alan Senauke

Your teacher is not always a person. It can embrace you like morning dew in a field, and you get a strange feeling, "Oh, this is it—my teacher is this field."

—Kobun Chino Roshi
from a lecture titled "Who Is Your Teacher?"

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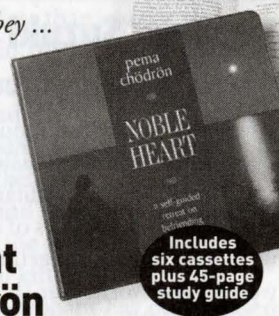
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History

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

by Diane Patenaude Ames

By 1943, fascist thought control seemed pretty complete in Japan. Dissidents were disappearing. Colleges had resident military commanders, some of whom publicly cut off the ears of student protestors, before colleges were shut down altogether. Very few Japanese knew they were losing World War II.

Feeling stifled by all this, a band of young students calling themselves the High Grass Mountain Group gathered in the Rinso-in Temple near Tokyo for discussions of "new directions" for Japan, those being less dangerous words than "peace." Virtually all of these daring youths were under 20. Despite or perhaps because of the fact that some of them had powerful fathers, the authorities did not bother the resident priest, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi (1904–1971), as long as things stayed low-key.

The son of an impoverished country priest, Suzuki left home at the age of 11 to serve a difficult apprenticeship under an especially harsh Soto Zen master, So-on. Eventually, after earning a degree in Buddhist philosophy and undergoing further Zen training, he became abbot of Rinso-in in 1936. Along the way he learned English from a middle-aged Englishwoman named Nona Ransom, and became interested in one day teaching Buddhism to Westerners. However, his dream of going abroad to teach

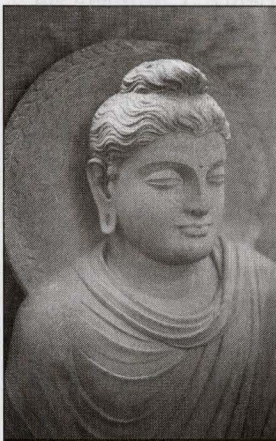
had to be delayed, partly because of Japan's strained foreign relations; the country had been taken over by fascists and was invading the mainland of Asia. Upset by this, Suzuki began writing papers urging, in a quiet way, that Japan work out its problems with other countries in a peaceful, amicable fashion. Young men who liked these essays gathered around him. This was the High Grass Mountain Group. Alarmed, the Soto Zen power structure tried the Japanese solution of pressuring Suzuki to head a patriotic Buddhist organization. He found an equally Japanese solution: he accepted, attended a celebratory banquet, and resigned the next day.

In the meantime, the war raged. Food became scarce. The army quartered troops and Korean slave laborers in Rinso-in. Suzuki and his wife struggled to help refugees from the bombing, including over 60 children who at one point lived in the temple under their care. And when atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, some members of the faction in the General Planning Office in Tokyo that urged sanity and surrender also proved to be members of the High Grass Mountain Group.

By the time the war ended, fascist propaganda had so demonized the Americans that most Japanese were terrified of their arrival. Suzuki held meetings to urge calm, saying that the Americans were human beings too.

For the next few years, he and his wife, though themselves struggling with food shortages, gave what food they could to the hungry Japanese people at their gates. Later, of course, Suzuki would go to America and found the San Francisco Zen Center, but that is another story. ❖

Source: David Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki* (Broadway Books, 1999).



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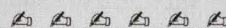
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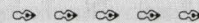
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The Power of Hpoun in Burmese Society

by Min Zin

Burma has been under a repressive military dictatorship for more than 40 years, and urgently needs to undergo political transition. However, traditional notions of power—*hpoun*—rooted in Burmese culture may prolong the country's journey toward becoming a modern democratic state.

Hpoun derives from a Pali word that originally meant “the cumulative result of past meritorious deeds.” Later the term came to be synonymous with power itself. *Hpoun* is not confined to the political sphere but is woven into the very fiber of society, defining the relationship between powerless and powerful.

Burmese people, particularly members of the elite, like to believe that they live in a land governed by the Buddhist virtues of *dana* (generosity), *karuna* (compassion), and *mudita* (sympathetic joy). This idyllic view of Burmese society has induced a dangerous complacency. In particular, the exercise of power within Burmese culture is deeply affected by the notion that the possessors of power acquired it through past acts of merit and thus are deserving of their status. Since *hpoun* is theoretically a “prize” earned through past good deeds, due to the law of *kamma*, it is self-legitimizing. Simply by virtue of possessing power, a ruler has demonstrated that he has the right to it.

The question of moral legitimacy does not arise. As long as the holder of power remains in the ascendancy, whether socially, politically, or economically, he is presumed to possess merit. This underlying assumption forms the basis of all unequal relationships—between, for instance, men and women, haves and have-nots, rulers and the ruled, and dominant ethnic groups and marginalized minorities. Unequal relations, and the repression and exploitation that derive from them, are accepted as “natural.” The oppressed are encouraged not to seek justice but only to support the replacement of one corrupt ruler with another who claims to possess superior *hpoun*. The overall hierarchical power structure is never challenged.

The current regime has made extensive use of ancient *hpoun* symbols in its efforts to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary Burmese (while using the language of realpolitik in its bid to gain acceptance in the international community). An example of this curiously anachronistic mindset—in a regime that claims to be working to establish a “modern, developed nation”—was recently seen in the discovery of an eight-year-old white male elephant in the forests of Arakan State, western Burma. In what to outsiders must have seemed a quaint reenactment of ancient custom, the country's two top-ranking generals sprinkled consecrated water on the auspicious beast during magnificent ceremonies.

In Theravadin Buddhist lore, the discovery of a white

elephant is regarded as nothing less than cosmic endorsement of the reigning king—or, in this, instance, the military regime. The significance of the white elephant is derived from the story of the Buddha's birth. The mother of Siddhartha Gotama, the Buddha-to-be, is said to have dreamed of a white elephant on the eve of his birth—a sign of the child's purity, wisdom, and auspiciousness. Traditional scriptures later described the white elephant as one of the seven jewels of a “universal king.”

In Burmese history, the white elephant has often played an important role as the embodiment of a ruler's *hpoun*. Kings eagerly sought these sacred animals, occasionally presented them as gifts of diplomacy, and even fought wars over them. The current regime invoked this tradition in naming its recent find “*Yaza Gaha Thiri Pissaya Gaza Yaza*”—“Royal Elephant That Bestows Grace upon the Nation.” The regime

Simply by virtue of possessing power, a ruler has demonstrated that he has the right to it. The question of moral legitimacy does not arise.

is not merely exploiting tradition to manipulate a superstitious public. In all likelihood the generals sincerely believe that the elephant is a divine blessing and a sign that their rule is ordained by cosmic law. In this, their perception of reality is not wholly different from that of ordinary Burmese.

This unity in faith plays a significant role in maintaining the social/political status quo in Burma. *Hpoun* as a basis of power, however, is inherently unstable, as one's right to rule must be constantly reinforced. It has also become a source of ideological contention. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's democracy movement, has directly challenged the more fatalistic interpretation of the doctrine of *kamma* that supports the notion of *hpoun*. She emphasizes the importance of present *kamma* to encourage Burmese people to take a more active role in shaping their destiny. However, the majority of Burmese accept the more conventional interpretations that enjoin them to passively accept their “fate.”

The symbol of the white elephant itself may offer the most compelling rebuttal to the principle of *hpoun* that perpetuates the dominance of ascendant groups. The expression “*hsinpyudaw hmipi kyan masote ba ne*” (“don't use a white elephant to take sugar cane”) admonishes against using symbols of merit to pursue selfish goals. In the language of popular common sense, at least, the regime's use of an auspicious symbol for its own purposes is neatly refuted. ❖

Min Zin is a Burmese journalist. At 14, he joined the 1988 pro-democracy movement as a high school student activist. Forced into hiding for nine years, he continued his struggle as an activist and writer and finally left Burma in 1997. He is now assistant editor of Irrawaddy (www.irrawaddy.org), Burma's independent news magazine based in Thailand, and is a commentator for Radio Free Asia. During the past year he has been a visiting scholar at U.C. Berkeley's School of Journalism.

Human Rights

Death by Stoning in Iran

by Judith Stronach

We have stood by for years in frustration, unable to respond as we would like to the abuses against women in Afghanistan. A small window of opportunity is open in Iran, where four women are under sentences to be stoned to death. I say four, but two may have already been killed, since they were sentenced a year ago. The Iranian government conducts these stonings in secrecy and believes itself able to take action with impunity, with no sense of the interconnectedness of life or accountability to anyone. Nonetheless, a window does exist. It is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a party. The covenant forbids cruel treatment that amounts to torture, and death by stoning clearly violates the covenant. The Iranian Penal Code is very specific about the types of stones to be used—they must not be large enough to kill someone with the first or second hit. Thus, the punishment is obviously designed to cause the victim grievous pain before death.

All that is known about the two women who are definitely still alive are their names—Sima and Ferdows B.—and that Ferdows B. will serve 12 years in prison before being stoned. No charges against them or details of their trials have come to light.

Send appeals as quickly as possible. Because the government acts with such secrecy, we cannot be sure if the women have days, weeks, months, or years to live. State your unconditional opposition to the death penalty as the ultimate violation of the sanctity of life. Point out that Iran is a signatory of the ICCPR, which prohibits the inhumane sentence of death by stoning, and ask that the sentences of Sima and Ferdows B. be commuted immediately. Also inquire into the nature of the charges against them and their trial proceedings. Finally ask the fate of Robabeh and an unnamed woman who were sentenced to death by stoning a year ago.

As Buddhists we can tug on the four threads of Indra's Net that are attached to these women, and send our vibrations of concern to a wide web of suffering women. ❖

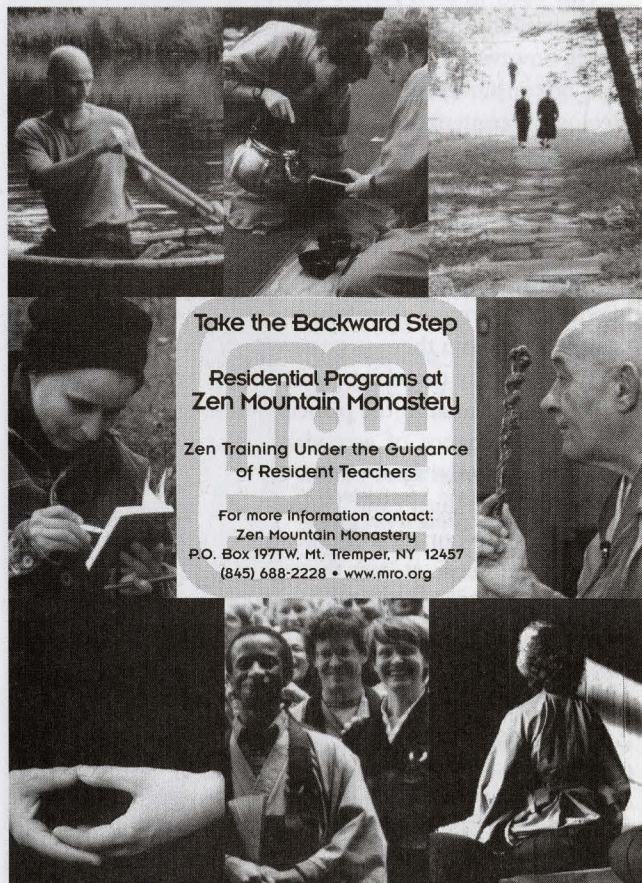
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☞ His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi,
Ministry of Justice, Park-e-Shar, Tehran, Iran.

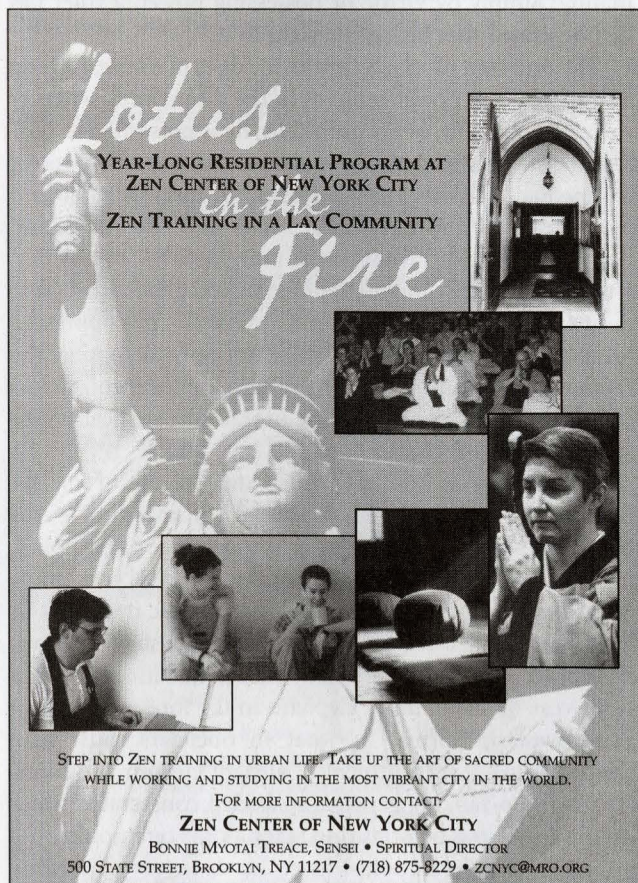
Iran does not have an embassy in the United States, but it may be useful to send copies of your appeals to:

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Family Practice

"May You Be Safe": Meditations on Protecting Our Families

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

May you be safe and protected from harm, both inner and outer.

May you be strong and healthy.

May you be peaceful and happy.

May you live your life with joy and ease.

—Meditation on *metta* (lovingkindness)

I hadn't intended to fall asleep but I was so exhausted I did, and when I woke, our apartment was quiet. Groggy, I lay on my two-and-a-half-year-old son's bed, trying to figure out how long I'd been napping, when suddenly I remembered that I'd left the back door open. Where was Joshua?

Any parent who thinks she has lost her child knows that moment, a potent jolt of anxiety and horror, mixed with self-blame: *Oh my God, I've lost my child, and it's my fault.* The only thing that kept me from falling apart was the knowledge that Josh was a fairly cautious child who didn't play with the knobs on the gas stove. If I told him an activity or place was "dangerous," he would usually avoid it.

But a quick search of our small one-bedroom flat confirmed that Josh was gone, and so I ran down the back steps, searched the back yard, and chased up and down the block in our Oakland neighborhood, barely able to croak my son's name as I searched for him. Everything was quiet and serene—the facades of the neighbors' houses suddenly seemed infuriatingly smug, doors and windows kept shut by sensible people who, unlike me, did not allow their children to disappear onto the streets where they could be abducted, raped, and murdered.

Call the police, I thought, but when I got back home, something tugged at my "mom radar." Again I ran around the small space, yelling frantically and rummaging through the closets. Then I stopped. Ignoring the despair that filled my heart, I stood quietly for a long moment, tuning in to my deeper animal senses beyond sight and hearing. Josh was still breastfeeding; our bond was very strong, and my body told me that he was nearby.

As usual, the bedroom was a huge mess. Piles of toddler toys, clothing, books, and papers covered the floor. Digging into a heap of dirty clothes at the foot of the bed where I'd fallen asleep, I found my son, slumbering as soundly as a hibernating animal covered with dry leaves in its winter burrow. What I felt at that moment was beyond description: the passionate heart of the world restored and whole.

May you be safe and protected from harm, both inner and outer.

So how do we create safety in this inherently dangerous world? How do my husband Chris and I keep our son, now 13, safe from getting beaten up in the locker room at school; from HIV-AIDS, crack cocaine, and "ice" (methamphetamine); or from heedless drivers on the expressway when he gets his driver's permit?

The simple answer is: we can't. Zen teacher Norman Fischer, who has two sons, once told me in *dokusan* (teacher-student face-to-face meeting) that parenting was knowing when to surrender control. "Your son will grow up and go out to risk his life," Norman told me, "and if you do not let him do this, he will hate you."

May you be strong and healthy.

When a sick cat began visiting us regularly, I warned against feeding her unless we were ready to take care of her. Josh had been wanting a pet for a long time, but because we live in such a small space, we had resisted getting a cat or dog.

"Are you really ready to take on this responsibility?" I asked.

Josh, who was nine years old at the time, made a list of the potential challenges: "cat figt. defekasion. food & water. scaring birds. fleas." He considered deeply, then said he was ready to deal with any problems.

I pointed out that the cat apparently had a kidney disease and might not live very long.

My son recoiled. By then he had lost two grandparents, and he had experienced the sorrow of terminal illness and the death of loved ones. "Oh," he said, "in that case, we can't keep her."

"Look, honey," I replied, "there are no guarantees. Even if Butterscotch was in perfect health, she could get run over by a car. We can only love her, let her be free to live naturally, and treasure her each day that she is with us." And the same is true for you, and Dad, and me, I refrained from adding.

We sat together in silence. Finally Josh's face relaxed. "OK," he said.

May you be peaceful and happy.

The only difference between me and a woman who has lost her family to war, disease, or malnutrition is that, so far, I've been luckier. I busy myself with household tasks. The cat snoozes contentedly on the windowsill, sun glinting on her fur. Deep below our old house, tectonic plates grind against one another along the Hayward Fault. Moment by moment, no guarantees possible. May I live my life with joy and ease. May you live your life with joy and ease. ❖

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Jukai at San Quentin

by Alan Senauke

The Dharma is a persistent blossom. Even in the brick-stone-steel world of San Quentin, it flowers through cracks in the concrete. On a warm Sunday evening in late February, six men from San Quentin's Buddhadharma Sangha received the precepts—what we call lay ordination (*jukai*)—from Seido Lee DeBarros and Myogen Steve Stucky, Zen priests in the San Francisco Zen Center family. Diana Lion and I from BPF were privileged to witness this turning of the wheel.

On this night the Dharma not only flowered but bore fruit. Six new Buddhas came forth in an unlikely place.

At twilight, 20 prisoners came across the courtyard to the prison chapel. As the sun faded, birds settled, singing loudly in a small palm tree. Together we entered the chapel and set up a floating zendo for the evening, as these men have been doing every Sunday evening for two and a half years. The zendo itself is a low rectangular room, maybe 20 by 40 feet. The fluorescent lights, worn linoleum, and celotex ceiling tiles convey a dingy 1950s aura, nothing holy at all. There are two doors into this room, with a handpainted sign over each door. One sign reads "Community of Al-Islam"; the other, "Congregation Beth Shalom." In this room, each week, the men set up orderly rows of cushions, with nice thick zabutons that they made themselves. They roll out an elegantly crafted altar, also made by prisoners. So, in the course of a week, this shabby space serves as a refuge for three faiths. (The Christians use the main chapel next door.) The irony is that the very scarcity of prison resources gives rise to this unique interfaith reality: three religious traditions sharing a common place of worship.

On Sunday evenings the men sit zazen together, do walking meditation, and hear and discuss the Dharma in a way that offers freedom even in the midst of captivity. The group is diverse: Anglo, Asian, Black, Latino. They tend to be of middle age, because these are men with long sentences, many of them lifers.

Tonight, six men, led by an attendant from Green Gulch Zen Center, entered the zendo chanting in low voices: "*Om Namu Shakamuni Butsu*" (I take refuge in Shakyamuni Buddha). These men have been mainstays in the sangha. It would not exist without them. They bowed and took places kneeling—six solid-looking men, with graying hair and mustaches, wearing freshly laundered prison "blues."

The same ordination ceremony takes place, and has taken place, in many settings, this ritual of taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and receiving the 16

Bodhisattva precepts. It's the same ceremony that I went through.

Each ordainee received a lineage document with his own Buddhist name. The names created by Lee and Steve, each consisting of four Sino-Japanese characters, expressed some personal quality they saw in the man before them, for example: "Seigen Joshi—Vow Manifesting/Silent Lion," "Jinryu Eishu—Benevolent Dragon/Endless Effort," and "Shingyu Fudo—Faithful Buffalo/Universal Path." These names convey strength of character and aspiration to practice.

This is not what the world expects from longtime prisoners. Each of these men had been inside for nearly 20 years for violent crimes. Five of the six were Vietnam veterans. They had done harm in their life and were serving hard time for their actions. The karma of violence and the retribution of prison life might have hardened them. Yet as they made their vows and received their new name and a *wagesa* (a ritual garment like a long collar) made by the Green Gulch Sangha, their eyes filled with tears. So did mine. And while solemn and joyful vows were exchanged, a gospel choir in the chapel across the way sang their hearts out.

Three years ago, after months of behind-the-scenes collaborative work by prisoners and Diana Lion of BPF's Prison Project, some of these men in San Quentin wrote to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship asking for sponsorship of a Buddhist practice group. Such a group in this place had once seemed unlikely, but on this night the Dharma not only flowered but bore fruit. Six new Buddhas came forth in an unlikely place. I'm reminded of the ancient and encouraging words of Zen master Dogen:

Those who in past lives were not enlightened will now be enlightened. In this life, save the body which is the fruit of many lives. Before Buddhas were enlightened, they were the same as we. Enlightened people of today are exactly as those of old.... Repenting in this way, one never fails to receive profound help from all Buddhas and Ancestors. ❖

I first met the men in the San Quentin sangha through the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), a Quaker-based experiential program with an emphasis on unlearning and healing the violent tendencies we all carry inside ourselves. I could not then have predicted that our naive ideas about starting a sangha would bear so much fruit. Nor could I have imagined the beauty of this evening. I was incredibly moved to witness this ceremony. Many people and circumstances contributed to getting the group started. Now, unfortunately, AVP has been discontinued from San Quentin, and many other changes have taken place. And yet, the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha keep rolling on—thanks to the steadfast leadership of the two teachers, and the hearts of the visionary men inside. I bow to you all. ❖

—Diana Lion

Passionate About Liberation

A Roundtable Discussion with Five Young Buddhists

In June 2002, Aran Watson, consulting editor for this issue of *Turning Wheel*, brought together five Buddhist activists in their twenties to talk about what socially engaged Buddhism means to them. They talked late into the night, in the community room of the Berkeley Zen Center. (See page 20 for biographical notes on the participants.)

Aran: The youth voice in Buddhism in this country right now is really missing. This issue of *Turning Wheel* is on youth, so let's make our voices heard.

Kenji: Let's start off with a basic introduction from everybody. How do we bring together our interest in Dharma and our social justice work? What are we passionate about as young Buddhist activists? How do our various identities and histories, like race, class, and gender, influence our concerns and commitments?

Aran: I'm 24 and I was born and raised in Oakland. I started practicing Buddhism in high school—I found out about it through a high school teacher. A few years earlier, I had started taking a passionate interest in social justice, first in my community, and from there looking out at the world.

I was in a BPF BASE program when I was 17, and that was the first time I ever did sustained Buddhist practice. From the beginning, what drew me to Buddhism was the ideal of the bodhisattva. When I learned about Kwan Yin, it just totally blew me away. It seemed inconceivably amazing that the goal of any practice would be the liberation of all beings.

I practice at a fairly traditional monastery. It's where I learned about Buddhism. It's in the Chinese Chan tradition, although it's mostly a Vietnamese community that supports the temple. Because that was my context, I was never fully comfortable in the Buddhist centers where the other "engaged Buddhists" and BPF people I was meeting were practicing. I felt a wedge between my Buddhist practice and theirs. And on the activist side, I didn't feel that what was being done in the engaged Buddhist world was really as full-hearted a commitment to the liberation of beings as I wanted. So on the one hand I found myself hanging out with more political types; and on the Buddhist side, hanging out with people at the temple who were intensely delving into practice. I never found the space for myself where "socially engaged Buddhism" was happening. And so, over the years, I've been trying to bring them together for

myself. Mostly that's happened through meeting other young people. There's a *youngness* that enhances my practice tremendously.

Veronica: I'm 24. I'm from San Francisco, and now I live in Berkeley. I'm not exactly sure when I started practicing but I feel like I've had some Buddhist inspiration in my life always. I have always identified as an artist, and for me Buddhism is part of being an artist. Practice is definitely something that is daily, and important, and it has been for several years. So has social justice. Buddhism, art, and social justice are why I'm here, and for me, none of those things has a separate history.

Steven: I'm 21. I'm from Long Island, New York. I guess I'm bicoastal now. I'm spending time on the East Coast right now, but I live primarily in Berkeley, California. Throughout my childhood and growing up I pretty much maintained the same core values of truth and justice and curiosity and creativity. At the same time that those ideals were ripening, I found myself falling into anarchism, activism, and Buddhism, and they were all connected for me.

The summer before my senior year of high school, I went out to Berkeley and caught the bug. When I came back to New York, for school, I was different. I immediately started spending a lot of time with local grassroots activist groups, and I started looking for books about Buddhism.

So my Buddhist practice was a little lopsided at first, in the sense that I was trying to find out what Buddhism was more than actually practicing it. Subsequently, I realized I had been practicing pretty much all my life even though it hadn't been explicit.

I always felt a kind of a schism between activism and Buddhism, because I found that in a lot of activist communities spirituality was almost taboo. My practice at that time was very internalized, because I didn't see how Buddhism related to the activist things I was involved in.

When I went out to Berkeley three years ago, I went down to the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery where I met Aran and Veronica. I plugged into a small committed group of kids for whom the values of justice and the Dharma were completely linked and inseparable. This was an important step in my development as an engaged Buddhist.

My whole life has been building bridges. And that's what I'm passionate about: building bridges between

The Buddhism I'm hooked into, which is BPF and the Buddhism of privileged white people, is going to fade away if it's not also relevant to the people I'm dealing with in the Tenderloin.

things that people see as being splintered and separate. I've been bridging the urban and the rural, the ecological and the social, the spiritual and the secular—for me these things exist to enrich one another. And so that's what I'm committed to: struggling with these seemingly polar opposites until they become one thing.

I was drawn to practice because I wanted to find some sort of sustainable activism—I had seen so many activists in my parents' generation just burn themselves out.

Phelps: I'm 26. I'm living in Santa Cruz, and for the last three years I've been involved in formal monastic practice in California, and advocacy work in Asia.

I was brought up by activists in Sacramento who were doing work in connection with Central American politics in the '80s. In college, I went on a Buddhist studies program to India and just fell in love with Buddhism. I also did some research on the political activities of Tibetan nuns in the Tibetan/Chinese conflict. When I learned that their spiritual tradition was also an inspiration for radical political action it felt familiar to me; it was similar to the Central American liberation theology I had grown up with. So it felt like a coming home.

Kenji: I'm 25. I call myself a 1.5 generation immigrant because I was born in Japan and came here at several months old. I grew up in New Jersey; my mother's Japanese, and my father's from Taiwan, which is an interesting combination in itself since Japan colonized Taiwan. Lately I've been thinking of myself in the context of immigrant life, and how that's related to things like colonization and globalization. I'm kind of a Third World person with U.S. privileges.

Buddhism skipped a generation in my family. My father and mother are both Roman Catholic. My Taiwanese grandmother is a Buddhist, although if you asked her what kind she wouldn't be able to tell you because in Taiwan, Buddhism is such a part of life that it's not really explicit, in the same way that Christianity is here. My grandmother and I can't communicate—we don't speak the same language—but I feel a connection to her because I've turned to Buddhism.

After moving to California, I was kind of a New Ager, a pseudo-hippie type, and I was pretty apolitical. It wasn't until I saw Lee Mun Wah's film *The Color of Fear* that I started breaking out of that apathy, angrily, and began looking at what it means to be Asian in this country. That started my whole trip on political and social issues.

At the same time I got introduced to vipassana through Goenka's lineage. In that lineage you can't

just try a 30-minute sitting and then go home. If you want to try it, you have to go on a 10-day course, or nothing. It changed my life. Before that, I had started a lot of things I couldn't finish, and going through this 10-day course from beginning to end, all on my own, and working through a bunch of shit really changed how I saw myself.

It wasn't until I did the Youth BASE program that Aran started—and where I met Steve—that social justice and Dharma really came together for me.

For the last five years, my main social justice concern has been racial justice, not just in this country, but globally. That's what I'm passionate about.

Phelps: What I'm passionate about is expansive definitions of practice and activism—defining my practice to include activism and defining my activism to include practice. I was drawn to practice because I wanted to find some sort of sustainable activism—I had seen so many activists in my parents' generation just burn themselves out to the core and create really big messes for themselves and the people they cared about. So I was dead-set on coming up with a way of being an activist that meant taking care of people on a very local level in terms of family and home, and not just on a global level. And this radical practice of sitting and facing oneself gave me a chance to do that. I also noticed that a lot of the activists who have been able to pull it off historically have been religious figures, and so that was a big lesson to me as well.

Veronica: I've also been thinking a lot about sustainability. In college I studied Gandhi and self-reliance, and I definitely consider Gandhi to be one of the main sources of inspiration in my life. When we look at things in terms of sustainability, we make connections between social, ecological, and personal justice issues.

At the same time, Buddhism is about impermanence. Practice feels like a deeper breath. Okay—things are being lost in the world. Things are not allowed to sustain themselves—things that I consider to be “good” things. Yet at the same time, the foundation of everything is impermanence, and that really opens up space around the issues that I'm passionate about. That's why I'm really excited about Buddhism and social justice.

Aran: I'm really passionate about liberation. Bottom line, it's all I care about. I find Buddhist practice to be so damn radical—that's why it really got me. I tend to jump around from one thing to the next, but as soon as I ran into Buddhism, I knew instantly: I can't ever bounce off this and go anywhere else. This will always be the root of anything else I look at from now on.

The suffering in this world is so real. Just being a young white kid in mostly black Oakland, it was all

around me. I became passionate about looking at racism within myself and society; looking at the effects both on people of color and on me and how I look at the world. Anywhere I've looked, Buddhism was constantly opening things up. It never lets me settle. Liberation is possible and it's up to you!

When I first began practicing, I lived in a monastery for a year and I really wanted to become a monk, because it just seemed so radical, that full commitment. But I realized that I was running away from some things. So then, looking at the world, I wanted to fully throw myself into some sort of revolution. Revolutionaries look like they're giving their lives to things, and that's what I wanted to do.

But then there was the Dharma. Let's say we change the whole structure of the world. Has the mind changed? As revolutionaries we should care about that. Are people liberated or not? There is an immaturity to my youthful vigor, but these questions are really alive for me right now.

Veronica: I appreciate what you're saying because there have often been revolutions in history that just replaced one agenda with another.

One of my goals in my life is to start a place in which people will constantly be looking for better and better ways to practice agriculture, but often, especially in agriculture, people are stuck in old habits. People should always be learning more and pushing themselves. I've been turned off by revolutionary people or agendas because they often present a closed door, but when you talk about liberation, you enter into infinity with what you're doing.

Kenji: Yes, you can have a revolution and still be left with the old habits. This is why Buddhism and activism are such an important combination for me. I've spoken to Buddhist practitioners who have the Dharma down but don't know shit about social problems. They don't have an understanding of why there are so few people of color in their all-white center.

My dream would be to go on a retreat where you'd meditate, then you'd have a class on Marxism, then you'd meditate again, and then you'd have a racism untraining. You'd go on like that for a week and come out liberated on all levels!

Aran: I feel the Dharma is often much more radical than Buddhism. Wherever I settle, the Dharma unsettles me and turns me. It's the most unsettling thing I have in my life. And that's why I've come to trust it more than anything. But sometimes Buddhism—especially the white convert Buddhism in this country—often avoids looking at issues, particularly of race and class.

The Dharma just goes everywhere, and sometimes I actually seek it outside of Buddhism, because

Buddhism sometimes settles for less than the Dharma. Sometimes I'll meet someone who is not a Buddhist but who is still an incredible Dharma teacher.

*When people equate spirituality with being nice,
it creates a culture of really annoying,
boring people.*

Phelps: For me, a politicized perspective and a Dharma perspective challenge each other to deepen and deepen and deepen your examination. Neither of them lets me off the hook easy. It's like: "You're not getting out of this alive, Phelps!" When I came into Dharma practice, I was comfortable with my political identity—I really thought I had that shit figured out. The Dharma gave me a whole new bag of tricks to work with.

One of my biggest influences recently has been the idea of Kwan Yin never abandoning any being. What does that mean politically in my life? It means talking to the guards at San Quentin like real people. It means interacting with my incredibly conservative boss. It means that I cannot allow myself to have a black-and-white picture of political reality.

In the last few months, I've been working with traditional Buddhist precepts and adapting them to political life: What does it mean not to slander? Can you go a day without slandering the people who are in the White House? Can I?

Steven: If you're really engaging with your practice, there isn't any point where you would be exclusive of other beings. The most radical person any of us could ever be is the person who's always completely connected. Liberation is both the means and the end. You can't cut off spirituality and you can't cut off injustice.

Kenji: Even though I try to develop compassion and a nondualistic mind, some days I just have to be angry at somebody. Some days I just have to let it out, and to me Dharma practice is about doing that without judgment toward myself. When people equate spirituality with being nice, it creates a culture of really annoying, boring people. In diversity work with people who consider themselves both politically liberal and spiritual, I often find the judgmental assumption that being "negative" or angry is counterproductive. If I'm feeling that judgment in an all-white environment where I've just experienced racism, this niceness is oppressive.

As an Asian American in a racist culture, I've been trained not to speak up. So what's the most skillful thing for me to do to combat oppression? Sometimes the most skillful and liberating thing is to be angry. The edge for me right now is trying to develop wrathful compassion.

Veronica: I really don't want to ever be violent. On a very basic level, my life is not as nonviolent as I would like it to be. I don't want to drift off into spiritual lala land, but when I consider "compassionate wrath" there's a fear that violence would come up.

We're talking about youth and we're talking about suffering, and we're asking what Buddhism has to do with it all. We're sort of deciding, right?

Aran: We've been throwing around the word "liberation" a lot, and I see it in two ways: there's liberation as something very active and vital—HAH!—and there's liberation as a letting go.

I'm doing youth work in the Tenderloin in San Francisco, and for these kids, there's so much oppression and so much shit to push through. Police brutality affects every day of their lives, their doors get beaten down, their parents get beaten up. What's Dharma in that situation? Things need to change and the river's not flowing in the direction of liberation.

On one hand, there's the voice that speaks up and says, "No! No more!" That's the speak-up quality of liberation. YEAH! I got to do that work.

On the other hand, I need to include all beings. How do you stand up to the police in a way that sparks their own desire for liberation, not in a way that cuts it off? I'm watching myself and seeing how much I learn by just letting go and opening.

I'm looking for practices in Buddhism. For me, being a young Buddhist in this country means dealing with racism and patriarchy. That's my oppression and that's my karma, and I want to free myself from it. Where are those practices? Who's going to teach me?

The Buddhism I'm hooked into, which is BPF and the Buddhism of privileged white people, is going to fade away if it's not also relevant to the people I'm dealing with in the Tenderloin. Not because Dharma is irrelevant, but because the way that it's couched is going to be irrelevant.

Kenji: Usually the retreats I go on are mostly white people, but the last 10-day retreat I went on was closer to L.A. and there were a lot of different kinds of people there. When I'm on retreat I'm often working out all these ideas and projections I have about people based on the way they look or act. The people who were at that retreat were not, in my stereotyping mind, people I'd think would go to a meditation retreat, if I saw them walking down the street in Oakland. I worked on my stereotypical projections and found it was so rewarding to be meditating with a

truly diverse group of people. You can really work through a lot of shit, just sitting with people you're not familiar with and have ideas about.

Veronica: I've never heard truer Dharma than from a woman who lived in crack houses, and was so, so, so addicted, and she got herself out of the situation, and now she's working with the same population. I go into work and listen to her for an hour, and that's my Dharma talk for the week.

Look at the history of Buddhism. Buddhism goes to all these different places and it mixes with what's already there and whoever is interested in it, and then it becomes that thing.

So, we're talking about youth and we're talking about suffering, and we're asking what Buddhism has to do with it all. We're sort of deciding, right? We're seeing Dharma where we find it, and we're bringing it into our practice. Buddhism isn't necessarily going to be locked in a tower somewhere. That's exciting.

Steven: The whole concept of awakening in Buddhism is a real thing. Vast numbers of middle-class Americans are just oblivious, wrapped up in a life of consumption, chasing after one goal or another, and disconnected from the poverty and devastation that's right next door to them. The main application of the Dharma is to bring people out of that oblivion.

That's where I came from. I came from suburbia and I came from being under a spell. I was living with contradiction: an African American kid from Jamaican immigrant parents, living in a very, very privileged community of mostly Jewish people. Those contradictions forced me to crack something open and start to wake up. We ourselves have a role in making everything relevant.

That woman who had been a crack addict woke up, and privileged people can wake up, too, and use their access and their opportunities to help spread awakening and move forward towards liberation.

Phelps: One of the things that's distinct about this 20-something generation and younger is that we came to the Dharma within a framework of a heavy articulation around identity politics. That was not true for the previous generation. So we bring identity politics into our practice of the Dharma right at the outset—and that's going to automatically contextualize the questions that we also bring to the Dharma: What does Dharma say about privilege? What does Dharma say about issues of racial justice and socioeconomic justice? These questions are not tagged on years and years later, after our practice is settled. That freshness is unique to this generation.

Veronica: I want to look at gender in Buddhism. I definitely feel shut out of many Buddhist things that I want to do because I'm female. At the same time, I'm not going to turn my back on Buddhism because of that.

Phelps: Before I took refuge with a Tibetan Rinpoche in India, I asked him about gender. I said, "I don't know if I can take refuge in this tradition that doesn't affirm part of my identity. And I'm not willing to let go of this anger because I think it's wisdom-creating anger. What are you going to say to that?"

He said to me, in a diplomatic way, "I think you can do more for the liberation of beings if you come inside the tradition and work toward gender equality within the tradition rather than outside the tradition." I like that view.

One of the important points of practice for me has been around equity issues for nuns. I was living and working in a nunnery in Dharamsala for several months and I saw the hand-to-mouth conditions of the nuns living there, except for the nunneries that are showcased by Western sponsors. My feminist politics have been applicable in traditional institutions of Buddhism, and I see that Buddhism is open to change.

Grassroots political movements have been happening within socially engaged Buddhist circles in the Third World, and I wonder if those teachings are more pertinent to our lives than the teachings that are broadcast by some of the Dharma centers in places like Marin County in California.

Aran: I've read documents of conversations that Vietnamese students were having in the 1930s that I think are just as pertinent to us. That's our sangha.

Phelps: Exactly! A dream I have is to gather up those kind of teachings in some way that helps.

Kenji: I'm an Asian American, and at the same time, I'm a U.S. citizen. That raises all kinds of questions for me. I can't claim to have roots in some sort of Third World liberation movement, and I benefit from global U.S. imperialism. With that privileged context, what does it mean for me to go to Asia to acquire knowledge of Buddhism?

Steven: Part of the liberation is in dealing with privilege itself. In order to awaken and see beyond the trance we're all in, you need to leave America sometimes. Or at least leave the community you feel comfortable in. It's when I'm traveling that I'm most mindful; that's when I realize that America is a place of privilege. There's a delicate balance between having the privilege to go trotting around the world, and really being able to understand: "Oh, the whole world isn't like America!"

Aran: What's underneath is the intention to transform. Without that intention you can travel back and forth a million times and it doesn't make any difference. I want to tattoo it on my forehead so that when I look in the mirror, I remember, "Oh, right. I'm a living being amongst living beings. And what are we all doing here?"

*In order to awaken and see beyond the trance
we're all in, you need to leave America sometimes.
Or at least leave the community you feel
comfortable in.*

Steven: Yeah, so it's not just an imperialistic, "How do we go in and use our privilege to liberate other people?" I want consciousness of privilege to be a mutually liberating force for change on both ends. Whether you're going from north Berkeley into East Oakland, or going from America into Africa, it becomes a mutually liberating process—other cultures promote the liberation of our sangha here just as much as the reverse.

Kenji: A question that interests me is how can older Buddhist activists be better allies to us? There is a generation gap. The institutions of U.S. convert socially engaged Buddhism are run by a different generation than mine, and I'm trying to figure out how to bridge that gap. I'm interested in the issues they're working on, but they're not close to my heart in the way anti-racism work is. And vice versa. Is that gap going to be bridged in the future of socially engaged Buddhism?

Steven: Both generations need to be allies and to help each other. The younger generation is the up-and-coming one, the one that's about to take more of a leadership role in socially engaged Buddhism, and so we need to really solidify our community and make our values more defined. Those older generations have more weight because they all feel connected to the same core. Our role is to come together as allies until we rise to the fore.

Aran: Now I'm on the board of directors of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, which in the past I imagined as some secret room containing the master puppeteers of engaged Buddhism. And who are these people? They're totally amazing people who are super humble, practicing really hard, and really committed to social and political change. We're all very different in the room, but we have an affinity of seekingness and humbleness.

What makes that relationship between me and older Buddhists so harmonious and mutually beneficial is the respect. Youth gets slighted a lot more often

That explains it all

The lion's roar of impermanence:
 Infirm-ative-ness gives rise
 to the squeals and yelps
 what's felt
 is the hand that's dealt
 with an icy black glove
 no love,
 build ya foundation on a bass
 but in this case earthquakes
 could leave waste displacement,
 shattering the basement
 I'm basting up that old mud flow
 fissury sauce again my friend
 along with some nuclear fission,
 envision implosions:
 inward motions deliver
 the style that's bigger,
 the one with out-flows he might
 have vigor but the trigger
 only does so much,
 what will he do without his crutches
 he clutches the arrow
 and ends up with his fish in the barrel,
 but the one with no out-flows:
 imploding all-knowing
 oceanic gigantic
 not coming not going.

(Chorus)

I hope it all, don't fall apart now,
 It already did, that's why ya born, how'd
 It all get like this, Brother Fangus?
 Unravel your fist, that explains it all (repeat)

the wolf cries for union of disillusion
 and the neumenon
 the full moon shining of chances and rampant transience
 the light dances
 across the field of this unwieldy medley
 of full-hearted inevitably lost in the
 cess
 of pride epithets? but no regrets
 just howling my pains at the wolf tribe's sphere
 no time for fear; see hear,
 see here,
 no time for fear; see hear, see here,
 I hope it all, don't fall apart now,
 it already did, that's why you're born how'd
 it all get like this Brother Fangus
 unravel your fist that explains it all
 I remember the days of Dr. Rollumfat
 hoodlums and ego-falls

(Chorus) ❖

—Max Track

than older folks recognize. And I hold myself accountable for needing to respect elders, too, and what they've learned.

Often the words of young people aren't considered valid. Sometimes I want to talk about an issue that doesn't sound Buddhist to an older Buddhist. They say, "Oh, *that's* not Buddhist." But that's bullshit. When the respect's there, it's such a wonderful relationship.

As for how we young people can become better allies to each other, I would say to all young people and to myself, let's keep practicing, seriously and with dedication. That's what will ripen the community.

Steven: *Woo-hoo!*

Kenji: I think Dharma practice can be reduced to one thing, which is something some young people say to each other—though it sounds cheesy now—and that's "keeping it real." ❖

Veronica Bollow graduated from U.C. Berkeley two years ago. She's an independent video artist and an agriculturalist, and she practices at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

Phelps Feeley is currently assisting with the Antioch College Buddhist Studies program in Bodh Gaya, where she is deeply engaged with Buddhist youth. She has trained and practiced in both formal and socially engaged ways in Asia and at the San Francisco Zen Center.

Steven Kelly volunteers in underprivileged communities of color, works for social/ecological justice, and independently publishes his writings on how Buddhism, activism, and the "do-it-yourself" punk rock community contribute to his pursuit of liberation. He is an undergraduate at U.C. Berkeley studying Sustainable Development in the Third World.

Kenji Liu co-coordinates the Diversity BASE program, works in San Francisco's Japantown, and is in the second year of an M.A. in Cultural Anthropology and Social Transformation at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He currently practices vipassana and Zen.

Aran Watson is a graduate of UC Berkeley's Peace and Conflict Studies Program. He was the coordinator for the Youth BASE program last year, and currently serves on the BPF Board. He works as a youth organizer in both San Francisco and East Oakland, and will lead a high school activist delegation to Chiapas, Mexico, this winter.

Max Track, the author of the poem to the left, has been writing and reciting hip hop poetry since he was 14. In high school he began practicing at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery (Chinese Chan tradition). While in college at U.C. Santa Cruz, he studied Buddhism and sang in a hip hop jazz band. Currently he writes and records songs from time to time in New York, continues his daily sitting, and practices tai chi. He is 25 years old and lives in Berkeley, California.

The Young Flamewalkers

by Louise Dunlap

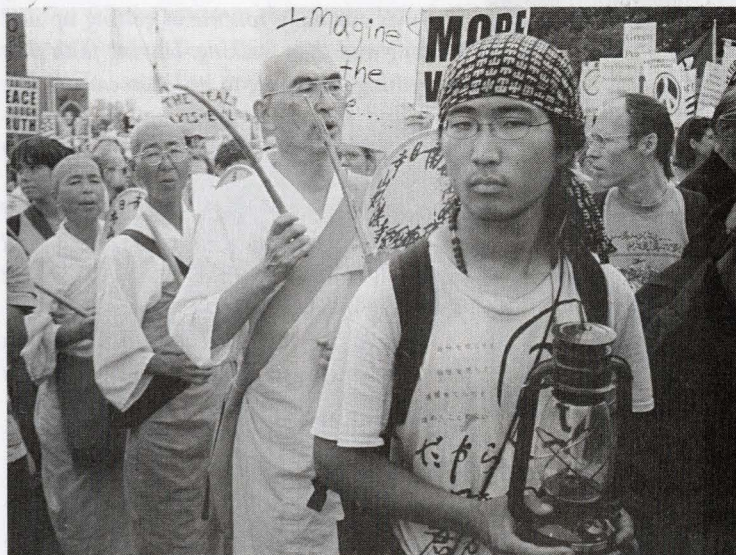
In the aftershocks of September 11, 2001, a Buddhist-led peace walk made a four-month journey through the United States to sites of nuclear devastation within our own borders—polluted military sites, Native American communities destroyed by uranium mining, Los Alamos, Oak Ridge. The walk was organized by Jun Yasuda, a Japanese-born nun from the Nipponzan Myohoji Peace Pagoda in Grafton, New York. Walkers set out from Seattle in January 2002, and in April they reached the ultimate destination—the place most Americans think of as Ground Zero, the big hole where the World Trade Center once stood. With them, the group carried the Hiroshima flame, kept alive from the original atomic firestorms on a Japanese family's altar—a flame saved in anger but transformed by prayer over the years into forgiveness and hope for a peaceful world.

I joined for just 10 days, but the experience went deeper than any in my 12 years of journeys with the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist order. Perhaps it was the actual presence of the flame. Perhaps my mindfulness had deepened since 9/11. Nipponzan Myohoji walks provide remarkable challenges to mindful practice: living with 30 to 40 people, of all ages and many cultures; arising from hard church floors for 5:00 AM prayer; walking 18 to 25 miles a day, no matter the weather—perhaps through harmonious forests, perhaps alongside Superfund sites or suburban traffic jams; getting by on whatever food is offered—sometimes a community potluck feast, other times roadside plants cooked up with donated rice.

My physical energy was good; I felt loving toward other walkers; I could drum and chant *namu myoho renge kyo* for most of the day, and smile at passersby. Remarkably, even the toughest looking of them would often smile back. I noticed what I can only call “joy”—a flowing sense of well-being, free of mental effort, that would last for hours at a time.

To a rare extent, people in the walk community seemed to be working with their own baggage and helping each other to *be* peace while they walked for peace. And it was the young people who stood out in this difficult work. I interviewed some of these young people after the walk, to learn what had nurtured their strength and wisdom. Portions of our conversations follow.

Few of the young walkers—Japanese or American—had much prior contact with Buddhism. Deeply resistant to “isms,” most had eclectic beliefs, so I mar-



Seiya Nishi carries the Hiroshima Flame at the front of the procession.

veled at how Buddhist teachings had settled into their hearts so easily, without formal instruction. The Nipponzan practice teaches by example, not by the text. During most of the walk, Jun-san was the only monastic present. A beloved, “salty,” and skillful leader, she gave a short talk each morning, but I never heard her mention the Four Noble Truths or the Noble Eightfold Path. Her talks drew lessons from the daily experience of the walk. What was transformative for the young Flamewalkers was the chanting, the walking itself, morning prayer, Jun-san's leadership, the supportiveness of a diverse community. Also the flame itself, and learning more about the pain it had caused both Japanese and Native American victims.

The very last day of the walk, in steady rain, we reached Ground Zero. On a street adjacent to the site, a remarkable ceremony was conducted by three Native Americans who had played major roles on the walk. (One, Tom Dostou, had first proposed the Flamewalk to Nipponzan Myohoji.) Young Flamewalkers were placed at the four directions and before the altar (normally a space reserved for monks). Kiowa, Abenaki, and Dakota prayers then rose for the release of spirits trapped at the site. Thunder rumbled and sunlight began to break through.

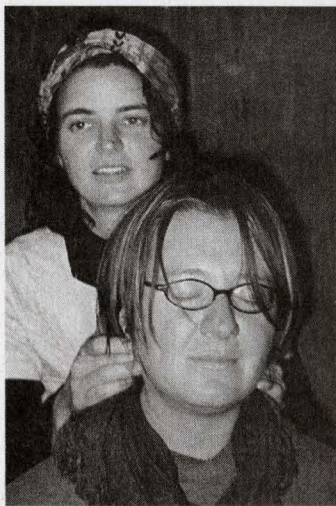
Marie Hubbs (24), Ephrata, Washington

On her night off from a Catholic Worker house on the Olympic Peninsula, Marie met the walkers, was inspired, and, within two days, had dropped everything and joined for the duration.

“It’s more like the flame is carrying us than that we’re carrying the flame.”

I feel like my faith is a lot stronger—more faith in God and other people and especially in myself. And, hey! I just walked across the country, and before I would have never thought I could do anything like that. It puts things in perspective. Things feel a lot more achievable than they used to. A lot of this was our daily routine of getting up and praying and then walking. Having faith that everything was going to be taken care of, like food and shelter. Learning not to be concerned with details like how much further do we have to walk and is it almost lunchtime. Just learning to be with my experience of hunger and pain and knowing that they'll definitely change. Learning to have faith that I'm going to be OK.

Toward the end of the walk there was this harmony that was being reached, and you could hear it when we chanted.



Meagan Kreske gives Marie Hubbs a neck massage.

Amanda Scott (19), Salem, Oregon

Amanda saw the procession walking through her town and followed. Raised in a judgmental community and a distant family, she saw immediately that here were people who weren't just "talking about peace" but were patient and loving.

I wanted to learn their method, so I came. I've been learning alternative ways of dealing with frustrations, and not being so angry when I'm asked to do something. At home, when I'd be asked to do something, it would be alone, but here when you're working, someone will come and help you.

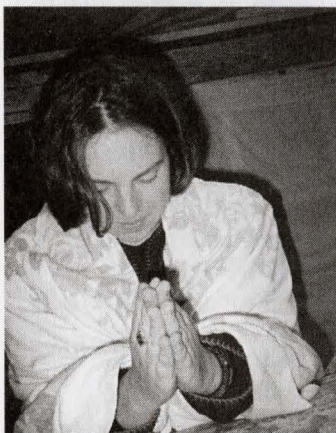
I haven't been perfect either—I've done some things that were really bad—but people forgave me. I realized that I was valued, and I wanted to help.

This community seems to be very much entwined—when one person is hurting, everyone hurts. Like when I was mean to an older man. I was rude to him once because he was annoying me and after that, someone else was rude to me. And I realized that it was a karma thing happening—and so I forgave this person right away and was nice to her and she felt bad for snapping at me. Then I was nice to the man who annoyed me, and the rest of the day and the day afterward I felt really good and so did everyone else.

They say if you do good things, you have peace in an afterlife, but I believe you earn your peace as you go along in this life. Today you are good, today will be good.

Hiroshi Kawamata (25), Saitama, Japan

Hiroshi walked the entire four months and made wonderful photographs, which can be seen on the



Amanda Scott

Walk's Web site (www.dharmawalk.org). Back in October 2001, he'd had a vision that somehow he was going to walk. But when he began the Flamewalk, it was painfully different from his vision.

Religion for me used to be the kind of subject I preferred not to touch. There was no religion in my family. At first, chanting, monks, and so on, was disturbing for me. At times I wanted to go back to Japan, but there were all these coincidences. I was given a Native American drum to carry, so I couldn't go back. Now my relationship to religion has changed. I feel closer. I don't pray—it's more a form of thanks. I feel thankful for everyone, all the people, all that exists.

On the walk I noticed that every time there's a need for someone, there's always a person. And when there's no need for that person, that person will kind of go back. So it's more like the flame is carrying us than that we're carrying the flame. After the walk, I'm going to be looking for a place that needs me. I want to give of myself, even if it's something I don't want to do.

Something else I noticed on the walk. This world is really beautiful, almost too beautiful. The world has a playful sense, like a little kid. It's a good thing that I discovered that.

Jen Allen (19), Seattle

Jen had a positive word for everyone, often carried the banner at the front of the walk, and managed the group's supplies of donated food.

When I first started the walk, it hurt so bad—everything hurt. One day I cried three times. I was just miserable. What touched me more than anything was the group support, like I was walking at the back and Naoki came and walked with me for two miles and kept me going. He says "You tired?" and I say "Yes" and he says "You too tired, I carry you."

It sounds grandiose, but the walk changed my life. When I started I was very, very angry for the first two weeks. I was angry at myself because I hurt. I was angry because I couldn't understand what Jun-san wanted from me. I was angry because everyone else seemed fine. I didn't know what I was doing here, and then over the course of the walk this changed and I got past the anger and frustration to a place of acceptance.

At first I was thinking: "A bunch of bleeding-heart peace activists." Negative stuff was spewing everywhere. It was appalling—and then I got past that to where I could see how much I must hurt from I don't know what, how much shame I must have felt about my own beliefs—because they don't conform with the rest of the world. But here I could feel the love and compassion within the group. It sounds corny, but it's absolutely healing and I just got past the point where I was

ashamed and hurt to a place where I could say yes I believe this and I'm proud of it.

Jun-san says "I am disposable Buddhist." I'm adopting that these days. I know the story of Buddha, and some of the teachings—basic compassion, basic peace of the universe—but I understand them more through living and being on this walk than from any reading or teaching. Walking, being in constant motion, changes something, takes you out of your normal reality. For me a really profound change.

And I connected with the chant—*namu myoho renge kyo*. David taught it to me my first day and I was like, OK—a bunch of Japanese words I don't understand. I spent three days chanting it and trying to find some meaning in it myself, and nothing happened. And then we were at a Unitarian church and someone asked Jun-san, and she said it means, "My heart bows to you." Not only do I bow, but my heart bows. That started me thinking. Every time you say it, you have that humility, and that love in your heart for another person, whether you like them or not.

Wataru Sano (15), Japan and rural Massachusetts

Raised by parents who are "into Buddhism" but not knowing much about their beliefs, Wataru joined the walk just outside of New York City.

Four days is a long time, but four months would have been better. The walk is powerful stuff. Just one step after another is powerful.

*Buddhism and drumming seemed like hippie stuff. Chanting—it doesn't really appeal to me, but it does feel good. It's the energy more than the words. How the walk is spreading the word of peace—not by yelling "We want peace." Chanting *namu myoho renge kyo*, it's the energy that spreads the message.*

I was grateful I could be of help at the final ceremony. Maybe it's just my imagination, but I feel like sometimes I can see things, feel things. And during the ceremony I was cold and I was looking up and saw this big ball of light over the Ground Zero area, kind of circling around. I don't know what that was—might be my imagination, but that's what I saw. I don't tell too many people this kind of thing. I'm afraid they'll say I'm just a 15-year-old kid.

David Headman (23), Pennsylvania

David had been waiting for the right time to take part in a Nipponzan Myohoji walk, and he knew this urgent moment in history was that time. He is now helping organize the mayor of Hiroshima's visit to Boston. David was the only person I interviewed who considered himself Buddhist, though he looks to other religions for poetry and mythology.

In the Christian mystery there's the idea that in the horrible, painful death of a human being the salvation of the world can come about. And that's the same mystery that's in that flame we've been carrying. That somehow out of those 3,000 lives lost, a light can come that can transform the world.

I've felt the power in that flame. When we were vigiling at Ground Zero, I felt that same light entering into the WTC site. You know the flame was transformed



David Headman

from a source of hatred and anger and war to a hope for peace through love and prayer. And through the flame's presence, I felt the coming together of the victims of the WTC and the Hiroshima bomb attacks—coming together with the victims of Afghanistan and Palestine and Israel. The coming together of both the suffering and the hope.

I've seen this only in tiny, fleeting glimpses that let me know how big this is. But when it was there the vision was powerful enough to keep me going through all the times I didn't see it.

Our world is to some extent formed by our consciousness, and whatever happens at one point in the web has an effect everywhere else. And so we spent four months every day praying for peace. We weren't always able to maintain a saintly mindset, but we were able to put forth consistent effort for four months. And however much stumbling, the effort was really powerful. Then there's all the others along the way who put in their own effort in organizing, in serving meals to us. And that, I think, has a really powerful effect beyond what is in the scope of my vision to see.

Also what we've done is transformative because it's not typical activism. What is typically done is very adversarial. What we're doing is in harmony with the dignity of everyone's life, hopes, and dreams. At a site like a weapons factory—a Raytheon or a Lockheed or a

McDonnell Douglas—or a military installation, the people on the other side also have powerful and beautiful hopes, dreams, and visions of what the world can be. I think we need to acknowledge and accept that. To a large extent we did that in this walk, more than is done in activism typically.

In D.C., there were counter-demonstrators with slogans on their shirts and signs that were demeaning to the people who were demonstrating. But when we talked to them, we were able to get them to agree to pray for the lives of all people everywhere, not just in America—and



Flamewalkers on the Brooklyn Bridge view the transformed NYC skyline.

we agreed to pray for the lives of Americans and the freedom of America. None of us can have a complete vision and we need each other to complete that vision. We may say we want peace, but if the form of our actions is aggressive—if we're saying "us" and "them"—then our actions are hobbled.

What we did on this walk was an act of alchemy. Alchemy is the process through which base matter is purified and it proceeds by a dialectic, separating a mixed up, confused mass into its distinct elements and then allowing it to be combined in a productive way. In every situation where we vigiled, there was a lot of love and a lot of pain on all sides. There was a lot of love on our side, for our vision of unity, our vision of peace, and a lot of love on the other side for their visions of democracy and the freedom of those they cherish, the future of their children. They're supporting their vision, actually, by what they're doing. And if we look carefully, the two loves aren't separate, they're the same.

On this walk, we look to find where in our own selves there is confusion, where we're being aggressive, where we're attacking others. Also to try and be compassionate to those who disagree with us, not to look down on them. Just the effort to do this is really deeply powerful.

Thomas Van Do (19), Albany, Oregon

Thomas told me he connected with the walk only because it was his mom's birthday and she insisted he come with her to a vigil. It was raining when he first heard the chanting, and the voices pulled him in like a magnet.

The group was just what I was looking for, what I needed for my growth and was yearning for. Because my friends don't advocate for peace. They're anti-Arab, get-even, pro-war, patriotic, President Bush-loving—yeah. And I'd felt so lost for so long. I felt like I'd stumbled home.

I've grown so much through the Native American presence—respecting myself and others. Even though I'm not Native American to my knowledge, I feel so connected when I hear the drumming. When Albert Runningwolf was doing the AIM song in Brooklyn, God, tears just dropped from my eyes and I don't know why. It's the connection—and all of us were singing the same song. All of our hearts were beating to the same tune. Makes me look deep in myself to meanings that I still don't know.

Buddhism has been an influence. This walk had so much structure and so much discipline and yet it was so free and open and liberal. I'm not real down with organized religion. But Buddhism, especially Nipponzan Myohoji, really talks the talk and walks the walk. They actually do peace.

Now, when I'm feeling negative, I don't want to be around people because I don't want that to transfer onto them. So I focus on myself and I find peace within myself, just myself—which I learned on this walk. I had no inkling before. If I felt like that before, I'd go out and drink a beer, smoke some cigarettes, or go snowboarding and just distract myself and see what happens. But now—focusing in internally and bringing peace and then being able to actually, truthfully spread it to others.

I feel good when I'm walking. I can concentrate. And Jun-san, man, if I was doing something lazy, she'd come up and tell me, "You're being lazy. You work harder." Oh man, I'd get so mad and then, like, wait a minute, I am being lazy. Now I find myself helping out with the dishes, talking to people, making connection. So I find that when I am peace, I want to spread peace.

The physical flame? For a lot of people it represents all the lives it took. And it connects with 9/11, and it does that for me. But I also see the flame in everyone who's around the flame. I look in their eyes and I can actually see a reflection of the flame off their eyes. It represents so much more than death and sadness for me.

We're stepping up and actually getting something done. Like John Lennon said, "You may say that I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one."

Annie Elfing (15), Kailua, Hawaii

Annie learned about the walk on Pearl Harbor Day

when she met Jun-san vigiling on a strip of grass between two highways. She was touched by the idea of *doing* something for peace and made arrangements with her school to walk for the term. Jun-san told me Annie had become a strong walker, fasting at times in the Japanese tradition. Upon returning to Hawaii, Annie organized a walk on Hiroshima Day.

I think I've learned a lot from everyone, from the people that I like and don't like. When I see something in someone that I don't like, I've learned to look in myself because usually that's where my dislike is coming from. I really think that everybody has a beautiful heart, even people who are really—ugh!—like Ashcroft.

Jun-san has had so much experience on walks. I'm not saying she's perfect, 'cause she's a person like everyone else, but she wants to make the situation comfortable for everyone, and that means if you have to change a little bit, then she'll give you a "Jun-san talk." I had a few of these talks. One day everyone was helping and I just felt really tired and I was sitting on the couch talking to people and she said, "If you no help, you don't have to walk—I know only two weeks left, but it does not matter, You can still go home." Oh my god! I started helping right away!



Annie Elfing

At the beginning of the walk, I really didn't feel connected with the flame, but after a while I started to feel connected. I really felt the presence of all these spirits. I don't know whether they were from when Hiroshima was bombed or from just all the people supporting the walk or from the Native American people who were killed by the uranium mining and testing of the bombs, but I really felt like this flame held a lot. ❖

Louise Dunlap teaches yoga, meditation, and writing in the Boston area. She is a member of the Old Path Sangha and the Cambridge Peace Commission.

All photos accompanying this article are by Louise Dunlap.



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Rebecca Reider is an environmental educator and writer living in Berkeley, California. She has been practicing Tibetan Buddhism with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition for two years. She works with youth in the wilderness, most recently building trails with high school students in the Washington Cascades. She plans to go to graduate school in social ecology, and hopes one day to found her own educational center for sustainability. She is 23 years old.

Just Walk

The Spiritual Challenges of a Young Eco-warrior

by **Rebecca Reider**

Two years ago, just before graduating from college, I drove down to Washington, D.C., with a group of student activists for what we hoped would be a massive protest. We planned to block a major meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, inspired by the success of thousands of anti-globalization protesters who had shut down a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) the preceding fall, in the “battle of Seattle.” The streets of D.C. the day before the protest looked like a militia was gearing up for battle. Church basements filled with participants in workshops on the how-tos of nonviolent resistance. An unofficial uniform of dreadlocks and anti-tear gas bandannas identified many of our compatriots.

Like many of the protesters, I suspect, I did not completely understand just how this trinity of arcane global organizations—the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO—figure into the exploitation of poor people and ecological destruction around the world. Still, I was eager to stand tall with this ragtag army against oppression. But as I walked the streets among steelworkers’ unions, anti-sweatshop protesters, Green Party activists, and Free Mumia supporters, all waving signs and chanting “This is what democracy looks like!”, I couldn’t help but wonder: What were we all doing here? What were we fighting for?

That protest in April 2000 was a moment when all the hope and despair swirling through youth activism showed. Many of the protesters were young middle-class people like myself, angry at the oppression of poor people and the pollution of our planet in the name of greed. We were determined to “save the world” but not quite sure how to go about it. Drumming and dancing in the street for a cause, many of us take inspiration from our 1960s forebears, who took to the streets to protest the Vietnam War. Still, I wonder if many young activists sometimes feel, as I do, that we were born too late for that radical time when—if we believe the glassy-eyed stories of our parents, teachers, and other aging ex-hippies—young people still believed they could change the world and that anything was possible.

Young activists today face an immense spiritual challenge. We are growing up in a century in which the world population will increase to 10 billion, and

with it, the number and scale of environmental and social problems. In college, I remember sitting in a lecture hall among hundreds of eager students, listening to E. O. Wilson, one of the preeminent biologists of our time, tell us all that the planet will likely go through a major worldwide environmental catastrophe sometime in the next century. We lack the naivete, but also the hopefulness, of past generations. And we wonder, what can we possibly do?

In high school I wrote a paper for my social studies class in which I tried to devise a system of redistributive justice that would succeed where socialism had failed and would put an end to poverty. It sounds funny now—a 16-year-old thinking she can dream up a solution to all the world’s woes—yet many of us do feel a personal obligation to think our way out of our global predicament. In a culture that values progress and success, it’s easy to bring a hunger for achievement even into activist work. Now, as a new generation of activists takes on the immense suffering of the world, I think Buddhism holds a powerful lesson for us—to transform activism into spiritual practice.

From my time bouncing around different fronts of the environmental movement, I have seen how easy it is for the problems that surround us to consume our energy. On graduating from college, I went to a recruiting weekend for the Green Corps, a nonprofit that claims to “train the next generation of environmental leaders.” I found myself in a room of passionate, young, would-be eco-warriors just like myself, each of us determined to use our one life to protect our planet’s ecological diversity. The moderator began a discussion by writing on the board various strategies: science and research; grassroots organizing; environmental education; consumer lifestyle changes, such as buying less or not driving SUVs. She then asked us all to decide which of these was the most effective way to achieve lasting progress. A heated debate followed; the group seemed convinced that there must be an answer to the mess we’re in, and that we needed only choose the best strategy and then plunge forward.

Because my own childhood experiences among wild Californian mountains and beaches made me an environmentalist from an early age, I decided that the best way to make humans into better Earth stewards was to change our culture, starting by educating the young. I found a job at an outdoor education center leading sixth graders through the redwoods in

Sonoma County, north of San Francisco. It was rewarding work. The kids gaped in awe at giant trees, became compassionate toward the smallest salamander or water bug in the creek, slid down muddy hills, and emerged from solo walks with eyes shining. We transformed inner-city kids into junior treehuggers. But the center was hurting for cash, and in a boardroom somewhere, someone hatched the idea to cut down and sell off as lumber many of its most majestic redwood trees to pay for new cabins.

My fellow teacher-naturalists and I mobilized in dissent. We formed an organization named after the Lorax, the Dr. Seuss character who “speaks for the trees”; we had our students write letters—but all we got in return were promises that the timber harvest would be done in a sustainable manner. Later that summer, the logging trucks rolled in. A friend told me how she watched the trucks head back down the road, piled high with logs. I haven’t been able to return there to look at the ruined hillsides where we used to hike.

This experience made me realize that while it is important to educate the next generation to take better care of forests, if we don’t take more immediate action, there may not be any forests left for them to protect. So I began volunteering at the Rainforest Action Network (RAN), which relentlessly pressures the business community to stop destroying what’s left of the world’s old-growth forests. RAN’s battle plan is to go directly to the biggest corporations—such as timber company Boise Cascade and financial giant Citigroup—and mount high-profile protests and boycotts against them until they vow to change their ways. I recently joined a group of RAN supporters on a protest in downtown San Francisco to publicize Boise’s destructive logging practices. We raised a gigantic hot air balloon in the shape of a dinosaur, bearing a banner reading “I Love Destroying Old Growth,” in Justin Herman Plaza. The images of our protest that appeared in the newspaper that afternoon provided a powerful visual metaphor for what it often feels like we are doing as activists—holding onto a dinosaur by its toenails, trying to drag it down. “Even if Boise were to stop destroying old growth,” I asked a RAN campaigner, “wouldn’t another company just take its place?” “When this beast falls,” she said, “we’ll move on to the next one, and so on, until the way people do business on this planet has changed.”

But I wonder, when will that day come? And will we be around to see it? Longtime Sierra Club director David Brower once said, “In the environmental movement, there are no permanent victories, only permanent losses.” I see most of my peers, many of whom were activists in college, choosing safe careers because they don’t want the life of low wages and permanent losses that comes with working for social change. As

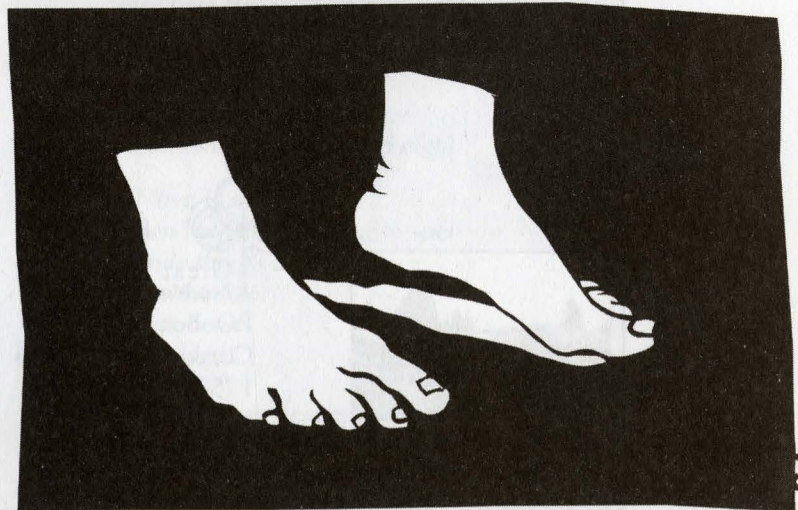
educators trying to inspire hope even as the trees are falling all around us, as activists hanging onto the toenails of a dinosaur, the question may not be how can we save the world, but how can we spiritually sustain ourselves while trying to?

I wonder how many young activists recognize themselves in this story of drifting from battle to battle, trying to figure out the best way to make an impact. Along the way, I’ve begun to realize how easy it is to bring all negative states of mind—grasping after outcomes, attachment to success, anger when things do not go our way—into the very work we are trying to do to change the world.

We want a more just, less polluted, less violent world, and we want it *now*. But in focusing so intently on a future world filled with peace, we may become less attentive to the present moment. I think it is crucial that we learn to transform activism itself into spiritual practice. Even in the midst of passionate struggles for change, we can develop our own patience, generosity, and equanimity. Instead of finding meaning only in the victories we achieve, we can recognize the value of the simple act of working with other people of conscience, knowing that we are giving what we can. The only alternatives, as far as I can see, are to become either more desperate in our efforts, or more apathetic to shield ourselves from the world’s pain.

This is the paradox Buddhism offers us: to work tirelessly for the sake of all beings, yet not to be attached to the results of that work. When I first heard a nun in Nepal explain the Four Noble Truths, they made perfect sense: our constant craving for things we do not have is what brings us suffering. The Mahayana teaching to work for the benefit of all beings also resonated with me. But I had trouble reconciling the two. If we truly feel compassion for all sentient beings and devote ourselves to ending their suffering, how can we avoid becoming attached to that goal? How can I open

Tiffany Sankary, 24, is a visual artist, writer, and activist living in Oakland, California. She is currently training as a Feldenkreis practitioner.



**Just walk?
How could a few
dozen oddball
souls walking
across North
America in
meditation help
end a war
halfway around
the world?**

my heart to the world's suffering, as the Mahayana teaching instructs me to do, without breaking it? To engage with this question, I think, is to begin to transform activism from merely a means-to-an-end into spiritual practice in itself.

The post-9/11 war in Afghanistan gave me fresh reminders of the Buddhist teaching. One day this past winter, I joined the Nipponzan Myohoji Hiroshima Flame Interfaith Pilgrimage Dharma Walk as it passed through the Bay Area on its way across the country. (See preceding article. —Ed.) Jun-san, a determined, wiry, Japanese Buddhist nun in saffron robes and running shoes, who has crisscrossed the continent for peace several times, led the group. I walked miles through suburbs, an army base, and low-income, racially diverse neighborhoods in the East Bay that day, alongside Native American tribal leaders, Japanese students, an older Jewish woman, a young black Muslim man, a 15-year-old girl from Hawaii.

All day long we walked, holding a small banner inscribed with the mantra *namu myoho rengo kyo* in Japanese, exchanging greetings, smiles, and words of peace with people who paused to watch and wave at us. Every few hours, we stopped to rest, gather in a circle, bow to each other, and chant *namu myoho rengo kyo* three times. Many chanted the phrase continuously as they walked. When I asked fellow walkers what it

meant, they replied gently, "It's untranslatable." Jason, a young man from New York, who had carried a banner all the way down the West Coast from Washington, said, "You can ask Jun-san what it means, but she'll tell you, 'If you want to find out, walk. And if you still want to find out more, walk some more.'"

Just walk? How could a few dozen oddball souls walking across North America in meditation help end a war halfway around the world? And yet it made perfect sense, to us and to those who lined the sidewalks to cheer us on and offer us food and shelter all along the way. It is what Dharma practitioners have done since the Buddha's time, when he and his followers walked in mindfulness across northern India, bringing peace through their very presence. To walk for peace in a time of war is to remind ourselves and all who see or hear of us that even now, in such crazy-making times, it is possible to hang onto hope, against all reason.

During the peace march, we walked through the long tunnel that connects Oakland to Alameda, on a narrow walkway above several lanes of traffic. The tunnel was dark, lit only by dim overhead lights and the headlights of cars zooming by, and the air was thick with exhaust. When our elbows brushed the tunnel walls they came away covered in soot. It was too loud for us to hear each other. I pulled my t-shirt up over my mouth to breathe, and held my free hand high in a peace sign. A few drivers honked their support as they roared by. And I felt peace, walking through that tunnel; we seemed to be radiating golden light. This was activism as spiritual practice: to breathe in the soot and suffering of our industrial civilization, and still, no matter what, to breathe out a message of peace and light, and to keep on walking.

It sometimes feels lonely to be a young Buddhist in this country. I am often the youngest meditator at retreats. Many American Buddhists are of the generation that discovered Eastern spiritual traditions when they were young idealists, in the 1960s and '70s. But I keep coming back to Dharma centers for the strength and wisdom I find there. I have a shelf of Dharma books by my bed, and when I need a spiritual jumpstart, I open one and read a passage. Recently, I came across this familiar verse from the seventh-century Indian master Shantideva:

*For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I, too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world.*

I don't know if I will ever have a definitive answer to the question of which activist strategy is the best one, the one that will end all the world's problems. In the meantime, I want to find out the meaning of that mantra, so I'm going to keep walking. ❖

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soulstice

every ounce of matter is frozen light
roses, clouds, bones, tears
all slowly moving light

everything is shining in glory
everything
singing a story

if love is a language
then I am just learning to spell
while there's a story
that the stars
have been
burning
to tell

everything is blazing
a diaphanous theophany

everything is shining
like the radiant mind of a child
like the eyes of a saint
like the dawn on the Nile
where the pyramids track the arc
of the spinning earth

sometimes I wander the streets and curse
the darkness
with a heart that's
frozen
as the
arctic

and winds are forming
as the planet's turning
and I'm thinking
about 500 years of oppression
and I'm thinking
about 500 years of resistance
and I'm thinking:
what if the trade winds had blown the other way?
would we not have been spared the middle passage?

and I wander the streets and curse
the darkness
with a heart that's
frozen
as the
arctic

because the capital of government
has succumbed to the
government
of capital

but I know the longest night
gives way to the strongest light

so I prolong this fight
'til what's
wrong

is
right

every second in the universe a supernova is
exploding
every second a star is shattering

and flames were
leaping off the moon
last night
flames were
leaping off the moon

like binary stars we
circle
each other

like binary stars we
circle
each
other

and
the more I
see of you
the more I
love the view

let me be a fierce clear mirror
in a cosmos made of passions

let me be a fierce clear mirror
in a cosmos made of passions

open the window
let me feel the star-filled night

if you can stand before the cosmos
until your form becomes transparent
the stars will pour beams
through your
emancipated

borders, open the window
let me feel the star-filled night

if love is a language
then I am still learning to spell
while there's a story
that the stars
have been
burning

to tell

◆
Drew Dellinger is a spoken-word poet, teacher,
and activist living in Oakland, California. "soul-
stice" is from his new collection of poems, *love let-
ter to the milky way*. (Contact: 866-POETICS.)

Time Machine Buddha

Three excerpts from a long poem in prayer wheel form

by Ava Ming Hu

Love Knot Wheel

This is a love knot.
Ribbons mate
with
the idea.
Can your words fold
and weave
the way water does?
Can they undo
what has already been done?
Can they turn
history on its head,
and make it
hold itself
upside down
until the ticking stops?
Make way,
this is the chosen time
where the bodhisattva
will be born.



Barter Wheel

I made a barter with light:
If you make
my body
into
a light-
house.
I will
kneel down,
and place
my hands
above
my head
in prayer
for
108
minutes
a
day.
I want you
to tell me,
if my
vessel
is
appropriate

enough
to
hold
you.
I want
to know
if
I
am
worthy
enough
to
bring
ships
in
after
long
nights
wagering
with
dark
spirits
inside
of
waves.

If I
kneel
down
for the rest
of my life
will you
let me
say I
have been
dwelling
in the
house
of
a
god?



LIBERATING ACTION

by Phillip Cryan

On May 26, 2002—the day of Vesak (the Buddha’s birthday)—Alvaro Uribe was elected president of Colombia. Uribe’s foremost campaign promise to the war-weary people of Colombia was a swift and decisive end to the country’s 40-year-long armed conflict. “*Mano firme*” (“a firm hand”) was his primary slogan, and Uribe’s election was understood as a mandate for the war’s escalation—an indication that Colombians are willing to pay the price of a vast and bloody increase in violence if it will somehow bring about the end of the conflict. It seems to me, however, that the conflict is entrenched and practically intractable. The infusion of more violence will only breed more violence.

Here in Colombia, far from sangha, I found it difficult to recollect the joy and hope of Vesak this year. The

*In the horrors of today’s Colombia,
the beauty of resistance, of simple acts of love—
amid concentrated greed, hatred, and delusion—
does not seem to fade with time.*

war rhetoric and fanfare surrounding Uribe’s victory drowned out hope. The peace and justice community here responded to the election’s military triumphalism with varying degrees of sadness, fear, cynicism, and tenacious faith. It’s clear that the space for speaking out about social justice, human rights, and peace—already small and systematically attacked by death threats, assassinations, and torture—will shrink under the new regime. And it’s clear that bloodshed will increase.

As a young person confronted with the reality that the horrors I’m witnessing here will almost certainly grow worse in the months ahead, it’s easy to become disheartened. What’s the point of standing up, speaking out, and fighting (nonviolently) back? Why not let the tides—which are vast, inscrutable, and strong, and which dwarf me, render my efforts pathetic—do what they will? Why not just let go of the urge to intervene, of the belief in the value of intervention, and instead let the world simply be as it (apparently irremediably) is?

What is the position and practice of radical Buddhist youth? How much do we, through dispassionate insight, let go? How much do we, through passionate insight, continue to thirst and struggle?

In the 1960s, the people of Vietnam were in a situation as bad as or worse than the one Colombians face today. There was no space to speak of peace or justice: anyone who tried to position themselves between the two sides was labeled an enemy by both. In South

Inversion Wheel

These are inversions you can perform.

Don’t think about things
that make a city
fizzle
all night long
past
any reference

to human existence.

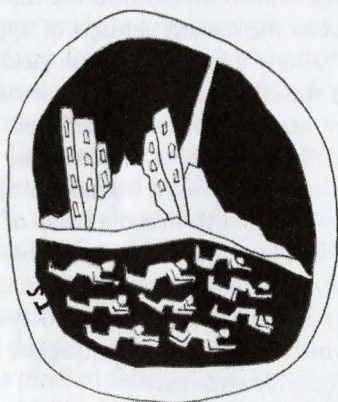
Why do you think
you can live like this?

Tired of me speaking
about what’s inside of you
when you think you are like
the steel a building is made of?

Eventually
you will find
your burial grounds
covered with cement
so not even
the spirits
of your ancestors
can get out.

This has nothing
to do
with majesty.

Leave your money bags
and run.



Ava Ming Hu, 29, lives in New York City, where she just completed her MFA at New School University. She recently returned from India, where the manuscript of “*Time Machine Buddha*” rested in the boughs of the Bodhi Tree in Sarnath for 90 days. Her poems have appeared in Sarah Lawrence Literary Review, NuCity, and Conceptions Southwest.

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Vietnam and the U.S., peace advocates were branded “Communists”; the North Vietnamese Communists called them U.S.-backed “imperialists.” In the same way, Colombian civilians are today labeled “guerrilla sympathizers” by rightwing paramilitaries, and “paramilitary collaborators” by the guerrillas.

In Vietnam, the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS), headed by two young people, Thich Nhat Hanh and Cao Ngoc Phuong (Sister Chan Khong when she ordained), sought to bring the perspective of Dharma to the conflict. They rebuilt bombed towns, provided food and medicine, meditated together, shared Dharma teachings, and called publicly for a negotiated, peaceful solution to the conflict. In the climate of violence that surrounded them, these simple gestures of compassion became revolutionary acts, fundamental challenges to a deluded system—and they invited repression. Nhat Hanh likened such acts of love amid the violence to “a lotus in a sea of fire.” Self-immolation made this metaphor visible. The images of calm-eyed monks and nuns consumed by flames provided a wake-up call to many, saying, “There is inhumanity, dehumanization, here—so much so that this is the only way left to show it.”

Buddhist nonviolent resistance to the war in Vietnam did not achieve peace. Gandhi’s decades of passionate work did not stop the partition of India and Pakistan, still a source of intense hatred and violence today. Were their efforts in vain?

As I struggle to find a practice of liberation in the horrors of today’s Colombia, the work of the SYSS in Vietnam and Gandhi’s *satyagrahis* in South Africa and India continues to provide inspiration and guidance. The beauty of resistance, of simple acts of love—amid concentrated greed, hatred, and delusion—does not seem to fade with time (witness the life of Jesus), is not subject to the instant verdicts of apparent “success” and “failure.” Liberating action yields liberation, even when the effects are minute or invisible, even if they do not manifest for many lifetimes.

So, in Uribe’s Colombia, we continue to stand up for justice and peace—and humane U.S. policies, in particular—in the faith that the value of such acts is not found in their outwardly observable success but in their karmic actuality, discerned through practice. These acts are themselves liberation; they do not defer that for which they thirst and struggle, but taste it, know it, in the struggle itself.

If, someday, we find ourselves in the hells—and see that delusion, hatred, and greed will remain rooted for eons, *kalpas*—what else is there to do, what other choice can we make, than to awaken, and to act? ❖

Phillip Cryan, 23, is an activist and writer. He works for Witness for Peace in Bogota, Colombia. (See page 40 for further notes about him.)

BASE House

Creating an Intentional Community

by Jesse Baen, with Tempel Smith and Anna Brown Griswold

Twenty-something and recently out of college, I encountered a relentless chorus of “So, what are your plans for the future?” Or, my favorite: “What exactly does one do with a degree in Religious Studies?” As I explored the answers, and my reluctance to answer at all, I began to care more about how I lived my life than about which particular label I chose to attach to myself, my livelihood, etc. I learned that I wanted to live in a community of friends who shared my interest in Buddhist practice, who felt moved to work in the world to ease the suffering around us, and, most importantly, who wanted to build a home, invest in relationships with one another, and explore what a socially engaged, Buddhist, intentional community could be.

While participating in a BASE program in 2001, I learned that the vision of a residential BPF or BASE community had been floating around in various forms for years, but it had never become reality for various reasons, the outrageous price of housing in the Bay Area not the least among them. But something else was also missing—one person, or a small group, to take the initiative. In the winter of 2001, Tempel Smith sent an e-mail to the BASE listserv for BASE participants and alumni, looking for people to join him in creating a BASE house. Many people expressed interest in the idea, but most did not want to move into a new place right away. There were three of us who were ready to take the next step.

Tempel, Anna Brown Griswold, and I met for dinner a few times, discussed our thoughts about intentional community, our particular needs, and pet peeves. We discussed our desires for connection and support, versus our need for time alone and for independence. We talked about our Buddhist practice, our experience in BASE, our dishwashing habits. It didn't take long for us to feel enough connection to decide to find a place to rent as a starting point, and to see what might develop from there.

Finding a place in the tight Bay Area housing market that would meet all of our needs within the 30 days' notice we'd given our respective landlords proved to be our first communal undertaking. We worked hard to find a place in a peaceful neighborhood that was also near public transportation—something affordable but also large enough to host retreats and gatherings. And of course there was the

issue of my cat and Anna Brown's cat allergies. But with patience, dialogue, and perseverance (as well as a rigorous cat-hair-vacuuming regimen), we signed a lease on a spacious, sun-filled apartment in the Mission District in San Francisco, with slightly over 24 hours to go before the first of the month.

We've been living together for six months now, and we see the house as a sort of interim solution, a launching pad, for this fearless Buddhist experiment in communal living. This project could take many forms as time goes on. Perhaps a larger group will develop that might be interested in co-owning a house. We might provide free or low-cost living space for current BASE participants. The house members might choose to create service or activist projects together, or develop a regular sitting group. We are also hoping we might start a trend....

Currently we hope for this house to fill two basic roles. One is to build a residential community that provides support and inspiration for our lives, our practice, and our work in the world. The other is to be of service to the larger BASE/BPF community. We have already begun to provide space for retreats and other events like teachings and workshops in our living room and backyard. We also want to host social gatherings, BASE reunions, and other events that will help us get to know one another in the wider BPF community, and to explore practice, organize, or just chill out together.

So far we've hosted three daylong retreats for Second BASE and Diversity BASE. We had a housewarming with tons of folks from BPF and beyond. The other day some BASE friends of Tempel's, who had been to Carnival, dropped by to meditate with us after all the bustle on the street.

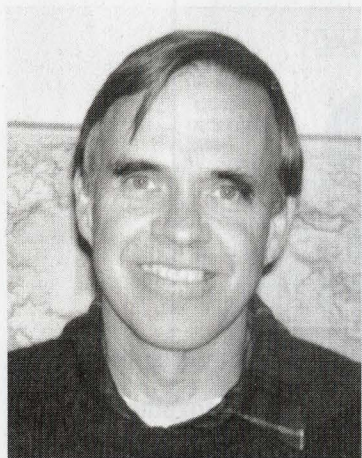
We would love for those interested to reach out to us and get involved in any way. Also, we have another bedroom available in our apartment, and there is a five-bedroom apartment available downstairs in our building, which we hope will become part of our community. Please e-mail me at <jessbaen@yahoo.com> or contact the BPF office, for more information. ❖

Jesse Baen moved to the Bay Area two years ago to participate in BASE, and currently works for Peaceworkers, an organization promoting peacebuilding and alternatives to armed conflict. (See interview on page 34.)

We've been living together for six months now, and we see the house as a launching pad for this fearless Buddhist experiment in communal living.

A Global Nonviolent Peaceforce

Susan Moon talks with David Hartsough and Joanna Macy



David Hartsough is a lifetime peace activist and the executive director of Peaceworkers, the parent organization of the Global Nonviolent Peaceforce. Joanna Macy is an author, teacher, and trainer in socially engaged Buddhism, and is one of the founders of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. I talked with David and Joanna about the Peaceforce early in 2002, in Joanna's Berkeley living room. —S.M.

Susan: David, could you start by telling our readers briefly what the Peaceforce is?

David: The Peaceforce is an outgrowth of Gandhi's call for a *shantisena*, or "nonviolent army," more than 70 years ago. We want to develop a trained international nonviolent group of civilian peacemakers who would be available, at the invitation of local peacemakers or human rights workers in areas of conflict, to go in as supporters of those local peacemakers.

It's similar to the work that Peace Brigades International, Witness for Peace, and Christian Peacemaker Teams have been doing, and doing very well, but our project is on a larger scale. In Yugoslavia, in 1999, for example, NATO and our government leaders said the only alternatives were to do nothing or to bomb. But we know from our own firsthand experience in Peace Brigades that there *is* an alternative that most of the world doesn't know about yet.

So, part of our motivation is to bring effective nonviolent peacemaking to areas of conflict. But part of it is to get world attention, so that after a few years of some successes, the United Nations and regional organizational bodies will say, "That's a much more effective, and less expensive, way of dealing with conflict."

Our vision is to start with a couple hundred peacemakers in a pilot project in a particular place—Sri Lanka, Colombia, Ecuador, the Middle East—where both local peacemakers and we as outsiders feel that the Peaceforce can make an important contribution.

Susan: What's your timeline for training people, putting together a Peaceforce, and choosing the place?

David: This present incarnation of Gandhi's *shantisena* was reborn at The Hague Appeal for Peace, in May '99, during the Yugoslavia war. Nine thousand peace activists from around the world gathered and vowed to find an alternative to war. Many of us committed ourselves to building a global nonviolent peaceforce.

We've spent the last few years meeting with people

all over the world—religious leaders, Nobel Prize winners, local peace activists, human rights workers—getting feedback on our proposal. People from all over the world are committed to working together to make this happen. We have about 300 endorsers, including Nobel Peace Prize recipients, religious leaders, people like Joanna.

We've also developed a very significant research project, to learn from past peacemaking efforts, so we don't have to reinvent the wheel. A friend of ours, George Lakey, is developing a training program, using the best methods of all the trainings that have been happening around the world.

At an international convening event in Delhi in November 2002, we will bring together the main people from key organizations around the world who are committed to building the Peaceforce. And at that point, the international group will take ownership of the project. Peaceworkers, the organization here in San Francisco, sees itself as the midwife, to help bring this baby into life!

Joanna: So the Nonviolent Peaceforce will become an organization of its own, separate from Peaceworkers?

David: Yes. It will be international, and probably based outside of the U.S., so that it won't be U.S.-controlled.

We have invitations to go to 11 different conflict areas for our pilot project. The international steering committee has now narrowed those down to three: Sri Lanka, Colombia, and Palestine/Israel. At the international convening event in Delhi we will narrow it to one.

We're beginning to recruit people who would like to be in the Peaceforce. We've got Buddhist monks from Cambodia who walked with Maha Ghosananda through the war zones. And we have groups in the Philippines who have been doing nonviolent training since before the overthrow of Marcos. We'll start the training very soon after the international meeting. We hope to start our first pilot project by mid-2003.

We're also raising money, and doing further research about possible pilot projects. And we're hiring organizers in the global south—in India, Latin America, and later in Africa.

Sometimes it seems overwhelming. But when all these people from different parts of the world, who collectively have decades of peacemaking experience, are saying, "We'd like to work together to help make this happen," that's very empowering. We have each other.

Peaceworkers all over the world often feel all alone: "I've only got this tiny little candle in this terrible

darkness!” We want to build a network of people from around the world who share this vision and are committed to making it happen.

Joanna: Beyond that, I see a couple of exciting functions of the Peaceforce. One is the dramatization of what has been learned in the decades since Gandhi, about third-party nonviolent intervention. The mainstream media, and the person in the street, are unaware of all the experience we’ve gained.

Another point is that now people will have a vehicle. You’re giving many more people a way to put their own comfort—and even their lives—on the line for peace. I think there’s a great deal of untapped will and courage to see the end of this senseless killing. Each time we try to resolve a conflict with bombing, the costs are higher, because our military technology is becoming more destructive and more expensive.

Susan: I’m about ready to sign up! It’s so inspiring.

Joanna: People who were drawn to the Mississippi Freedom Summer, like you, will be drawn to this.

Susan: And the next generation. People will say, “Here’s something I can actually do with my own body.”

David: There are different levels of involvement. We want to start out with 200 peacemakers and 400 reservists, plus 500 supporters. The reservists will have also have gone through the whole training and be prepared to spend one or two months a year in the Peaceforce. Let’s say we have 200 folks down in Colombia, for example, and at a certain point we need a couple hundred more—we can call on the reservists. So the full-time people would really be full time, but the reservists could be schoolteachers, people who have another life.

And then we’ll have hundreds, if not thousands, of support people around the world who can respond to urgent action alerts. We will be the international eyes, ears, and conscience. But instead of machine guns as our weapons, we’ll have thousands of people around the world ready to do phone calls, faxes, e-mails—ready to make a stink!—if some military group is threatening civilian populations. In 10 years we hope to have 2,000 full-time peacemakers, 4,000 reservists, and many more thousands of support people.

Joanna: I’d like to ask you about accompaniment. Peace Brigades and Witness for Peace have a lot of experience with this. Will you describe what it is, and why it’s been so successful?

David: Accompaniment really means that local peace and justice workers are not alone. Death squads and paramilitaries don’t like peace and justice workers. They rock the boat. So they kill them, disappear them, throw

them in prison, thinking: Nobody will ever know. The idea of international accompaniment is to show those military leaders, those death squads, that the world is watching. These people are not alone, and the world cares. If they are harmed, there will be consequences.

Guatemala is an example of effective accompaniment. In the early ’80s the government was committing genocidal violence against the civilian population. Hundreds of villages were wiped off the map, tens of thousands of people were killed, and the whole civil society was destroyed.

In that horrendous situation, the families of the disappeared began finding the courage to walk, many in their bare feet, to Guatemala City, carrying pictures of their loved ones, asking “Where are they?” I was there at the time, and Peace Brigades International (PBI) had just sent a group down to see what they could do to help. In early March 1985, two of the four leaders of the families of the disappeared were assassinated. The others, who were feeling so much pain from losing their family members, said, “We cannot remain silent. But we also don’t want to die.”

They asked Peace Brigades International to accompany them, especially the leaders, both of whom were women. “Can you be with us 24 hours a day, as we take our children to nursery school, as we go to demonstrations, as we go to church, as we come home, when we have meetings, when we’re walking on the street?” And PBI gulped and said, “We’ll try.”

For five years they accompanied the leaders day and night. None of the leaders were killed. They continued speaking out, and asking: “Where are our loved ones?” That gave courage to many others in the civil society—human rights and social services organizations—to speak out, too. And then they also asked for accompaniment, and other groups besides PBI began responding to the requests. The refugees who had fled to Mexico said, “We’re ready to come back, but we want accompaniment.” So, over time, there was a gradual return to a more democratic society.

I think it’s fair to say that that wouldn’t have happened if those courageous Guatemalan people had not been willing to stick their necks out. And they say, “We would not be alive if it were not for the Peace Brigades.”

Joanna: In Palestine we hear about the Hell’s Grannies and people from many lands coming to join the International Solidarity Movement there. They’re positioning themselves to watch at the checkpoints, and entering refugee camps, observing the behavior of the Israeli military. Would you say that’s a current example of accompaniment?



“You’re giving many people a way to put their own comfort—and even their lives—on the line for peace.”

Instead of machine guns as our weapons, we'll have thousands of people around the world ready to do phone calls, faxes, e-mails—ready to make a stink!—if some military group is threatening civilian populations.

David: Sure. They're risking their own lives to protect the lives of Palestinians. I think of what Brian Wilson said at Concord Naval Weapons Station, where we were nonviolently blocking trains carrying weapons to kill people in Central America: "Our lives are not worth more and their lives are not worth less."

I was in the Philippines in '88 on the island of Negros. There was ongoing conflict between government forces and guerrilla groups. An area the size of Rhode Island was being bombed with U.S. bombs, because there were "subversives" there—guerrillas. The population was taking refuge in churches outside the bombing area. I visited one church where there were 500 refugees who had fled carrying their children on their backs. It was a tragic scene. Death squads came into the church and threatened to kill them all unless they left within 48 hours. The assumption was that since these folks lived in the area of the subversives, they must all be subversives.

Several of us visited the Catholic bishop, Antonio Fortich, whom the Quakers had nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. He was in tears, saying, "What can we do? These people have suffered so much." I told him of our experiences in Central America, with the Peace Brigades and Witness for Peace. His eyes lit up and he said, "That's what we can do! We can invite international religious people to come and be present with these refugees." So he dictated an invitation, and I went back to Manila and faxed it out. Within 30 hours we had about 25 international religious people there.

We had a press conference in the church hall. We appealed to the death squads, saying, "These people are children of God. We appeal to you to treat them as brothers and sisters, and not to kill them. We want you to know that whatever you do to them you'll also have to do to us. And we're going to tell the rest of the world what happens to them."

This statement was broadcast by local radio and television stations, and printed in the newspapers. The death squads didn't come back. It wasn't in their interest to have the whole world know.

Joanna: So even if the international presence is very limited in numbers, the impact can be huge.

David: I worked in Kosovo between '96 and '98, where there was a significant nonviolent movement. Many people asked me, "We need international people to be present with us as we engage in nonviolent resistance. Can you find these people?" So I traveled around the U.S. and Europe saying, "Kosovo is an explosion about to happen. There are people committed to non-violence and human rights. Can we get people over there to accompany and support their nonviolent struggle?" Everybody said, "Where's Kosovo? We have too many important things to do."

Susan: That's exactly the situation the Peaceforce is for.

David: That's right. If we'd had 200 people in the mid-90s, or even as late as '98, we could have made a very important difference. But we need to respond to those situations *before* they explode into violence. One of the things we've been learning from our research is: respond early. After the bombs start falling it's too late.

Susan: What you say makes me realize that this work requires deep commitment, and a kind of faith. I wonder how Buddhist practice could relate to participation in the Peaceforce. What do you think about this, Joanna?

Joanna: I think participation in the nonviolent Peaceforce is a natural activity for Dharma practitioners. And it would be a great stimulus to practice. The Buddha teaches about the interdependence of all and about the preeminent quality of generosity. To participate in the Peaceforce would be like doing a hundred sesshins or long retreats all at once. It could pop you so fast into an awakened state of mind!

I hope we'll begin similar actions back home, right here. In future years, Buddhist practitioners may well wonder, "Gee, how did you manage to sit through a retreat when all you were doing was sitting serenely in a safe zendo, with somebody cooking for you? Can you really do serious practice when you're not facing the forces of oppression and warfare?"

Susan: So, participation in a Peaceforce could strengthen one's spiritual practice. What about the reverse? Would a spiritual commitment strengthen one's ability to participate in the Peaceforce?

Joanna: Yes, of course. There's no substitute for the attentive and disciplined mind. Dharma practice brings a quality of steadiness. It schools the intention and cultivates the capacity to take action without any guarantees of the outcome. We're facing such huge and violent forces that spiritual groundedness is essential.

This brings up another question I have for you, David. In your newsletter you mention affinity groups and study materials, and I'm thinking that we could apply the idea to Dharma communities in North America. We need a study program, a toolkit of resource materials, the kind of thing your newsletter speaks of generating. We're woefully ignorant of the evolution of nonviolence in the 20th century since Dr. Gandhi and Dr. King. So much has happened, an incredible set of tools and understandings has been developed, and we need to spread the word. So I'd like to ask what you might envisage for such affinity groups, and how that might apply to a Buddhist community?

David: Our idea about the affinity groups is that they are for people who think, "This Peaceforce is an idea whose time has come. But I want to do more than just say it. I want to *be* it, and help make it happen." People who have a strong commitment to the Peaceforce can get together in a geographical area or a religious community and deepen their understanding of what the Peaceforce is, and how they can help make it happen.

We have a group here in the Bay Area that meets about once a month to study nonviolence, and they also take up specific tasks, such as writing articles and speaking to other groups about the Peaceforce. Also, a lot of our research is now available on our Web site (www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org). There are many inspiring examples of nonviolent action around the world, and there are helpful books and videos. (See resources listed at the end of this article.) People in the study groups can educate themselves and report back to the group; they can reflect together on the meaning of what they study and, in the process, become better prepared themselves for leadership.

You don't learn about nonviolence in the history books. You don't read about it in the newspapers. We need to educate ourselves and inspire each other.

Joanna: I've loved seeing how the ancient spiritual practice of pilgrimage has been recaptured in our time, as work for peace and justice. In the '80s there were peace walks from coast to coast in this country, from Cardiff to Greenham Common in the U.K., from Copenhagen down to Assisi. Many focused on nuclear weapons. More recently in Australia, there was a pilgrimage from Perth to Canberra and back again—many thousands of miles—bearing witness and calling for the end of uranium mining.

The drums of the Buddhist monks serve so exquisitely on these pilgrimages. And time is taken to sit in meditation; we've seen sitting practice used on the tracks at Rocky Flats, and out at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. These features of Buddhist spiritual practice from centuries past steady us, and bestow a sense of collective strength far greater than anything you can summon up by yourself.

In Sarvodaya, a Buddhist-inspired social change movement in Sri Lanka, two things have allowed them to play a particular role in mitigating the civil war. One is that they have engaged people from all communities concerned. They have been working with Sinhalese and Tamils, Buddhists and Hindus, together, from the beginning. They were the only NGO in Sri Lanka that, once the hostilities started, could bring people together to meet. This echoes what David was saying: It's good to start early to build the capacity for people to hear each other. Even just a few on each side can make a big difference. Don't wait until the bullets are flying and the bombs are dropping.

In Sri Lanka's 19-year-long civil war, the temptation to give up has been very great. Bitterness on both sides has sunk deep—so many losses, so many seeds of hatred. The Buddhist presence is still compromised by right-wing, chauvinist elements among the clergy. What I saw at Sarvodaya gatherings is a strong recourse to Buddhist practice, vipassana practice, without depending on the clergy. Laypeople really need this practice. We need the practices of mindfulness and lovingkindness. We need to be able to act independently of visible results.

David: We're also using some tools of modern technology. One of the people in the Nonviolent Peaceforce is involved in developing technology so that a person in Sri Lanka or Tibet, for example, if their village is being threatened, will be able, with a videocamera, to send video footage up to a satellite, where it can be beamed down to CNN or anywhere else around the world.

Joanna: A whole new dimension of accompaniment!

David: Yes, now the whole world can hear someone calling out in the dead of night.

Now we're raising funds for the project. The Peaceforce will cost about 8 million dollars a year—less than what the world spends on the military every hour. We are appealing to people in religious communities, in organizations, in foundations, and to individuals and their families to give peace a chance and help realize this vision of an international shantisena. A religious community could support one person in the Peaceforce, financially, for as long as that person puts her life on the line. About \$25,000 a year would cover one person's expenses, medical insurance, and so on.

We welcome everyone inspired by the vision to join us. Visit our Web site at www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org. Sign up for the newsletter and get on our mailing list at info@nonviolentpeaceforce.org. Send contributions to Peaceworkers, 721 Shrader St, San Francisco, CA 94117. Please let us know if you would like to consider being a full-time peaceworker, reservist, or supporter when the Peaceforce goes into the field in mid-2003. ❖

Resources

Unarmed Bodyguards, by Liam Mahoney and Luis Enrique Egun (Kumarian Press, 1997). By a PBI volunteer, documents the experience of Peace Brigades International.

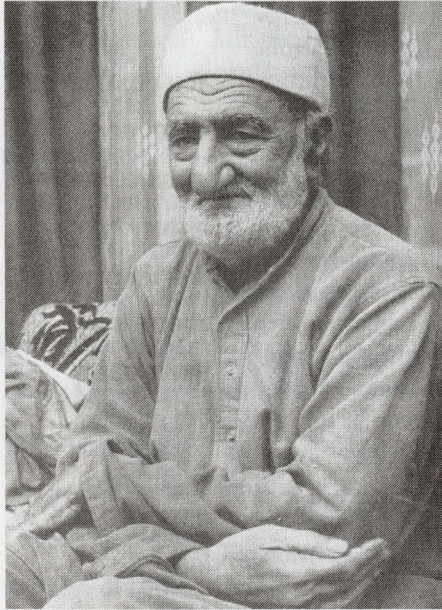
Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision, Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Thomas Weber (University of Hawaii Press, 2001). Gives examples of experiences of nonviolent intervention, or third-party nonviolent intervention, over the last 50 years.

A Force More Powerful: A Century of Non-Violent Conflict, by Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall (St. Martin's Press, 2001). Book and video (available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 800/257-5126) about nonviolent movements of the 20th century.

You don't learn about non-violence in the history books. You don't read about it in the newspapers. We need to educate ourselves and inspire each other.

Badshah Khan's Nonviolent Army

by Annette Herskovits



Badshah Khan in London, 1964.
Photo by Rajnikant Kothari

The world's first-ever nonviolent army arose among the Pashtuns—the ethnic group from which the Taliban originated. The *Khudai Khidmatgars* (“Servants of God”) was formed in 1929 by Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The group carried on a nonviolent struggle against British imperial rule in the Northwest Frontier Province of British India until 1947, when India gained its independence but was disastrously partitioned along religious lines into Pakistan and India.

Ghaffar Khan's disciplined nonviolent force was made up of people known for their constant feuding and cult of revenge.

Although Khan eventually became an ally of Gandhi, his nonviolence was rooted in Islam.

Born in 1890 in a village near Peshawar (present-day Pakistan), Ghaffar described his deeply religious parents as kind and upright; most unusually, his father, a *khan*, or tribal chief, “did not take revenge—he would tolerate any offense with patience.” Ghaffar had planned to study engineering in England, but the thought of his absence so distressed his mother that he chose to stay and “serve the creatures of God.”

He started by establishing village schools. Travels through the Frontier Province made him aware of the ravages of poverty, ignorance, and strife. The British, who saw the Frontier as their first line of defense against tsarist Russia's expansion into Central Asia, ruled the region brutally. They jailed people at will and levied heavy taxes to support the police and army. They used destructive “divide and rule” tactics, drawing a border with Afghanistan right through Pashtun homelands, creating a class of poor tenant farmers by rewarding favored khans with large land grants (the Pashtuns did not practice private ownership of land), and stripping away the power of the elder councils (*jirgas*) that had traditionally mediated disputes.

Ghaffar Khan attracted a devoted group of activists who toured the Frontier, urging villagers to avoid feuds and spend money on education and sanitation. His inexhaustible energy and kindness earned him the name “Badshah Khan,” or “King of Khans.”

But his work irked the British. In 1921, they arrested him on charges of subversion and sentenced him to three years' imprisonment. Prison life almost killed

Khan but gave him a chance to meet many leaders of India's independence movement.

Released in 1924, he returned to a flourishing movement in the Frontier. He resumed his work and often discussed British oppression with the villagers. At the same time, he saw clearly how internecine violence destroyed their lives.

To Khan, violence contradicted the teachings of Islam: “The true life of a Muslim is a life of nonviolence. If you read about our Prophet, it becomes clear that he never used the sword as an instrument of *jihad*.” To Khan, *jihad* meant the struggle toward selflessness, the soul's perfect “submission” (the meaning of the word “Islam”) to God's will.

“That man is a Muslim who never hurts anyone by word or deed,” said Khan. His faith in *ahimsa* (non-harming) and *satyagraha* (the strength to withstand injustice firmly and without hatred for the perpetrator) preceded his association with Gandhi. *Satyagraha* is similar to the Prophet's “patience”: persecuted by the Meccans, the Prophet never retaliated.

Khan and a young disciple hit upon the idea of turning Pashtun courage and bravado inside out by creating an army—complete with ranks and uniforms—whose soldiers vowed nonviolence: “I am a *Khudai Khidmatgar*; and as God needs no service, but serving his creation is serving him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God. I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge. I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty.”

Khan went from village to village accompanied by “Red Shirts” (the *Khudai Khidmatgars* dyed their shirts red-brown) organizing local civil committees. The “soldiers” helped the villagers in their tasks; they also drilled and marched but carried no weapons. By the end of 1929, Badshah Khan's nonviolent army numbered 50,000.

In December 1929, Khan attended the Indian Congress Party conference where Nehru announced a massive civil disobedience campaign to end British rule. Khan met Gandhi and became his devoted friend and follower, allying the Red Shirts with the Indian Congress. Indian Muslims, fearing domination by the Hindu majority, were increasingly drawn to the idea of a separate Muslim state, but Khan believed Hindus and Muslims—India's children all—should live together in a united India.

Back in the Frontier, he resumed traveling, now urging people to withhold taxes and boycott English cloth.

Gandhi, looking for a unifying issue, chose to challenge the British colonial administration's monopoly on mining and selling salt. On April 6, 1930, reaching

the sea after a 24-day march with thousands of followers, he picked up a pinch of salt, symbolically flouting the salt laws. The country exploded: Indians by the millions began to make and sell salt, drawing crowds which His Majesty's troops beat with *lathis* (steel-tipped staffs).

Few Muslims joined the civil disobedience campaign, except in the Frontier Province. But there, British violence reached a different level. On April 23, British authorities arrested Khan and immediately transported him 300 miles away to a Punjab prison. The next day, Red Shirts and other Pashtuns gathered in a Peshawar bazaar to protest the arrest. British colonial troops started firing on the unarmed crowd and continued for three hours, killing about 200. The Pashtuns remained nonviolent. The survivors removed the dead and wounded and then moved forward to become targets themselves.

One Himalayan Indian regiment under British command, the Garhwalis, refused to fire. (They were later court-martialed.) Eventually, troops and police withdrew, but new contingents returned a few days later and began a wave of savage repression throughout the Frontier.

Starting in Khan's village, soldiers stripped, beat, and jailed all Khudai Khidmatgars and looted and burned the village. Martial law was declared. Army and police officers tortured and humiliated the Pashtuns to provoke violent responses, but with no success.

Despite Gandhi's arrest in May, civil disobedience continued. The British relented in February 1931, and released Gandhi, who agreed to end civil disobedience in exchange for concessions from the British—principally a conference on independence in London, with Gandhi representing the Indian Congress.

Khan was freed. He spent several exhausting and dangerous months touring; Red Shirts and their supporters staged dramas to spread Khan's teaching of nonviolence. In December, Gandhi returned from the London conference empty-handed. The British re-arrested all Indian Congress leaders—including Khan and Gandhi—and launched another campaign of brutal repression, especially in the Frontier. In one incident, colonial troops killed 300 assembled Red Shirts.

Badshah Khan spent the next four years in prison. Freed again, but banned from the Frontier, he lived in Gandhi's ashram in Central India. In 1937, he was allowed to return to the Frontier. He found that his movement had continued resistance activities all through his long absence—a testimony to his leadership and to the profound impression made by his personality and teachings.

One biographer wrote of his "invincible gentleness." Khan's spiritual force shows in interviews with elderly Red Shirts conducted in 1992 by anthropolo-

gist Mumulika Banerjee. "People listened to Badshah Khan—because there was something special in the way he spoke—it was with love," said one. Another remembered, "Even if we had had weapons, we would not have fought. Badshah Khan brought light into our lives. His message was one of independence."

Khan also spoke of currents in Pashtun culture that revered peace and lovingkindness, such as mystical Islam, carried from Central Asia's Sufi schools by "lovers of learning and seekers of God wandering through the Islamic world in search of the real Islam." A deeper current still was Buddhism—2,300 years ago, the Peshawar Valley was part of the Buddhist kingdom of Gandhara, and Buddhism survived there for a thousand years. The ruins of Buddhist temples and shrines dot the countryside and the villagers speak of the "peaceful people" who built them. Khan was drawn to these Buddhist ancestors: "When Buddhism spread, our country made great progress."

In 1947, India achieved independence, but it was not the united India Khan had yearned for. With Partition, two states were born, in violent enmity, their borderlines drawn through lands shared by Hindus and Muslims for centuries. Rioting engulfed the country; a million died. About 14 million migrated—Muslims to Pakistan and Hindus to "Hindustan" (India).

In the former Frontier Province, now part of Pakistan, Khudai Khidmatgars protected Hindus and Sikhs from Muslim attacks and helped prevent a bloodbath. Khan himself traveled to riot-torn areas pleading for tolerance, with his message that every religion was based on "love and brotherhood," though "details differ, because each faith takes the color and flavor of the soil from which it springs." He held the British responsible for encouraging extremist Muslim separatists as a way to divide India's independence movement.

Recognizing that Partition was irrevocable, Khan swore allegiance to Pakistan, but his earlier links to the Indian Congress party and support for a unified India led the new government to brand him a traitor. His call for an autonomous "Pashtunistan" within Pakistan brought further hostility and he was imprisoned again and again on various charges. In all, Khan spent 15 of the last 40 years of his life in detention.

In 1980, eight years before Khan's death, the U.S. started arming the most fanatic Islamic groups to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. In the Afghan refugee camps that sprang up throughout the region, schools taught boys a form of Islam that preached violent *jihad* and an unforgiving interpretation of Islamic law, especially in regard to women. Khan had said, "God made no distinction between men and women.... If you study history you will see that there were many scholars and poets amongst women. It is a

(continued on page 42)

"People listened to Badshah Khan—because there was something special in the way he spoke—it was with love."

Book Reviews

Blue Jean Buddha: Voices of Young Buddhists

Edited by Sumi Loudon

Wisdom Publications, 2001, 232 pp., \$16.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Phillip Cryan

What do Buddhist youth have to say about the Dharma? What insights and edges have we discovered; what shifts are we making from previous generations' Buddhist practices, understandings, and institutions?

Blue Jean Buddha tries to answer these questions by letting young Buddhists speak for themselves. The slim volume brings together 28 short essays and reflections by Buddhists ages 20–33. It includes stories about teaching meditation to incarcerated teens; celebrations of the power of faith in a mantra; reflections on emotional honesty in relationships; accounts of death and grief; and meditations on integrating Dharma and activism.

Like most anthologies, *Blue Jean Buddha* contains essays of widely varying quality and depth. In some essays one can hear the voices of emerging Dharma teachers, and can almost feel their clarity and wisdom settling in. Other essays convey first encounters with Buddhism, or lessons learned when an initially overzealous application of a teaching led to trouble.

Many of the young contributors describe a strongly felt need to carry practice off the cushion and into the “marketplace,” through political activism, social service, or teaching meditation. The prevalence of this social/political imperative may mark a difference of emphasis between the young generation of Buddhists and some of our predecessors.

The juxtaposition of very diverse experiences of Buddhism reveals ongoing differences and potential rifts. Many questions come into focus. For example: Is faith a central element of Dharma practice, or is it antithetical to fundamental Buddhist teachings? How important are the precepts? Has Buddhism become acceptable and mainstream in the U.S., or is it still infused with elements of 1960s counterculture, experimentation, “wildness,” or exoticism? Is the experience of European American youth who grew up in Buddhist families comparable to the experience of young Asian American (so-called “ethnic”) Buddhists? Or is it more similar to the experience of other European Americans who discovered Buddhism on their own during their late teens or twenties?

Editor Loudon, a student at Harvard Divinity School, offers reflections on some of these questions but does not suggest definitive answers. She lets the contributors' varied understandings and experiences speak for themselves. Despite a corny title, *Blue Jean Buddha* is a worthwhile—if inconsistently profound—read. It offers fascinating glimpses of Dharma practice in motion, acculturating and

shifting as it takes root and new shapes in the experiences of the next generation of U.S. Buddhists. ❖

Phillip Cryan, 23, is an activist and writer. He works for Witness for Peace in Bogota, Colombia. A participant in BPF's Youth BASE program and the Zen Hospice Project, he practices in the Theravada tradition of Ajahn Chah and the Ch'an school of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

Transformation at the Base: Fifty Verses on the Nature of Consciousness by Thich Nhat Hanh

Parallax Press, 2001, 248 pp., \$24.00 (cloth)

Reviewed by Roy Money

In this book Thich Nhat Hanh presents and discusses 50 four-line verses composed by Vasubandhu that reflect on Buddhist psychology. Specifically, he discusses the teachings of the Manifestation Only school of Buddhism, which grew out of Indian Yogachara philosophy. I learned about this book shortly after September 11, and it has been a frequent companion since then.

Of course, transformation is central to the meditation process: by sitting with our suffering and opening to it, we can find release. Mindfulness can transform mental formations by allowing us first to see them for what they are—the results of conditioning—and then to interrupt the automatic responses associated with that conditioning.

After the 9/11 disaster, I found myself awash in waves of anger. I was angry with others and angry with myself for being so angry. The more I sat with this torrent of aversion and tried to welcome it, the more I came to see it as part of a conditioned reaction that has been with me a long time, and which is normally dormant. The more I sat, the more I came to see that my identification with these feelings was not necessary and was making my life miserable.

What was new for me in this book is its comprehensive discussion of the transformation process. “Transformation at the base” refers to the transformation of the “store consciousness” (*alaya vijñana*)—the repository of all our experience and the source for all our mental formations. The store consciousness is said to be the ground of all other aspects of consciousness based in the five senses and the mind.

Phenomena manifest when conditions permit, but even an unmanifested phenomenon can still exist as a potentiality in the store consciousness. Indeed, the store consciousness holds an infinite variety of such potentialities, and our challenge as Buddhist practitioners is to cultivate the wholesome potentialities and transform the unwholesome ones.

What does this have to do with socially engaged Buddhism? In some ways this book is a consolidation of many of Thich Nhat Hanh's writings over the past 30 years. Here the focus is on illuminating exactly how mindfulness

can lead to an awareness of interbeing and transform delusion into enlightenment. If delusion is a way of thinking based on pairs of opposites, and self and nonself are not actually two, then my life and that of others is indivisible.

One of my favorite verses is:

*Beings manifest when conditions are sufficient.
When conditions lack, they no longer appear.
Still, there is no coming, no going,
No being, and no nonbeing.*

All 50 verses are presented at the beginning of the book in a separate section, and then each one heads a chapter devoted to its explication.

One difficulty I encountered was an occasional blurring of the distinction between metaphor and "reality." For example, Nhat Hanh writes that "store consciousness is present in every cell of your body," but he does not explain how this could be. I doubt he means that DNA is equivalent to store consciousness as the basis of all potentiality. I was also confused by his discussion of Indra's Net. Although many aspects of modern science confirm the interdependence of phenomena, I had difficulty translating that into the idea that "the entire universe has come together to make this teapot."

This book makes for challenging reading, as it attempts to delineate a theory of consciousness that "you could spend an entire lifetime looking deeply into," as Nhat Hanh says in the introduction. He advises the reader to "allow [the verses] to enter you as you would listen to music." It is evident that he has spent much of his lifetime looking deeply into these teachings. The time I have spent with them so far has been rewarding, and I look forward to spending much more time investigating them further. ❖

Roy Money lives in New Haven, Connecticut, and works as a statistical analyst. In addition to vipassana practice, he draws inspiration from a 25-year marriage, a teenage son, a Unitarian-Universalist faith community, and social activism.

I Opened the Gate, Laughing: An Inner Journey

by Mayumi Oda

Chronicle Books, 2002, 76 pp., \$16.95 (cloth)

Reviewed by Virginia Hickey

Best known for her powerful, charming silkscreened "Goddesses," artist Mayumi Oda relates her search for inner peace and self-acceptance in this beautifully designed little book.

Oda left Japan in her twenties, when she became the wife of an American university professor, and moved to New York to begin her career as an artist. In 1978, at age 37, she realized sadly that her marriage was ending. At the invitation of her friend Richard Baker Roshi, then abbot of San

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Francisco Zen Center, she moved to northern California. Oda and her two young sons settled in Muir Beach, near the Zen Center's retreat facility, Green Gulch Farm.

Embracing the simple rural life of the farm, she began to find her way back to the Buddhism of her childhood. Her practice of American Buddhism, the community of the farm, and, especially, her garden, provided insights into her life. She says, "I became whole." From that wholeness Oda was able to leave the security of the garden: "I opened the gate, laughing." She went on to found Plutonium Free Future, a network of people advocating safe energy and the elimination of nuclear weapons. She also coordinated the World Court Project and helped to establish a refuge for women in Cambodia.

This inspirational book is delightfully illustrated with Oda's watercolors of goddesses and of vegetables, flowers, and small creatures from her garden. It is liberally sprinkled with poetry and verse. It will appeal to gardeners, to anyone who admires Mayumi Oda and her art, and to Buddhist practitioners and activists. The book's charming design and illustrations make it a lovely gift for almost anyone. ❖

Virginia Hickey is a retired social-services administrator with a long history of volunteerism and activism for racial equality and environmental causes. She collects Mayumi Oda's art, has studied Zen for many years, and has visited many Buddhist sites in Japan. Turning Wheel's Book Review Editor is very proud to be her daughter.

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Briefly Noted: What Do You Believe?

Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers by Sarah Feinbloom

In this engaging 50-minute video documentary, diverse teenagers share their thoughts on the meaning of life, God, and religious tolerance. Interviewees include a Catholic, Muslim, Pagan, Jew, Buddhist, and Native American. An excellent teaching tool, challenging stereotypes. See www.whatdoyoubelieve.org. To order, call 800/343-5540.

Correction:

In a review of Toinette Lippe's memoir, *Nothing Left Over* (*Turning Wheel*, Summer 2002), the publisher was incorrectly identified as Bell Tower; the book was published by Tarcher/Putnam. We apologize for the error.

Badshah Khan, continued from page 39

grave mistake we have made in degrading women." He worked to bring women out of seclusion (*purdah*); women were active in the Khudai Khidmatgars and were encouraged to speak in public.

Khan died in Peshawar in 1988, at age 98. He had asked to be buried in Afghanistan, where he spent many of his later years. A one-day ceasefire was declared in the Soviet-Afghan war, and 20,000 people followed the funeral procession over the Khyber Pass.

Despite this amazing tribute, Pakistan's governments succeeded so well in suppressing accounts of his life and work that today, only 14 years after his death, he is little known.

All governments promote versions of history that suit their goals. Thus the current Indian government claims kinship with Gandhi but engages in nuclear brinkmanship with Pakistan. Our own government declares the 9/11 attacks to be the unprovoked product of evil minds, ignoring a long history of imperial offenses—British and American, among others—against Muslims.

The *Dhammapada* says, "The results of karma cannot be known by thought." Indeed, no mind can apprehend all the causes and effects of an action. But this does not justify superficial versions of history that conceal the West's responsibilities for the current violence.

Rediscovering the buried stories of active nonviolence—in the work of people like Badshah Khan and the Red Shirts—helps us to strengthen the beneficial currents of which Khan spoke: "No true effort is in vain. Look at the fields over there. The grain sown therein has to remain in the earth for a certain time, then it sprouts, and in due time yields hundreds of its kind. The same is the case with every effort in a good cause." ❖

Annette Herskovits is a Zen practitioner whose life koan is to work on racial hatred and war while keeping in mind the cheerful smile of Zaroohé Najarian—a 94-year-old Armenian woman who survived the genocide of her people in World War I and who can still say, "I will not be sad in this world."

BPF Reports

From the Executive Director:

The last three months have been a time of change at BPF. Like many other nonprofits, we are facing serious budget cuts in the current economic downturn. We are grateful to BPF members and supporters who are giving generously in these hard times. We do need your help.

It is with great regret that we have had to let go of Joi Morton-Wiley, codirector of the Prison Project. For the last year and a half, Joi has been bringing her compassion, commitment, and cheerful spirit to the work of BPF, and in particular she has done a wonderful job of organizing our prisoner correspondence program. We will miss her sorely.

Other aspects of our programs are currently being re-examined so as to make them sustainable within our budget.

We will let you know how things develop.

This summer we were fortunate to have had wonderful volunteers in our office. Gerhard Köberlin was here from Germany, where he worked with a Lutheran peace organization, to learn about our work and to offer his experience and insight into peacework. Allison Budner was here for the summer from Brown University as an intern with the Prison Project. Llewellyn Wishart, from Australia, has been volunteering on a regular basis as well. We had to dig out some old computers from storage to accommodate everyone. It's a real pleasure to have had the benefit of their fresh ideas.

Our chapters continue to do important work, and the Board has recommitted to providing better services to our chapters. Diana Winston visited three chapters in Massachusetts in June, and in July I visited a newly developing chapter in Nevada City, California, and was impressed by the commitment of this group to social and political activism.

We are working to develop responses and actions to world events and the violence that permeates our environment at all levels. You can join us in this effort by going on our Web site and signing yourself onto our action list; you will be notified of coming actions around the country.

Many of you have written to us with suggestions and good ideas. We welcome this input tremendously and hope you continue with your encouragement. We also welcome your financial help in these difficult times. Please consider making *Turning Wheel* and BPF membership your main gift this holiday season, and use for meditation the time you save in shopping. The world will be better for it. ❖

—Sibylle Scholz

From the Prison Program:

In the fall of 2002, San Quentin State Prison in California will roll out its new medium-security program for 200 men. Dubbed "Success Dorm," the program is restricted to prisoners who can show that they are seriously committed to turning their lives around, and who have at least three months of their sentence left to serve. The curriculum will include over 40 classes in a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation and post-release connections. Among the classes being offered are meditation, yoga, positive parenting, anger management/peacemaking, theater, and one called "Going Home," which prepares inmates for the transition from prison to life "on the streets." That transition tends to be so rough that a recidivism rate of 70 percent is not uncommon.

BPF's Prison Program is excited to cosponsor, along with the Bay Area Center for Nonviolent Communication (BayNVC), a 12-week class on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as part of the new program. NVC is a system of communication developed by Marshall Rosenberg that is based on looking at the world in terms of our inherent interconnectedness, and acting from that awareness. It has successfully helped to promote harmony in over 30 countries around the world, including between inner-city gangs in America, warring groups in the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and Ireland—even within families and couples. I see it as a concrete way to put "right speech" into practice. And, in this case, it will offer some tools for people making the transition to life outside the walls, with all the conflicts and obstacles inherent in that process.

At our orientation, five of us gathered to discuss the issues that might come up when offering NVC inside. I was moved by the questions people brought. The importance of neither demonizing (as much media does) nor romanticizing (which many new volunteers do) prisoners was central to our discussion. Offering NVC for the first time inside a prison means not only figuring out how to teach the method but also what examples are relevant to the folks inside, and how to negotiate such tangibles as gate clearances, lockdowns, relating to people who live in a space the size of most people's bathrooms, and so on. We are conducting an experiment. As in all of the prison meditation classes I've led, I will undoubtedly learn at least as much from the people who are incarcerated as they will learn from me. I look forward to this new aspect of prison sangha. ❖

—Diana Lion



BPF-sponsored weekly vigil, every Friday on the U.C. Berkeley campus.
Photo by Ted Seymour

BASE Midyear Report:

BASE has had a half year of exciting developments. This year we held our twentieth BASE group since the program's inception in 1995 (and that doesn't include four other programs modeled on BASE)! Currently, Diana Winston has been working to strengthen BASE, update forms and procedures, and finish up a BASE reader. The BASE Committee has been exploring how to support BASE alum, create BASE group leadership, and bring the insights of BASE to the wider socially engaged Buddhist community. Here are BASE developments since January:

Diversity BASE, organized by Swan Keyes and Kenji Liu and mentored by Mushim Ikeda-Nash, completed its six-month run in July, and is extending the program and continuing to meet monthly. D-BASE, as they call it, has provided a great opportunity for its members to examine racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class oppression using a Buddhist lens. Members took turns facilitating the group, with supportive guidance from other Buddhist practitioners and teachers. Members have been exploring identity, power, decision-making, and alliance-building within the group context.

Educators' BASE has been running as an independent group in the Bay Area since 1999. It has completed its third year and will be starting up again in the fall. Mentor Lyn Fine says, "We recently had our end-of-year Educators'

BASE group—nine of us. We have evolved helpful structures, processes, and communication styles to keep renewing and deepening...quite lovely."

Vancouver BASE ran for six months from February through July. It was organized by Harreson Sito and mentored by BASE alum Margot Sangster. This small group explored the intersection of social change and practice, and will be starting a new group in the fall. This is our first group outside the U.S., thanks to the efforts of committed folks in Vancouver.

Second BASE is a program for BASE graduates. Tempel Smith and Anna Brown Griswold wanted to continue their BASE experience, but wanted a group tailored to those whose lives are ongoingly committed to BASE principles of service, social change, practice, and action. This small group, with its informal but much-needed flavor, met weekly for four months to support each other's work. Another Second BASE is starting up in September.

BASE grads Tempel Smith, Anna Brown Griswold, and Jesse Baen moved into a renovated Victorian in San Francisco's Mission District to start the first-ever BASE House. (See story on page 33.) House members practice together, and are all working in the field of social change. BASE community events will be held there in the future.

Check the BPF Web site (www.bpf.org) for the latest updates on next year's BASE program. ♦

—Diana Winston

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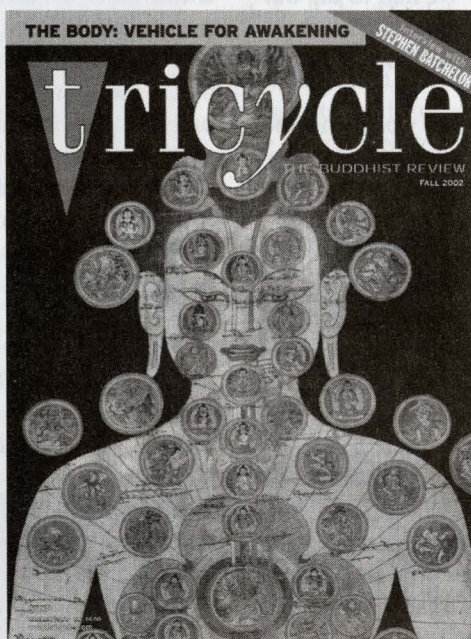
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Celebrate for Peace! Star Alliance presents a free multicultural concert-celebration for peace. Saturday, October 12, 2:00–5:00 P.M., People's Park in Berkeley. Come enjoy! To volunteer, call 510/540-8887; www.staralliance.org.

Free Dharma Teaching Altar Cards for Inmates. Naljor Prison Dharma Service offers three beautiful Dharma Altar Cards: Eight Verses for Training the Mind, the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, and the Four Immeasurables. Inmates may request one Altar Card of their choice. For all other practitioners, the Altar Cards are \$8.95 each. Contact Naljor Creations, P. O. Box 628, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067; 530/926-1166; www.naljor.com.

8th Western Buddhist Monastic Conference, Nov. 7–11, 2002. Hosted by the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB), Ukiah, CA. A unique opportunity to share the experience of being a monk or nun in the West. Ordained Buddhist monastics of all traditions that hold vows of celibacy are welcome. Shuttle to/from San Francisco and CTTB, lodging, and food provided. For more information and to register, contact one of the organizers: Ven. Ajahn Punnadhammo, <arcc@baynet.org>, Ven. Ani Jigme Palmo, <neljorma@aol.com>, or Ven. Yeo Kwang Sunim, <Jayusan@cs.com>.

GROUPS

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.

Sangha for Buddhists of Color meets monthly in the San Francisco Bay Area for meditation, Dharma talks, and mutual support. For information, call 415/789-8359; <boc_caretakers@hotmail.com>.

Diversity and Social Change Sangha, for those interested in blending mindfulness practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh with social change work, meets weekly in Oakland. Contact Olga at 510/540-0141; <drking@attglobal.net>.

Peace and Human Rights in Latin America. Several of us who are active BPF members have a long history of involvement in peace and human rights work in Latin America. If there are other BPF members who share our path and would be interested in seeing BPF support peace and justice work in Latin America, contact: Judith Stronach <jlstronach@sprynet.com> or Andrea Thach <ananda3917@earthlink.net>.

Art, Buddhism, and social change group to explore the intersection of art, Buddhism, and social change. What does it look like when creativity emerges from a Buddhist practice? How can the process of creating art be an act of socially engaged Buddhism? Please contact me if you are interested in creating a space (once or twice monthly) to meet, discuss, and explore these and other related questions. Tiffany Sankary, 510/532-9625; <tiffany@prisonactivist.org>.

VOLUNTEER/DONATIONS/ SPONSORSHIP

Quaker prisoner, Washington state, M.A. work completed, seeks financial help for Ph.D. program. Send donations and/or biographical request to Faith Adams, 412 1/2 NW 42nd Street, Seattle, WA 98107.

Help Homeless Seniors. St. Mary's Center in downtown Oakland needs volunteers for our Emergency Winter Shelter: companionship, meals, programming (group discussions). For other volunteer opportunities see www.stmaryscenter.org. Call Patt at 510/893-4723 x215.

Help Homeless Women and Children by donating needed personal care items—toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, hairbrushes, combs—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.

Prison Dharma Network (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>.

Help Ven. Suhita Dharma, social worker and Buddhist monk, create a community meditation and empowerment center in Mt. Vernon, NY, to serve at-risk youth, people with HIV, and prisoners. Send checks payable to "Mettavihara Monastic Community" to Ven. Suhita Dharma, Desert Zen Center, 10989 Buena Vista Rd., Lucerne, CA 92356-8313; <kalibhante@yahoo.com>.

Seeking Sponsorship for Jampel Yeshe, a young Tibetan monk now studying at Dzongar Institute in India. Both parents died in Tibet and he is on his own, with medical and educational expenses to meet. A warm and faithful correspondent. Potential for lifetime connection/friendship. Helping directly and personally without organizational overhead. Ongoing or one-time donations appreciated. Contact Dave Young, P. O. Box 241, Ponderay, ID 83852; <fibsquib@yahoo.com>.

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See our Web site, www.bpf.org, for the most current version of this list.

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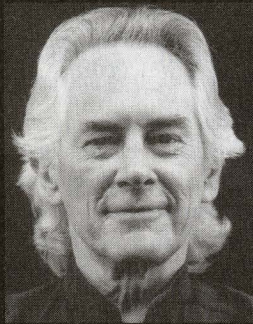
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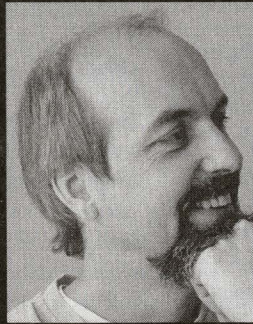
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