



TURNING WHEEL

Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Spring 2000 \$5.00

The Invisible Divide



BUDDHISTS LOOK AT CLASS

- ❖ IS BUDDHISM AFFORDABLE? ❖ CROSS-CLASS DIALOGUE
- ❖ INTERVIEW WITH JAN WILLIS
- ❖ THE ONGOING STRUGGLE OF UNTOUCHABLES

PLUS: Buddhists at the WTO



FROM THE EDITOR

The invisibility of class is one of the reasons we need to study it. We can't really *see* it. More conditioned than we realize by social myths ("Anyone willing to put in a hard day's work..." etc.) we make assumptions, and then we turn out to be wrong.

In the communities I'm a part of, we speak more consciously of race and gender (not that we've come to the end of those conversations) than of class. So a group of us got together to talk about class for this issue of *TW*. (See p. 20.) One woman, when I called to invite her to join the discussion, said, "Class?" as if she'd never heard the word. "I don't think I have anything particular to say about that." A lot of people feel that way.

In some contexts, however, class is a familiar subject. Marxism and socialism can help us expand our vocabulary. Writers and artists aren't afraid to talk about class, either. Off the top of my head: Chekhov, George Eliot, Dickens, Mark Twain, Chaucer, the Brothers Grimm, Charlotte Bronte, Toni Morrison, Diego Rivera, Dorothea Lange, *My Fair Lady*, *The Titanic*, Woody Allen, Mike Leigh. I've learned a lot about class (and our myths about class) from these sources.

But it's hard to look at the way class differences show up within our own sanghas, within our own friendship circles, even within our own families. It's not a theoretical thing. There are unspoken contradictions that are basic to the quality of our lives: some of us have to work harder than others to make ends meet. For some, the ends *don't* meet; others don't have to work at all. Some of us can afford psychotherapy and some of us can't. Some of us know that material wealth is not the source of our strength, and some aren't sure. Some of us hire others to do the chores we don't have "time" to do ourselves; others are the ones who get hired—to weed, vacuum, sort mail. Some of us get kicked out by the landlord; others build a tea house in their garden. Some look anxiously into empty refrigerators; others throw out spoiled leftovers. This is scary stuff to talk about between friends. No wonder some people just hang out with their own "kind."

Looking at class is also scary because we suspect we might have to give something up. As engaged Buddhists, we honor racial and gender diversity, but class is different in this respect. We need to shrink, not celebrate, the gap between rich and poor. And in the world economy, we in the West are the upper class. So how much do we really have to give up? And when do we start?

Buddha says we're not separate. But class boundaries sure can make us *feel* separate. And it's hard to express your buddha nature if you're worrying about your survival, or if you're clinging to your privilege, or if you're afraid to let people know who you really are.

Class privilege isn't the same as money, though they overlap. Some privilege is like a pie—if one person gets a bigger piece, others get smaller pieces. But some privilege is not quantifiable, and there's more than enough for everyone. Like knowing how to read. Or the dharma—there's enough of *that* to go around.

One way to make our sanghas more open to people from different backgrounds is to tell our stories, to reveal the invisible diversity we already have. Surprise, surprise! We didn't all grow up like Dick and Jane.

We're talking about it here. The writers in these pages are stepping into dangerous territory, and it takes courage. We're pretty new at this, and we may mispeak, but I think it's more helpful to make mistakes than to remain silent. So please join the conversation. ♦ —Susan Moon



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- Summer 00: *Human Rights*.
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- Winter 01: *Aging*. Deadline: 10/2/00
- Spring 01: *Karma*. Deadline: 1/2/01

For up-to-date information on action and events in engaged Buddhism, please see the Urgent Action/Events page of the BPF website: <www.bpf.org/urgent.html>.

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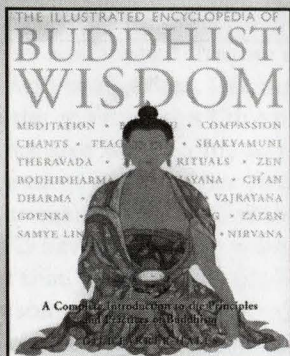
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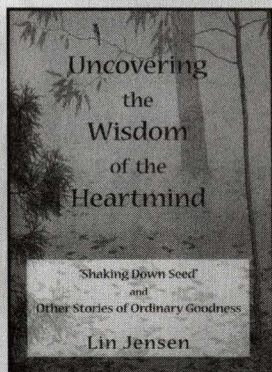
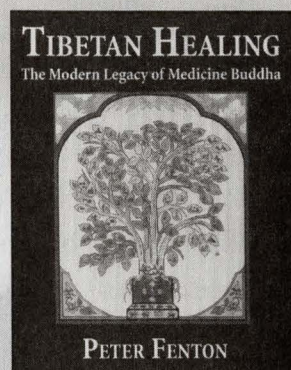
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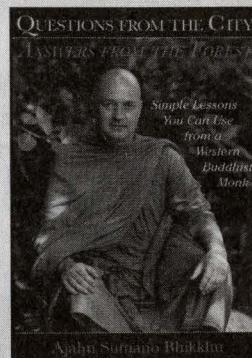
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LETTERS

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

Appreciations

Last month I came across Diana Winston's article "Speed" in *Turning Wheel*. I wept after reading it. How perfectly she articulates this frantic aspect of our society. I love her phrase "reverberation time," and have been passing it on ever since.

I once thought myself hopelessly out of step, moving to a much slower rhythm, absolutely lost in this place and time. Since those days, I have come to comprehend my misalignment as a sign of life, and very common among us. (This was one of the reasons I was so comfortable living in India.) Diana's article has given me heart.

—Anne Hudes, Oakland, California

I really appreciate Mushim Ikeda-Nash's Family Practice column in *Turning Wheel*. It is a gift to witness mindfulness being applied to parenting and family practice. Although I have no children myself, the parts of me re-parenting myself and the parts of me on the receiving end of that re-parenting feel very nourished by Mushim's sharing. Thank you for including this as a regular column.

—Anne Frances Martin, Berkeley, California

Thailand Education Project

Four years ago, I saw a classified ad in *Turning Wheel* asking for volunteer English teachers for Buddhist nuns in Thailand. I have just returned from my third winter teaching in this program, and I need some help. By myself, I cannot give the students enough time to really make a difference. I need to find additional volunteer teachers, whom I'm willing to advise, and I need to raise some funds to pay my way back to Thailand.

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The community in which I teach rescues young women from the impoverished northeast of Thailand, who are at risk for becoming prostitutes. The program gives them a safe place to live along with some education, dharma instruction, and job training. The government supplies 15 baht per day (38 cents) per girl for food. It should also supply a teacher, but there are long stretches when no teacher appears.

I have learned how to teach English to a group of girls, some of whom have never been in school before. Many are motivated and smart, and all are a delight to teach. Learning to read and write English can make a huge difference to their self-esteem, their employment opportunities, and their ability to go on to school. There is no funding for this program, and I have seriously depleted my own savings doing this for three winters.

I can offer to prepare other women volunteers from my own hard-won experience. Thai-speaking women are also needed to teach math and science. Volunteers should plan to go for a minimum of two months, preferably longer. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Janey Bennett at <janeyb@mars.ark.com>. Contributions toward airfare, photocopies, shipping of typewriters and books, bus fare, and other expenses may be made payable to Buddhist Peace Fellowship, marked "For Northern Thai Maechee English Project."

—Janey Bennet, Bellingham, Canada

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NEWS FROM INDRA'S NET

The 17th Karmapa Flees Tibet

A 14-year old Tibetan boy, the leader of the Kagyupa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, has fled to India from his monastery near Lhasa. The 17th Karmapa arrived in Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government in exile, in early January, exhausted but healthy after a 900-mile trek (on foot and by truck) through the Himalayas.

The boy was recognized as the reincarnation of the 16th Karmapa in 1992 at the age of seven, and confirmed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was also officially approved by the Chinese authorities, unlike the Dalai Lama's choice of reincarnation for the Panchen Lama.

The Karmapa said the Chinese government failed to keep a promise that he would be able to visit his followers throughout the world and to invite his teacher, Tai Situ Rinpoche, to give him the proper teachings. The Chinese government kept the 17th Karmapa under tight control, hoping he could be of use in their effort to woo the Tibetans away from the Dalai Lama. Their endorsement made him very precious to China's political goals, so his flight could worsen the harsh reprisals against monks and nuns loyal to the Dalai Lama. But some hope it might encourage China to send a mission to India to talk with the Karmapa and the Dalai Lama, thus opening a new avenue for secret negotiations between China and the exiled Tibetans.

Punishing Immigrants

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Congress enacted two laws, severely curtailing the civil and human rights of immigrants and refugees. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and the Anti-terrorist and Effective Death Penalty Act, along with welfare "reform" which denies immigrants almost all government benefits, are creating fear and suffering in immigrant communities. Civil rights and religious organizations have now joined in a nationwide campaign called "Fix '96" to change these laws.

These laws require the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to detain and deport any immigrant who has committed an "aggravated felony," a category drastically expanded to include minor crimes such as shoplifting, even if the crime was committed and the sentence served (or suspended) decades ago. So someone who has lived legally in the U.S. since early childhood, has several citizen children, and has been employed for 20 years, can be deported because they were convicted 25 years ago of possessing marijuana, and lose everything—job, home, family, community. The laws eliminate the right to review by a judge—INS officials decide, and the decisions cannot be appealed. The particular circumstances of the "criminal alien" cannot

be considered. Detention until deportation is mandatory, without possibility of bail. Since INS detention centers are overflowing, refugees are often placed in local jails with convicted criminals and treated like other inmates, in defiance of international law.

The cruelty of these laws culminates in the indefinite detention of those who cannot return to their country of origin. About 3,500 prisoners—some of them from countries that will not allow them to return, like Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—are currently held with no hope of release.

Another provision of the law, "expedited removal," effectively deprives asylum seekers of a fair hearing. Refugees must now convince a low-level INS officer they have a "credible fear" of persecution even before their case is considered. They have no right to counsel during this interview. Terrified and weary refugees, speaking no English and unaware of their rights, may fail such an interview and be sent back to the country they fled.

Finally, the law criminalizes undocumented immigrants. Anyone who enters the U.S. a second time without documents is now committing a felony and becomes another "criminal alien." Across the country, the number of foreigners prosecuted for re-entry increased from 698 in 1994 to 2,749 in 1998. Sentences range from two to six years.

- To learn more about Fix '96, see the websites of the ACLU: <www.aclu.org/features/fix96.html> and of the National Immigration Forum: <www.immigrationforum.org>

The High Price of Medicine

By placing patent law over basic human needs, the developed countries are keeping essential medicines from millions of people infected with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other, often fatal, diseases. Patents give pharmaceutical companies absolute monopoly over a drug for 20 years, enabling them to charge exorbitant prices. For example, Pfizer charged \$14 in Thailand for a day's supply of an antibiotic used to fight a fatal form of AIDS-related meningitis. After the patent expired, two Thai companies began making the drug for 70 cents for the same quantity.

At one time, every country had the right to produce medicines needed to protect its people's health. But in 1994, the World Trade Organization (WTO) voted to require members to abide by a system of patents, including on essential medicines.

WTO agreements allow a country to issue a "compulsory license" to a local drug manufacturer in a national emergency, but the U.S. government has moved to stop any country that tries. Thailand, with a million HIV/AIDS patients, was ready to produce the anti-HIV drug ddI but stopped after the U.S. threatened to set high duties on Thai goods.

A country can also obtain more affordable medicines by buying from countries where they are cheaper. This "parallel importing" is allowed by the WTO, but when South Africa enacted a law in 1997 authorizing both parallel importing and compulsory licensing, the U.S. government launched a campaign to force its repeal, with Vice President Gore at the forefront. (Gore changed his position after protesters disrupted campaign events.)

Reliance on free market mechanisms also means research on and production of medicines for tropical diseases has all but ceased. One manufacturer stopped producing a medicine for sleeping sickness, endemic in Africa, because it was not sufficiently profitable. According to the World Health Organization, more than 90 percent of the billions spent on health research is directed toward diseases that afflict less than 10 percent of the world's population.

Pharmaceutical companies claim they need exceptional protection because research for new medicines is costly. But profit margins in the industry are nearly three times those enjoyed by other manufacturers of consumer goods, and overall, drug companies spend 50 percent more on advertising, promotion, and lobbying than on research and development.

In December, President Clinton addressed the WTO and promised the U.S. would no longer block access to essential medicines.

ACTION ALERT!

• Write President Clinton and Vice President Gore to demand they back up good words with action, and encourage all means by which poor countries can obtain affordable medicines. Contact: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC 20500, fax: 202/456-2461.

• To find out more about access to medicines, see the websites of Ralph Nader's Consumer Project on Technology: <www.cptech.org> and Doctors without Borders: <www.msf.org>.

—*Researched and written by Annette Herskovits*

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ECOLOGY COLUMN

Warrior or Protector?

by Stephanie Kaza

Were the early Buddhists high or low caste? Was the first sangha troubled by class distinctions? Buddha delivered the Aggañña Sutta, it is said, to address the concerns of two young Brahmins whose decision to join the order had been denounced by their class peers. Their fellow Brahmins scorned these two as betraying the highest caste “born of Brahma’s mouth,” by choosing instead to associate with those whom they felt were “born of Brahma’s feet.” They saw Buddha and his followers as no better than the *suddas*, the lowest caste. The Buddha delivered this talk to demonstrate that such an attitude itself is degrading, and that people who hold to high or low standards can be found in all castes. He urged people to join the community of monks, drawn from all classes to form a single sangha, transcending class differences.

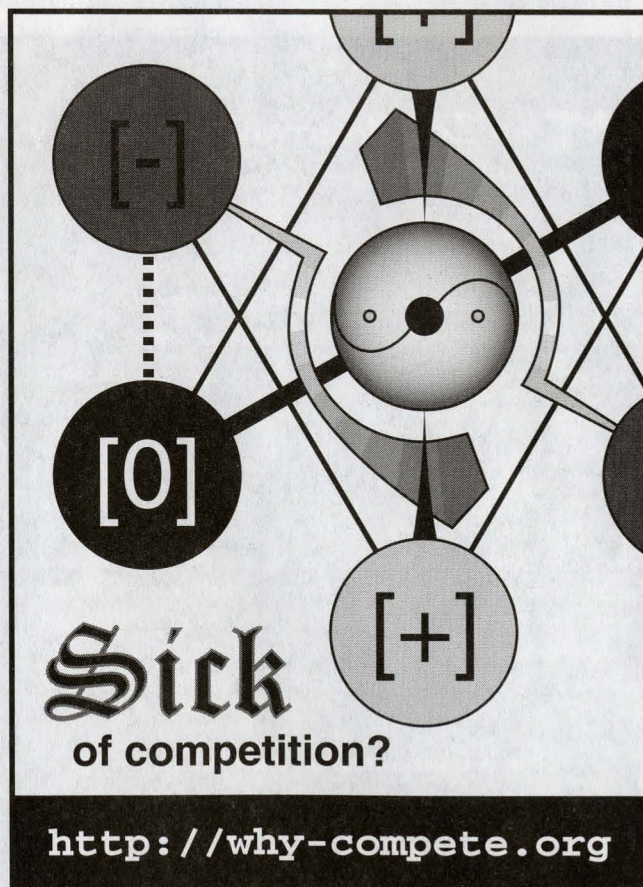
The sutta is a moral tale of the origin of the castes, linking caste to human errancy. The story begins with the earliest eon, when the first beings were self-luminous, subsisting on joy, and made of mind only. At that time the earth was covered with a delicately flavored

earth-substance similar to butter. As the Radiant Beings ate of the butter, they developed a taste for it, and eventually became greedy for it. The more they ate, the more coarse their bodies became. With the solidification of bodies, forms differentiated into beautiful and homely. Problems arose—pride, lust, and ill-will. The butter gave way to mushrooms and the forms separated into male and female. More problems—sex, pleasure, and indulgence. The mushrooms were replaced by self-growing rice; when people began hoarding the rice, its quality declined. As the story goes, the people gathered together to stop the hoarding and agreed to divide the supplies evenly among themselves. One person was dissatisfied with his (or her) allotment and took an extra share. Thus, theft came into the world, and with it censure, deceit, and punishment.

To mete out such punishment and protect the social rules, the people conferred authority on a capable spokesperson, compensating him for this task with a portion of their shares of rice. In the sutta, this person was called *Khattiya*, which means “lord of the fields.” The story continues, telling the origins of the priestly caste, then the farmers, merchants, the lowest castes, and eventually the formation of a fifth group, the circle of recluses, the caste-transcending sangha.

From an ecological view, it is significant that the sutta declares that the khattiyas are supreme among the castes. Usually khattiya is translated as “warrior,” and Buddha himself was said to have come from such a warrior class. But the original phrase, “*khettanam pati*,” or “lord of the fields,” implies a more protective than combative orientation. The phrase can also be translated “husband of the fields,” thus evoking the values of marriage between ruler and land, based in cultivating loving relations. P. D. Ryan, in his book, *Buddhism and the Natural World*, suggests that this view of the warrior caste as superior to the Brahmins, or priestly caste, elevates acts of protecting over acts of sacrificing. In the story, then, it is the protectors who bear the greatest burden of responsibility for the welfare of the world.

This understanding of warrior as protector was developed by Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa as a formal path of practice. He called it “The Way of the Shambhala Warrior.” Many young people today who stand in solidarity with trees and other beings bring a fiercely protective warrior stance to their activist work. Julia Butterfly, holding firm in her treetop home, protected Luna with her own body from encroaching chain saws and profit lines. And John Seed, speaking for the rain forests in Australia, felt that the rain forest was protecting itself through him. Finding this new translation of “khattiya” makes me wonder: might there not be an unbroken lineage of fierce and loving land protectors, traceable all the way back to Buddha’s time? ❖



FAMILY PRACTICE COLUMN

*Hi, Brother!—**Parenthood, Poverty, and Remembrance*

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

I was breathing heavily and sweating as I pushed the stroller up a steep hill in downtown San Francisco. As usual, I had a large duffel slung over my shoulder, stuffed with diapers, extra clothes for Joshua, and a few snacks. Oh no, I said to myself when I saw the derelict blocking my path on the sidewalk, I'm going to have to walk right past that guy. I hate being panhandled! A single mother, I always felt so vulnerable in those days, worrying that a mugger could knock me down, take my purse, or, even worse, take my baby.

Trying to avoid eye contact with the man in dirty clothing, I trudged past, dreading the minute amount of extra energy it would take to say "No" to the outstretched hand.

Instead, the man graciously waved me on, and, with a great, gap-toothed smile of recognition, shouted, "HI, BROTHER!"

Suddenly, I realized that *he* was probably relieved that I hadn't asked him for money! I was dressed in an odd assortment of clothes and a Guatemalan cap that friends had given me; my toddler, who despite my best efforts always seemed to have food and grime smeared all over his face, hands, and clothing, sat in a battered stroller that had also been donated to us. The street man, who thought I was another street man, was trying to lift my spirits.

That was around ten years ago. Now I'm no longer single, I can buy clothing from a store, and my refrigerator is full of fresh organic vegetables and fruit, tofu, milk, cheese, and eggs. Both my husband and I spent our early adult years separately investigating the counterculture, Chris through hippie tree-planting co-ops and building his own cabin in Oregon, I through the path of American Zen and a vow of poverty. When we began living together, money was always tight, and we fought a fair amount just because of financial stress. No matter how well I managed the checkbook, there always seemed to be three days at the end of Chris' pay period when we had maybe five bucks between us, nothing in the bank, and a pile of unpaid bills. Slowly, aided by a small inheritance after my parents died, we have worked our way to a slightly eccentric, but more comfortable middle-class way of life.

I'm immensely relieved that things are easier now. But I don't want to forget how easily things can change. I don't want to forget how it feels to walk down a city street, looking into restaurant windows from the outside, knowing I could not go in and buy a meal. I don't want to forget what it feels like to sit in the waiting room

of the Medi-Cal office, breastfeeding a crying baby, and hoping that our medical coverage will be approved by the state for one more period. During my time as a Zen student, I've done a lot of things that I don't want to forget. I've eaten food from garbage containers, stolen toilet paper from public restrooms, and once, to earn just \$15, I climbed onto the roof of a hamburger stand in New Mexico, at night, in order to scrape congealed hamburger fat from the inside of the grill hood.

I don't want to forget anything I've done or anyone I've met when I didn't have money. These are the stories that don't get told. Sometimes, though, I am sad when I think about some of the women, like the tall blonde hooker in Albuquerque, who worked a corner on a main street I used to drive down fairly often at night. Over the course of three months she became ever more visibly pregnant, and I felt really sorry for her, standing in her white fringed coat and thigh-high white boots, looking as though she was ready to give birth at any minute. And the poor, crazy woman in Korea, who accosted me in a park, offering what she called "love" for money to feed the baby she said she had at home. Her front teeth were rotted out, and her hair was dirty and matted. I didn't have any money to give her.

So, I'm glad I'm not so poor anymore, and I'm glad my son has good shoes and warm clothing and plenty to eat. I'm glad my husband and I can plan a vacation to Hawaii next summer to visit our relatives there. I'm grateful for all my friends, many of whom helped me through the hardest times with generosity and humor. I'm grateful for everything I have, and I try to share what I have with others, including whatever warmth and joy Chris, Josh, and I generate through our family life.

Every day, I meditate on these words of the Buddha, found in the Sutra on Loving Kindness (Metta Sutta):

*Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world,
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding. ❖*

The top 1 percent of households
have more wealth than the entire
bottom 95 percent combined.

~ from *Divided Decade: Economic Disparity at the Century's Turn*, a report from United for a Fair Economy

HISTORY COLUMN

Kukai

by Diane Patenaude Ames

At the end of the eighth century, the aristocrats of Japan's imperial court were still very much barbarians, despite their elegant silk robes. Inside their tiled palaces, Byzantine intrigue, murder plots, and shamanist curses set the tone, while Buddhist monks grew rich by promising to soothe the vengeful ghosts of everybody's victims. The monks grew powerful, so much so that the Emperor Kammu moved the capital from Nara to Nagaokakyo in 784 to escape them. But, concluding that being so far from the monks left him defenseless against the understandably irate spirits of his half brother and a lot of other victims, he moved it again to Kyoto. Building two new capitals in ten years necessitated increasing the already crushing burden of taxation and forced labor born by the peasants. The economy threatened to collapse.

In the midst of all this, an aristocratic youth named Sacki Totomono, later called Kobo Daishi or Kukai (774–835), alarmed his family by dropping out of the imperial school for bureaucrats to become a Buddhist practitioner. For about 12 years, he alternated between

meditating in the mountains on a diet of wild horse chestnuts, and studying Buddhist texts in monasteries, and became an ordained monk along the way. Then in 804, he went to China as a student. There he studied for two years under Huiguo, the patriarch of Chinese esoteric (otherwise known as Vajrayana) Buddhism. In 806, he returned to Japan as a certified master. He soon gained imperial backing, founded the Shingon (Japanese Vajrayana) school, and went on to write over 50 classic Shingon treatises, besides winning lasting fame as a poet, sculptor, calligrapher, lexicographer, and saint.

But with all this, Kukai did not neglect the needs of a developing country. In 828 he opened the Shugei Shuchiin, the first school for "the sons of the poor" in Japan. While this was an eminently practical idea—the court undoubtedly needed clerks by then—it was also a radical one in a brutally hierarchical society in which not only education, but human status itself, had been pretty much reserved for aristocrats. So, Kukai instructed the teachers to overcome class prejudice, citing Buddhist teachings. Whether students are high- or low-born, rich or poor, he said, they should be given appropriate instruction and unremitting admonishment from their teachers. "The beings in the triple world are my children," announced the Buddha [in the *Lotus Sutra*].

Kukai also announced that the school would provide free meals to students as well as instructors, making study possible for the poor. The school lasted until 847 and it was probably for its students that Kukai composed the oldest extant dictionary in Japan. The few recorded facts about it make it clear that Kukai was not solely concerned with mantras and mandalas, but also with narrowing the gulf between rich and poor in Japan. ❖

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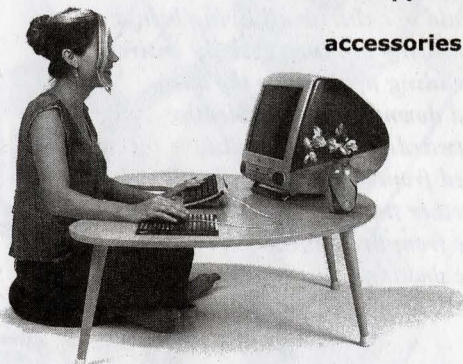
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~ from *Taking Back Our Lives in the Age of Corporate Dominance*, by Ellen Schwartz and Suzanne Stoddard



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PRISON PAGE

The Smell of Night Air

by Diana Lion

How many ex-prisoners would you guess are members of your sangha?

Bo and Sita Lozoff run Kindness House in North Carolina, a community where ex-prisoners live with non-ex-prisoners. The Lozoffs have been spiritual prison activists for almost three decades. When Bo was in the Bay Area last November, he gave a public talk about the prison-industrial complex, keeping 350 people spellbound. He especially urged us not just to tolerate ex-prisoners in our churches, synagogues, temples and sanghas, but to welcome them after they are released: hold potlucks in their honor, and show them how happy we are that they're out. Tell them we've missed what they have to offer, and invite them in.

Recidivism hovers at around 70 percent in California. Even though California is #1 in prison spending in the U.S. (and #41 in education spending), rehabilitation programs inside are receiving less of the budget as the emphasis in the "Department of Corrections" becomes more and more punitive. Most of the prisoners inside will be getting out at some point, and most of them will leave even more traumatized from their incarceration than when they went in. They often return to the same communities they left, with the same lack of jobs and access to drugs, and with the added stigma of a prison record. That doesn't look good on a resume. Post-release programs are therefore extremely important. If people are going to have a chance to live a whole life once they are out, they will need what anyone else needs: an opportunity to work, a place to live, a chance to get clean and sober (if they aren't already) and then stay that way, a practice that allows them to connect with their depth, and love, respect, and support. Nothing special. How many post-release programs are there in your city, town, or county?

Sangha X is a new post-release group co-sponsored by BPF's Prison Project. Its focus is on providing a supportive meeting place for people who are in a process of spiritual reclamation, recovery, and re-entry. We thought of this idea largely because we didn't know anywhere to refer the former prisoners who had attended our meditation classes inside, once they got out. The demographics of most "convert" sanghas would not have felt comfortable for some of our friends from inside.

Sangha X has blossomed since it started a few months ago, largely due to the enthusiastic and dedicated work of two of its members—both of them ex-prisoners and ex-drug addicts.

A few weeks ago Sangha X tried something new. We carpooled over to the Berkeley Zen Center—a small

sweet center which was pleased to host us. The air was cool and fresh, and that particular evening was very quiet. Normally the street outside the zendo is lively with the shouts of kids riding bikes, men fixing their broken-down cars, and women talking on the sidewalks. A Thai monastery resides down the block, in this multiracial neighborhood.

Ten people come for the Sangha X-meeting, and I doubt that the host from Berkeley Zen Center can tell which of us has done time. We are artists, musicians, computer mechanics, photographers, prison reform activists. We buzz with excitement at being in this new place, and at the beautiful simplicity of the space. We troop into the zendo, and are given short instructions about the bows and bells. And then we sit.

Later, during check-in, people speak from the heart: no dry pontificating here! Two people are dealing with deaths. One describes his intoxication with the smell of the night air, so delicious and so unfamiliar to the incarcerated. One member is terrified about facing more time, in a case that is in process. We all listen and offer support in different ways. The post-release weekly rituals for drug offenders are mentioned matter-of-factly—having to pee in a jar while someone is watching to make sure you are not substituting someone else's pee, and so on. Racism rears up in the account of a recent incident, and we practice with rage and disappointment. Several members speak of the challenges of their drug-related illnesses—the disabling symptoms, the hassles with insurance companies. The check-in is calm at times, intensely emotional at other times.

Sangha X juggles the same paradoxes we all do—not being too hard on ourselves, but also not being too slack. On this night, one person describes the meditation experience, clearly capturing that naked awareness of sounds and smells, before wondering out loud whether she knows anything about meditation. And in all of this, nobody forgets gratitude, so important in any recovery community.

Come join us—you will always be welcome. Call the Prison Project at the BPF office for details.

- Donations of zafus, zabutons, yoga mats, Buddhist and other books, and of course money, can be sent to Sangha X, c/o Prison Project. ❖

Prison Dharma Walk: Free Mumia Abu Jamal

March 12–April 25, 2000. Norfolk, MA–Waynesburg, PA

Walkers are welcome to join us for a short or long time.

Call Grafton Peace Pagoda at (518) 658-9301. After 3/12, call Free Mumia Committee of Albany at (518) 462-2871.

In February of this year, the U.S. hit the 2 million mark for incarcerated people. The United States now houses 25 percent of the world's prisoners, even though it only has 5 percent of the world's population.

CROSS-CLASS DIALOGUE

by Jennifer Ladd, with other group members

One of us has several million dollars for personal use; one of us is in debt with absolutely no financial cushion. One of us grew up with an indoor swimming pool; one of us grew up being called "white trash." Half of us can live on inherited money, and half of us have to work to support ourselves.

We are a group of six men and women—originally eight—from different class backgrounds who have been meeting over the past three years to talk intimately about our experiences with class and money. One person is of Cuban descent, the others of us are Caucasian-American. The youngest person was 27 when we started and the oldest was 57. Most of us are in our forties. We are a laboratory group for one another, doing research on ourselves in hopes of being better organizers in our social change work and of sharing what we learn about bridging the class divide with others down the road.

We are not practicing Buddhists, but all of us have an important relationship to spirit. Three of us are Jewish, two practice Wicca, one practices Authentic Movement, one of us is a student of an esoteric studies course. All of us are committed to equity and come to it from a sense of compassion, are personally familiar with suffering, and are aware of others' suffering in a world with ever-growing disparities of wealth.

Our goal was to learn as much as possible about how class dynamics work in this society, using ourselves as guinea pigs. The initiators, who were from two different edges of the class spectrum, each recruited three others. Our experiences span the economic spectrum, from rich to poor. We sat down in August 1996 and set up ground rules.

We decided we would strive for:

- Honesty
- Understanding about confidentiality
- Commitment to "clean up" problems that may arise
- Good listening
- Willingness to go deep while respecting limits
- Respect for all types of feelings—sadness as well as fear and anger
- Communication about participation (i.e., alert others if we can't come)
- Room for fun, lightness, and singing
- Speaking from our own experiences
- Periodic check-ins about the process

We revealed to each other our total financial worth—bank accounts, portfolios, cars, houses, debt, and potential inheritances: all our assets and debts.

We agreed to meet for five hours every month from 4–9 PM with a potluck dinner in the middle. We also agreed to meet between our whole-group meetings in two "caucus" groups, one composed of the working-class and poor members, the other of the upper- or owning-class members. (Although some of our members now identify as middle class, all of us come from either owning class or working class backgrounds.) We facilitate our own meetings with teams made up of one wealthy and one low-income person. We meet in each other's homes, for each of us a very immediate and vulnerable place to address class issues.

Over the years we have explored a variety of challenging areas. We have striven to stay on the edge, to follow our fears and resistance, knowing that there is a gold mine of material to work with in those hidden corners. In one of our earliest sessions we told stories of when we had felt betrayed by someone from a different class. One woman recalled that when the Ku Klux Klan started harassing a civil-rights group she was working with

in the South, all the white, middle-class members left. On the other side of the spectrum, an upper-class man spoke of agreeing to be on a panel about class, only to be skewered and railed against by members of the audience.

Our group has explored what it would be like to walk in each other's shoes. Some people with wealth imagined feeling fear, some imagined relief, others, insecurity but also a sense of belonging that they had not experienced growing up or even now. Each of those with wealth had grown up feeling separate from others; their families often paid for the help they needed rather than establishing mutual, beneficial relationships with neighbors and friends, as the others in the group had done.

When the people from the working-class and poor backgrounds imagined suddenly having money, they felt a sense of freedom and excitement about all the possibilities for helping others and for nurturing themselves. They also acknowledged the burden of extra responsibility that accompanies having wealth; the time needed to pay attention to socially responsible investing and giving away money strategically, not to mention coping with all the requests (spoken or silent) from friends and family.

In our first year we held a two-day retreat, during which time we revealed to each other our total financial worth—bank accounts, portfolios, cars, houses, debt, and potential inheritances: all our assets and debts. This was a very scary exercise, and we had to do much work to create safety for this sharing. The people of wealth, in

particular, felt apprehensive about this process, so we took time to go around and put up on newsprint all the projections that each of us thought people from the other class backgrounds might feel about us.

The sharing of numbers was indeed challenging. The person with the most money had four times more than anyone else and so grappled with a sense of isolation even from fellow wealthy caucus members. A woman from a working-class background, by working multiple jobs, had managed to save a fair amount of money, and another member of the working-class/poor caucus was shocked by the amount. Another woman struggled with the shame she felt about having so much debt, even though it was her huge, unavoidable, and class-related health care bills that had put her in that position.

During this retreat we also began to look at what kind of society we would like to build. What gap between those with most and those with least would be tolerable? What might we be willing to sacrifice to actually make that world come into being? What will it take to build a movement that seriously addresses these questions?

Following the retreat, we decided to wade into even more revealing territory: telling each other exactly how much we had spent the previous year, and on what. This was an even scarier exercise for some, because all kinds of desires are exposed in one's check register or Quicken files. Although we are not personally responsible for our inheritances, or our lack thereof, we are all responsible for our spending choices. It was also painful to witness how unmindful or mindful we are with money. For example, one wealthy woman could not account for \$8,000 that she had withdrawn from her ATM, while a woman in the working-class/poor group reported that she feels compelled to write down every cent she spends, since she needs to know exactly where she stands. Some of the folks from working-class/poor backgrounds found it hard to hear the amounts spent by people of wealth on self-care, from travel to massages.

At one point in our meetings, two of our members were going through parallel life changes. One was heterosexual from an upper-class background, one was lesbian and working class; both were getting married or having a commitment ceremony at about the same time, both were going on honeymoons, both were considering having children. We shared openly the different choices each was making, the different amounts each was spending, and explored the accompanying feelings. Both humor and challenge flowed through these conversations, as did empathy for the struggles of getting pregnant.

One summer we talked about the different vacations we were taking. A woman from the working-class/poor caucus had saved up so that she could finally take a

walking trip in England and Scotland. Because of some health problems she became more frightened about whether she could really afford to go and still be able to take care of her health needs and continue to work. She resented the freedom that the wealthy folks had to go on vacation when, where, and for as long as they wanted without getting too close to the bottom line.

This freedom to make choices, to have options, has been one of the most marked differences between those from different classes. One woman would love to spend her life walking and writing poetry but feels she will be chained to paid work forever.

Another working-class woman has always had to sell her skills and her ideas and visions to others in order to have enough funding to do the organizing work she believes in. She has felt resentment toward wealthy members who have freely decided to fund their own work with no accountability to other colleagues, while she has had to test the value of her work in the marketplace, always accountable to employers or funders.

Class is also linked to the issue of security, another central theme in our discussions. The people of wealth have talked about the security of being able to "buy" their way out of difficult situations. The security for people from working-class/poor backgrounds has tended

to come from relationships—their families and communities. The issue of security underlies one of the key questions in our group: Why don't people of wealth give all their money away? Or, put another way: How can you tolerate living with that much money while so many others have so little? One person answers by saying that she has poured money that would have gone to her personally into her foundation instead, the same amount of money that her sister has taken for herself. Another wealthy person's principal has not grown significantly since he inherited because he has chosen to give a lot away and to support his work in organizing other donors. He rationalizes not giving more away, saying that his million dollars gives him just enough legitimacy in the world of the wealthy to be able to speak out as a wealthy activist, to be taken seriously, and yet it is not so much money that he can live extravagantly.

Working class members stress the importance of investing in social change movements now, and question whether the upper class members are more attached to their privilege than they are willing to admit. We continue to discuss what it would take for people with wealth to be willing to give up privilege. We've had many discussions about the need for a movement for social change, one which would inspire risk-taking, where our sense of security would lie more in spirit, in authentic relationships, and in making change than in staying with the status quo.

How can you tolerate living with that much money while so many others have so little?

One of the most important recurring themes has been how to allow ourselves to dream, to see ourselves within those dreams, and then to actually think our dreams are possible. The working-class/poor caucus has explored deeply the ways internalized oppression operates, preventing one from even being able to *imagine*, stunting those “possibility” muscles. And then, even when one can dream, it takes a lot of work to overcome the societal messages of inadequacy and ineligibility. It is difficult to arrive at a place of truly feeling powerful and entitled to bring dreams into reality—even when these dreams are ones that serve the larger community, not just the individual.

Not surprisingly, the wealthy people have less trouble dreaming, have more resources to follow their dreams, with less accountability in terms of having someone else to report to who holds the purse strings, and with lots of support to go forth and manifest them. These folks often went through school systems that affirmed them and reinforced

their sense of capability. It is important to add, however, that not *all* the wealthy people feel so entitled, or so free to dream. Having the money, in fact, often feels like an obligation to have a brilliant dream. They have the sense that “you had better be good at what you do; there are no excuses for failure or for depression or for feelings of inadequacy.” A challenge for people of wealth has been to define their self-worth separately from their net worth.

In the course of our discussions we have realized that none of us feels exactly representative of our class. None of us feels at home with where we come from; we are all boundary-crossers. We have also realized that each one of us brings a whole crowd of inner voices with us into the group. These inner voices are as present as we are in our dialogues. One woman hears the voices of the poor women she works with who are actively organizing against welfare cuts, low wages, lack of day care and transportation. A wealthy woman in the group hears the voices of her wealthy clients and fellow donors who would never make themselves vulnerable in a group like this. One man, originally from Cuba, carries the voices of poor people in third-world countries, all of whom are exponentially poorer than the poorest person in our group. Wealth is relative; our felt experience is often based on those to whom we compare ourselves. The disparities, however, are clearly unjust.

So what has been the impact of these meetings on our lives outside the group? Have the people with wealth given financial help to those with less in the group? How have we dealt with the disparities and contradictions? Two wealthy members have increased the

amount they give to economic justice work. All members of the group have joined the organization United for a Fair Economy, and the wealthy folks in the group have become members of Responsible Wealth, a project of UFE, in which wealthy people speak out publicly for fair taxes, living wages, and a reasonable pay ratio between CEO and lowest-paid worker. One of the members of the group expects to give away all the funds in her foundation over the next 25 years, a foundation dedicated to human rights and economic justice.

In order for the group to work in the first place, it was important for us all to understand that the group was not for fundraising; there were no expectations that any of the wealthy people would fund those without money or their projects. (Though it is important to note that all four wealthy people were already supporting the organizations that two low-income folks led.) All of us are committed to institutional social change and feel that individual solutions are needed but are not at the core of the problem. This

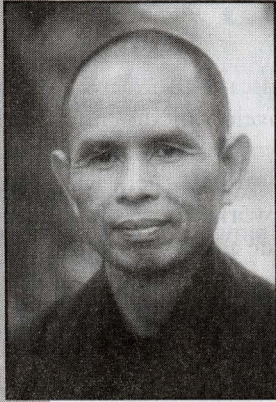
None of us feels exactly representative of our class. None of us feels at home with where we come from; we are all boundary-crossers.

does not mean that some of the wealthy members of the group have not supported low-income members of the group outside of the group context. This has happened, but the low-income folks have thought it important for wealthy folks to remember that they cannot “buy” relief from guilt or from the larger problem of outrageous disparities in wealth.

Now, in our fourth year together, we are looking at new layers of commitment. We are exploring the possibility of pooling money, time, and attention on some common project. This may entail some of the low-income members being able to take time off from their jobs to reflect, think, and dream. We may put more effort into sharing what we have learned with others, in workshops and writing. We are very excited about “upping the ante” and are searching for the next risk-taking piece of work that we can do with one another.

It has been and continues to be an amazing journey. We have been angry with each other. We have felt deep compassion for each other. We have become aware of our projections onto each other. We have been moved by each other’s stories and struggles. We are continuing our exploratory journey, moving toward building something together. Our dialogues have been, in the healthiest ways, both humbling and inspiring. We hope that sharing our story and insights will contribute to social justice and right livelihood for all. ❖

Jennifer Ladd, Ed.D., lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, directs Class Action, a philanthropic advising and donor organizing business, and continues on a lifelong journey of integrating politics and spirituality.



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TALKING ABOUT CLASS—AT LAST

In May of 1999, seven of us from a wide range of class backgrounds—all BPF members and socially engaged Buddhists—came together in a discussion about Buddhism and class, which I taped for this issue of Turning Wheel. That was the reason for the meeting. We had planned to meet just once, but we were so compelled by the subject that we have continued to meet as a consciousness-raising study group on Buddhism and class. We've talked about many things, including security, renunciation, generosity, and stereotypes and projections about people in different classes. Because of space limitations, I've focused here on our comments on class as it manifests in our sanghas.

We're grateful to Karen Payne (of the Turning Wheel editorial committee), who has skillfully facilitated our meetings. Everyone in the group has agreed to the publication of the following material. This is an act of courage for all of us. Class is a taboo subject, riddled with secrets and projections, and so this sharing of our thoughts and experiences is a tender offering—a kind of coming out—to our community of socially engaged Buddhists. We want to encourage you to think about these questions, too. —Ed.

INTRODUCTORY CIRCLE

Karen Payne: Can we each say something about our class background, and how it affects the way we choose to be socially engaged in the world?

Melody Ermachild Chavis: I grew up in the U.S. Army, where your class is written right on your dad's arm. We lived in enlisted men's housing, dragging all over, like migrant workers. It was very insecure, like the car might be repossessed, and there was a lot of ignorance from lack of education.

I'm not only a Buddhist, I'm also kind of a Marxist. I still believe in class analysis, and I'm horrified that we now have a world-wide system of corporate rule. The main thing that's happened in the last 20 years is the widening of the gap between rich and poor. So my social engagement is with poor people. Poor people get the death penalty, poor people get locked up in prison, poor people get screwed in every possible way. I'm still always shocked by all the ways that poor people are ground down. They don't have chances for things like beauty and knowledge, poetry, rest, nature, all of these things. They are often unaware of those possibilities, some of which don't even cost money.

Patrick McMahon: I was raised without any mention of class at all. My father was a maintenance technician at the Federal Aviation Agency, my mother was a secretary and a homemaker, and I grew up in a middle-class neighborhood. I went to a high-class college where I didn't do anything except think for four years. I now

work as a landscape contractor, and identify as working class. I've traveled in different worlds, including the rather elitist world of Zen, but I've made a return to the world of my grandfather, who was a farmer in the Midwest and worked with his hands, as I do now.

I try to evade all these categories. I find myself getting bruised a fair amount. I come to this meeting with the feeling of something at stake—a chip on my shoulder.

Pamela Krasney: I grew up in a world of chauffeurs, servants, privilege, accustomed to luxury. My grandfather made a great deal of money in Detroit. My mother was adopted. Her biological mother was a 16-year-old unwed Scottish girl, so there's a part of me that feels closely connected to poor people. I rebelled in the '60s—I became a “digger” chick and lived in a storefront in Haight-Ashbury. Most of my friends were not from my wealthy background.

Later, I became a student of Chögyam Trungpa. In Boulder in the Vajradhatu community, I was very out about my wealth and I became a donor. I don't know why, but I wasn't embarrassed. I felt lucky that I could be generous. I tried to be honest about who I was, and to work with the *paramita* of generosity in my practice, which I continue to do. I couldn't live with the anxiety of hiding my wealth. I do a lot of fundraising for Naropa. I co-chair Shambhala Trust. I've tried to take my own personal wealth as my starting point, and also inspire others to give. My father was a natural fund-raiser, my grandparents were very civic-minded, and I've carried on that background of philanthropy in my Buddhist communities.

Sue Moon: My grandparents were wealthy business people in Chicago. My parents were very progressive, and took a different path. My father was a teacher and started an alternative high school. I think he felt guilty about money, and it was rarely mentioned in the family. We lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and my family was basically upper class, with a high value placed on the arts and education. I grew up with some confusion and guilt about my privilege; and I grew up believing that along with my privilege came a responsibility to make a contribution to the world, to try and change things for the better. I still feel that.

Working for BPF and editing *Turning Wheel* is one way I try to make that contribution. I do have to work, but the money I inherited subsidizes me so that I can afford to work for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship for a relatively humble salary.

Lewis Woods: My family is solidly middle class, maybe even upper-middle class—it's hard to say. My dad's a doctor, and my mom's a lawyer. My grandfather was a judge.

One of my great grandfathers worked for the Post Office, and another was a minister. Both of those occupations were definitely middle class for black folks in those days. At present I would have to say that my individual class identity derives more from intangibles like education and other social privileges than from economic status.

When I started college people used to say to me, "Oh, are you the first person in your family to go to college?" *No, actually my great grandmother went to college, thank you.*

My mom's a public defender, and my dad's been a pediatrician at a publicly funded health center for almost 30 years, so even though there was a lot of talk about the importance of making money, it's under my skin that I should do something to benefit others. I'm probably more likely to make my contribution as an armchair activist than as a person at demonstrations, possibly as a writer or a teacher.

Mushim Ikeda-Nash: When I was born my parents were very poor, and my dad sold Wear-Ever pots and pans door to door. Later he worked for the railroads. Both my parents were second-generation Japanese Americans. We lived in a trailer park in Ohio. I never understood why we were looked down on at school—I thought our trailer was pretty nice. Later, my mother got her pharmacist degree, and they borrowed some money and bought a house with some land, where we could have a dog and a piano. So my younger sister grew up in a more middle-class home than my brother and I.

I went to Oberlin College, with people who went skiing in the Alps for spring break. I'd never even *seen* a ski.

I was raised by my parents to want to be middle class, with a house in the suburbs, but I ruined all that when I began Zen practice with a teacher who deliberately tried to deconstruct all that stuff. I still admire his efforts to make Zen students like "carp, who can go anywhere and eat anything."

Talking about class in Buddhist sanghas in North America is like raising questions of race. When those questions have come up for me, I've always kept them to myself, because I've felt that it's not something the sangha wants to address. I never felt that other people wanted to talk about it, so I'm glad to be having this conversation.

Karen Payne: I grew up in Texas, in a working-class Catholic neighborhood with lots of kids. My father also sold pots and pans! Neither of my parents graduated from high school. My father ran away from home when he was 13 and went to sea. My mother dropped out of school to help support her family when she was 16.

We weren't poor when I was a child, but when I was 14 we moved into an upper-middle-class neighborhood, and I didn't fit in at all.

I still admire my teacher's efforts to make Zen students like "carp, who can go anywhere and eat anything."

My siblings and I have just taken over the mortgage on my mom's little house—it's made me feel very working class, supporting my mother.

My Buddhist practice has influenced the diversity training I do. It helps me listen, and just be silent

and present, no matter what is being said. Just show up, as one does with one's own thoughts.

I know that I do my community organizing work because of my class background. It's not just privileged people who can help people who are struggling, but so can a working-class person from Texas!

SANGHA AND CLASS

Karen: How does your class background affect your relationship to Buddhist practice?

Melody: In my Buddhist sangha, I don't know what class people are from. I used to think that everybody was middle class, but now I realize my assumptions are totally off.

However, I went on a Thich Nhat Hanh retreat where there were so many fancy cars, and people were having fits in the parking lot and honking at each other because it was hard to find a place to park. But when I go to a vigil at San Quentin on the night of an execution, I want to be with the Buddhists. These are my people.

Patrick: I've been disinclined to identify as a Buddhist or as an activist because I'm afraid of the specialness that that creates. It seems very limiting to me, in contrast to the way I feel when I'm just out there doing the work.

I'm remembering with some resentment the years of Buddhist practice that separated me, paradoxically, from so much of the world. Twenty-five years ago, in the hippie days, our sanghas were full of young people in the trades. To be a carpenter or a plumber or a house cleaner in those days was really kind of cool. Today, I think there's a different feeling about manual work. It's assumed that you are transitioning toward being a psychotherapist.

If I could shift my sense of what a Buddhist is and what an activist is from these elitist categories, I sense new possibilities.

Karen: I go to the Berkeley Zen Center, but I don't quite feel that I belong. The forms of Soto Zen really feel elitist to me.

Lewis: The kind of Buddhism that's been imported into the U.S. and taken up by "Westerners" is mostly upper-class Buddhism. The tea ceremony has very upper-class origins. So does Rinzai Zen. Of course, two big exceptions are the Thai forest tradition and Soka Gakkai.

Also, the majority of the texts that have been translated into English so far tend to be associated with upper-class Buddhism. There are whole genres of Buddhist literature that have largely been ignored

because there's no demand for them here. Buddhist practice aimed at helping people meet their physical needs gets left out. But in Asian countries, there are chants you do, bodhisattvas you pray to, when you need work, or something like that.

Melody: My friend Pam, who is an African American in Soka Gakkai, says that other Buddhists put Soka Gakkai down because people chant for things like a new car. But she says they chant for those things because that's what they need, and it's a way to start. Start where you are. If you don't have the rent money, it's hard to be calm.

Patrick: American Buddhism is not neutral territory. Most Buddhist teachers are college-educated, coming from privilege.

Karen: We don't disclose our class. Who knows which teachers were raised in a trailer park?

Sue: I've noticed that everybody seems to feel shame and embarrassment, no matter where they are coming from: *There's something wrong with me. I don't fit in.*

Patrick: That's what happens when something's not talked about. And even when we do talk about it, the terms of discourse are pretty intellectual, born of a certain freedom from care about survival.

Karen: There's a very limited vocabulary for talking about class in this country.

Lewis: On the face of it, liberation in Buddhism is a

pretty individual thing. The eightfold path says nothing about society. This feeds the notion that liberation from classism will also be an individual thing, rather than the idea that class oppression is a social problem.

Sue: Are we making this whole thing up, that there could be such a thing as engaged Buddhism?

Melody: Recently I went to an all-day workshop with a Thai teacher at Spirit Rock, and he was talking about emptiness all day long. He never said anything about social justice or changing the world. He might have if anyone had asked him, and I didn't ask him, either. I like being reminded of emptiness, but if that was the only day I had of Buddhism, I would be thinking: This isn't for me.

If it weren't for the bodhisattva ideal, I would probably be a Christian. I hear Sister Helen Prejean talking about Christ's teachings about feeding the poor and visiting the prisoners. That's what I want to be doing. Luckily, Buddhism has enough stretchiness that I can be doing that if I find the right group of Buddhists to do it with.

At the same time, I have to admit that being Buddhist is part of achieving being more middle class for me. I equate being middle class with some type of sanity. I don't want to sink down into a hole I can't get out of, which is the situation a lot of my family members are actually in. I've worked so hard to be middle class, to go to college, own a home, have a pretty good job. It's hard being the one person sticking up—I'm always giving out loans and advice to people in my extended family who are losing their jobs or getting evicted or needing drug treatment. Without the tools Buddhism has given me for understanding my life better, I could just lose it.

Now, I cultivate gratitude. I tell myself: We have everything we need—it's a miracle.

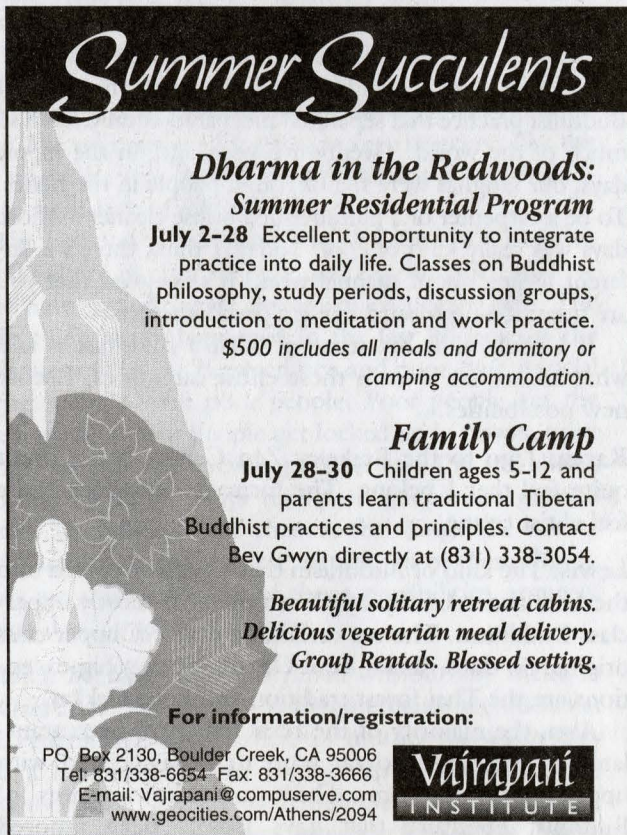
Karen: I have such a strong reaction to you saying that being Buddhist is a way of being middle class. I think that's part of my resistance to it. I have never been on a ten-day retreat. I've never been able to afford it. When I have a vacation I usually use it to visit family.

I value the sanity part a lot, but I don't see that as being more middle class. The fact that my Buddhist sangha seems pretty middle-class is a barrier to me. I barely feel included.

Sue: I know that going on retreats is expensive, but it isn't expensive to go to zazen at Berkeley Zen Center. It doesn't cost anything, and it's offered in that spirit at many places.

Karen: That's something I adore. The concept that the teachings are given freely and that you generously give what you can, that's one of the things that makes me happy to be there.

Melody: Sometimes people show up at Berkeley Zen Center who are very marginal—chronically unemployed, or almost homeless. They come because they are



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If it weren't for the bodhisattva ideal, I would probably be a Christian.

changes, renunciation flows naturally. Renunciation comes from seeing that I'm actually happier when I let go than when I cling.

Mushim: There was nothing middle class about my first Zen teacher, Samu Sunim. I gave everything up, everything except some clothing, and lived a monastic lifestyle, as his student, for some years. He had grown up in Korea during the war and had been very very poor—he had starved during the war as a child, and was orphaned—and he was adamant about the importance in Zen training of giving up privilege and seeing what that did to your sense of identity. He would take his students into Chinatown and send them into Chinese restaurants saying, "Now you have to beg for your dinner."

There's an archetypal journey represented by the Buddha's life story: Whatever privilege we have, it's necessary to give that up, not because privilege is intrinsically bad, but because the journey of Buddhist practice is about giving up our identities and questioning everything, so that we become fertile ground for the great matter of life and death. Give up whatever your privilege is, like your education. This teacher was a very smart guy, but he always said, "You people are over-educated, and you have to become simple and stupid. Just go clean the bathroom. I refuse to discuss dharma with you." So we went into this dreadful poverty, and we were hungry and cold, but through doing this I was able to get an experience of Buddhism in America when I traveled with my teacher that I would not have gotten any other way. We went into the poorest Vietnamese temples, the poorest Chinese temples. We went into very rich upper-class Buddhist circles. We just went from one place to another, hearing people's stories.

Lewis: In the Christian gospels, to be wealthy is practically a sin. "It's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." This shows up in socialist attitudes as well: If you're rich, you must have exploited others to get there. But Buddhism doesn't teach that the possession of wealth is inherently bad, it just teaches that the fulfillment of wealth is generosity. There isn't anything wrong with having money as such. The Buddha accepted all sorts of wealthy followers. He didn't say that they had to give up all their money to be his students. I find that useful in terms of undermining class antagonism.

Melody: I think it's true for everybody that being generous feels good.

Lewis: I went to some teachings by the Dalai Lama recently, and I began to see that renunciation isn't about being noble, it's not about trying to do anything, it's strictly a function of insight. When one's vision of reality

poorest Vietnamese temples, and at Vajradhatu, in Trungpa's office, we had tea from china cups with gold rims. I felt that one place did not know the other place. When we were sitting in Trungpa's office, the conversation was more philosophical, and when we were with Vietnamese monks in the basement, they were concerned with getting by.

Pamela: I just want to say that Trungpa talked a lot about richness, but it wasn't richness that had to do with money. He was teaching his students about internal richness. The china cups could have been oryoki bowls. How to drink from the cup was the same instruction as how to eat oryoki. It was symbolic. You could enrich your life even if you were poor.

Karen: And of course the opposite is true, that people with a lot of material wealth can have a poverty mentality. One can practice compassion for people living with that kind of poverty, too.

Pamela: Yes, like my stepmother. She's in a convalescent home. I visited her today. She's blind, she's had strokes, and she's in the slow process of dying. She had a lot of *stuff* in her life, and all she can think about now is that stuff. Every conversation is: Where is that necklace, or that dress, or that piece of furniture? It's a real lesson for me.

Lewis: Renunciation isn't something strenuous. You shouldn't give away more than you're ready to give away, because it's really bad karma to regret a good deed. So if all you feel like giving away is 50 cents, give it away and rejoice in it. "Cool! I gave away 50 cents!" And then maybe you go on to give away five bucks and then 50 bucks, and so on. But if you give it away and then regret it, you've lost what you gave away and you've lost the good karma too! Karma is working perfectly, as it always has and always will. The good news is that the true cause of wealth is generosity, and everyone can be generous. The best thing anyone can do, whether they're rich or poor, is to be generous. The most radical thing to change our society class-wise would be to make generosity the norm.

Sue: For me, this brings up the difference between social service and social change. There are class differences in this room, but in the global economy, we're all in the upper class of the world. The gap is vast, and I don't think the practice of generosity is going to be enough.

Melody: It may not be enough, but we can't do without it. ❖

SHADOWS OF WAR AND CLASS

by Annette Herskovits

As I kneel in my Berkeley kitchen scrubbing the floor with a wet rag, I remember the maid who worked for my adoptive family when I was navigating a wretched adolescence. This was in Paris in the 1950s. I would spend non-school days in my bedroom, studying, lying on the bed with a book, or playing the piano. Sometimes, when I wandered into the kitchen looking for something to drink, the maid would be washing the floor on her knees, emanating wetness and bleach. She was in her fifties, but it would never have entered my mind to offer to help her. This was her role and I had mine. We were not particularly wealthy—a maid was then a normal appendage of middle-class life in France.

But there was a twist to our relationship. I was an adopted child, a war orphan. My parents had been killed in Auschwitz. Our family had been poor, living in a shabby fifth-floor walk-up in a working class neighborhood—five of us in three minuscule rooms, with “Turkish toilets” between floors for two families, a stairwell smelling of food and urine, no place to bathe except the kitchen sink. My father and mother had immigrated to France from Romania in the early 1920s, with barely a cent in their pockets. My father, a self-taught man who spoke perfect French, found work as a typesetter—quite a feat and a relatively well-paid job—but eventually, with three children, money was scarce.

My brother, sister, and I had survived the war. My father sent the three of us to the countryside in early 1943, as the persecution of Jews escalated. He and my mother remained in Paris; he had to keep his job—

money was needed to pay for the foster care of my sister, then 12 years old, and myself, just short of 4. We were placed in the home of a forester, recommended to my parents by their downstairs neighbors, where several other foster children besides ourselves brought in desired income. My brother, who was then 16, lived and worked on a farm a few miles away. From that time until the end of the war he was on his own, moving from farm to farm in search of work or to evade the Nazis and the French

police, except for a brief period in Paris, where he found night work cleaning printing presses.

The forester sent my sister and me away shortly after my parents’ arrest—no more money was coming for our keep and we were dangerous charges. The sequence of events from that moment until the end of the war remains blurred. We were shuffled, often separately but sometimes together, from foster home to foster home, to an orphanage, to a sanatorium, etc.

In 1945, after the war, my brother returned to Paris and quickly married. He survived on odd jobs, including a couple of years digging ditches for a salary he, his wife, and their first child could barely live on. But then, by a stroke of luck, he was hired by a print shop and taught to do “photo retouching.” He made a fair living—except when he was laid off for leading a strike: he was an active member of the Communist Party until the early 1960s. Yet, he and his wife continued to live in my parents’ old apartment, with eventually two daughters. He bought a small plot of land near Paris where they gardened passionately on weekends.

I was adopted right after the war, through a child welfare agency. My sister, a ward of the state, became a boarder in a high school. After graduating, she went to university erratically, supporting herself with secretarial jobs, and living in sixth-floor maid rooms which I never visited.

What did I feel as I lay on my bed while the maid worked? I could not accept the role differences with the unquestioning ease of my adoptive mother, who stayed in bed with her morning cup of coffee until 9 AM, or played bridge to fill her empty afternoons. I

felt guilt then, and I feel shame now. (How could I have asked the maid to prepare a cup of tea for me?)

But I was immersed in a suffocating misery, never drawing an easy breath; all was guilt and confusion. Struggling with the legacy of my own war experience allowed me to focus on little more than surviving the next hour without being engulfed by fears I could not begin to tease apart and examine. In the process, internal guides to fair and kind action seemed lost.



The author (left) with her sister, 1942

My adoptive parents had shown an abysmal lack of insight into the mind of a six-year-old emerging from war. They treated me as a blank slate and never mentioned my birth parents or asked about my war experience. So I was left to try and make sense of what had happened—why my parents had died, why we had been the target of hatred and murder—on my own.

My adoptive mother's primary concern was "discipline"—training me to be quiet, obedient, clean, orderly, and hard-working. When I was 15 and objected when she hit a two-year-old grandnephew who would not eat, she said: "Children are like animals; they have to be trained." Her "principles"—children were not to talk unless spoken to first, children must never express a personal opinion, children must never question their parents—were standard for her generation and class, but she applied them with a thoroughness and cruelty whose motives remain a mystery to me. She died when I turned 18, before I could still my rage enough to ask.



My adoptive parents did not sever my relationship with my brother and sister. They dutifully—if reluctantly—sent me to my brother's about once a month, and they received my sister in their home for an occasional lunch. But I could hear, loud and clear, their disdain—which extended naturally to include my brother and sister—for the secretaries and salesgirls in the neighborhood streets, with clothes and hairdos in "vulgar" taste; for the "low-class" speech of the working men who came to do repairs in their home; for the maid, who had to climb up and down the five flights of a back stairway with the heavy garbage can, while we always used the elevator in the front. My brother, his wife, and my sister spoke, dressed, and lived much like these people.

My adoptive parents established distance in more direct ways too. My brother was treated with a mix of trite approval and condescension: he was a good boy, a hard worker, he did not drink, did not mix with hoodlums. When, very rarely, they invited him to their home, I could sense his discomfort at the dining room table as the maid served him and the strained conversation chugged along. His table manners were like those my adoptive mother scolded me harshly about—he kept his hands under the table, slurped his soup. When I once asked my mother about the slurping, she said it was through no fault of his—he had not had the luck of being "well brought up."

My sister was the object of searing contempt. As they saw her, she was a ne'er-do-well, an airhead with ambitions beyond her reach because of her laziness. But there was something worse, something wrong about her character that was always discussed in impenetrable language.

I soon figured out they were alluding to her relations with men.

My adoptive parents believed unquestioningly that their manners, tastes, pastimes, and, most importantly, their morals, placed them squarely above my birth family. "Morals" connoted a combination of order, cleanliness, and self-discipline which my own family had somehow lacked. In our home, teasing and bantering had flown freely between parents and children; my parents never forced us to eat something we hated; my brother and sister played in the streets, wandered as they pleased, and came home when they were hungry; the apartment was untidy.

In my mind, my adoptive mother's idea of moral virtue—which I was never able to satisfy—became associated with survival.

Those who had it survived; those who did not had been killed—the messy ones, who spoke with an accent and often too loudly, who did not know the rules of polite behavior. In fact, this had an element of truth: the Jews most likely to survive the war in France were those from moneyed old French stock.

Yet I felt at ease at my brother's, where laughter came freely, everyone talked out of turn, and no mishandling of the fork or improper way of speaking would attract wrath. Never, of course, did my adoptive parents set foot in his home.



When I was 15, my sister gave birth to a child out of wedlock. My mother hid the pregnancy from me, telling me about the child only a month or so after it was born. She explained that, had the child died, there would have been no need to tell me—being an unmarried mother was a great shame and she worried about the influence my sister's misconduct could have on me. But I was starting to show some independence in more than thought and I visited my sister and the child often to assert solidarity. Somehow my mother knew not to interfere.

After my adoptive mother died, the maid took over the full care of the household with quiet dignity and kind patience. When I turned 22, she fell ill—some mysterious heart ailment which doctors could not diagnose—and spent months in the hospital. I visited her twice, and then lost track of her. When I evoke her image now, I feel love for her and helpless sorrow. I know she loved me, whom she had seen grow up. But I could not then embrace that love wholeheartedly.

My sister married a soldier from a U.S. base near the provincial town where she was living and eventually left with him and her four-year-old daughter for Topeka, Kansas. My father objected to my going to the wedding—again to protect me from my sister's influence.

I felt at ease at my brother's home, where laughter came freely, everyone talked out of turn, and no mishandling of the fork would attract wrath.

He did not know I had slept with several men even before my mother's death.



I was drawn to Buddhism from the age of 15, reading any books I could find in secret—such absorption would have seemed bizarre to everyone around me. Eventually, I wrote Hubert Benoit, French author of *Zen and the Psychology of Transformation*, and started to see him in “therapy” sessions. It was odd therapy. Dr. Benoit did almost all the talking, discoursing about the metaphysical distress of “meeting the Not-Self,” the illusory nature of ego, the intuition of a true Self beyond time and phenomena, the illumination of selfless love, surrender to the nature of things. “Yes” is the ultimate word of wisdom, he once told me. The question of what precisely I had to say “yes” to—the cruelty and death in concentration camps—was never broached. In fact, I never talked about the past after our first session. The teaching went mostly over my head, but something rang true and I absorbed it hungrily.

Yet, the urgency of constructing a self the world would consider worthy—the world which had tried to kill me as a child—engaged all my energy. One measure of success I sought was acceptance in the city's bohemian milieu. I hung out in the right cafes and fantasized a self that would be a blend of an enlightened Zen master and a French intellectual, but I remained only a very quiet, very shy, and very awkward young woman, who attempted to alleviate existential distress mainly through sexual seduction.

At about that time—the early 1960s—I took on steering my brother's eldest daughter toward higher education and cultural pursuits. She was bright and eager. My brother must have had mixed feelings about our increasingly close relationship. His daughter expressed her adolescent rebellion through open contempt for her parents' “lack of culture” and “bad taste.” It must have hurt, but he did not take it too hard. And he was not going to stand in the way of her ambitions.

No doubt my brother saw clearly that I believed, though I did not express it, that my cultural hankerings must confer on me some ineffable worth he lacked. Yet, the sense of superiority I was able to draw from the fact that he did not read Faulkner, did not appreciate Picasso, and knew nothing of Buddhism, felt insubstantial.



I came to the United States in 1967, at age 28, ostensibly to study, but really to flee a country where every encounter touched off pain. I made a trip to France every year or so. Each time, I would spend a day with my brother and his wife. I admired their garden, we went for a walk in the nearby woods, but he and I

did not talk about the questions that most deeply troubled us—our murdered parents, our life during the war, his conflict with his eldest daughter, or the social distance that separated us.

I talked with my sister regularly, but during the few visits I made to Aurora, Illinois, where she was then living, I experienced embarrassment and shame. Her husband, who had become a railroad conductor after leaving the military, had abused her and the children—there were now three. She was divorced and a fortune teller by profession. Her clients were mostly “white trash,” she said, but she talked about them with affection and concern. She saw herself as part psychotherapist and part medical doctor, as she offered a sympathetic ear and advice about diet and vitamins. Her home was overrun with clothes and beauty products that

My adoptive parents believed that their manners, tastes, and morals placed them squarely above my birth family.

she and her two daughters bought in almost daily trips to the mall. The television was on day and night.



Buddhism remained at the center of my thoughts. When I moved from Boston to San Francisco in 1970, I began sitting at the Zen Center. The ethos of the place, as I saw it, held that to dwell on one's personal history was only attachment to ego. But I needed most to pay close attention to that personal history, to investigate the rage and grief it deposited in every thought and feeling.

In the 1990s, I turned to vipassana and metta practice which gave me a gentle nudge toward self-acceptance and opening to others. The permission to say with a whole heart “May I be happy” brought a deep release. And “May all beings be happy” opened my mind to the possibilities of forgiveness—and I had a lot to forgive, both others and myself. The words of the *Metta Sutta*: “Let no one despise any being in any state,” brought out tears of yearning and grief—yearning for reconciliation, for unobstructed love; grief for the contempt received and the contempt inflicted.

Over the years, then, some healing has come—a growing trust in my own innocence, in letting whatever arose in my mind be, and in the reality of compassion in others. While Buddhist teachings and practice certainly played a role, I feel the healing mostly as a gift from two people, a wonderful life companion and a wonderful psychiatrist. But looking back, I also see an extended network of relationships, going back to my own parents' love, the maid's affection, and even my adoptive parents' closed-minded but not loveless protection of me, through meeting with a couple of Buddhist teachers who listened with full attention and true compassion. Every word of kindness and acceptance was like a drink of magic cool water.

On a trip to France in 1992, I had lunch with my

brother and his wife at their eldest daughter's where I was staying. Next to my bed was a book on the Holocaust, one of a great many I had read. The next day, I found in it a note to me from my brother: "I am sure it is not necessary to continue researching all details of the sufferings of the Jews during the war. It is something that keeps happening, to many people and many races, even in 1992, and it goes back to the beginnings of man's life on earth. One must know how to learn enough of the truth, but one must also know how not to suffer. With love, Aimé." Yes, my brother had something to teach me.



Reunion: The author (right), with her brother and sister in 1998

living, he found someone he felt he could trust, who knew of a clandestine child rescue organization. My brother took me to a contact person and the organization took over, assuming the rescue of my sister as well.

In fact, there was hardly anything new to me in that story. I remembered some of it and had heard most of the rest from his daughter. But something, perhaps residues of the old prejudices, had prevented me from formulating it in simple, clear terms: my brother had saved my life through a mix of courage, good judgment of people,

and clear understanding of a situation tragically misunderstood by the adults in charge.

My sister basked in the glow of family restored—she who had brought up three children alone in the harsh, alien environment of the poorest quarter of a Chicago suburb. But as she rushed from store to store, buying t-shirts with pictures of cable cars for each child and grandchild, keyrings, toys, postcards, and so on, and as she told stories which jarred my sense of plausibility, I felt the old acrid taste of contempt rising in my throat. I know she is easy-going and good-hearted; she has taken care of her children with steadfastness and generosity; she even adopted and raised her son's daughter after his wife bolted; and she has never held my occasional harsh remarks against me. I also know the losses and terrors of the war wrought unfathomable injuries on her adolescent self; and after the war she found only loneliness and contempt, as she went from boarding school to callous weekend caretakers. So why is it so difficult for me to utter simple words of appreciation?

At times, however, all walls disappear. As my brother pokes around the house fixing things or works in the garden, and my sister sits at the kitchen table talking away about her grandchildren and her clients, a flow of happiness runs over me. At least for now, the world seems to have gone back to some original order, with love at its center. ❖

After ending a career as a college teacher and linguist, Annette Herskovits did volunteer work for an immigrant rights organization. She is currently writing on human rights and political issues. Annette practices at the Empty Gate Zen Center in Berkeley.

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Last year, I invited my brother and sister to spend three weeks in my home in California. This was the first time we had been together under the same roof for more than a few hours since 1942, and the first time my brother and sister had seen each other in 25 years. We did the usual tourist things, but along the way we talked of life before the war, of how each of us had lived through it, and of our parents' struggle to escape the Nazi noose and their eventual capture and death.

I was discovering who my brother was: his humor, his keen eye for ironies and pretensions, his kindness and compassion for others' pains and difficulties. He would poke gentle fun at my sister's fortune-telling and her preoccupation with dreams. But he was always the one next to her, helping her without the least impatience, as she, hampered by her weight, tried to keep up with the rest of us. He was a man at peace with himself, with no regrets about occasions missed, curious about others and about this country he was visiting for the first time. He even talked of his declining strength and not too distant death with equanimity, my brother the Buddhist, who knows nothing about Buddhism, and may, for all I know, still think that "religion is the opiate of the people."

He told stories of how he had survived the war and how he had saved my life: shortly after our parents' capture, I was dispatched to him in Paris where he was hiding in a hotel. He decided against entrusting me to the official Jewish Social Services organization. He understood that the Germans had full information about the children's homes run by the organization and saw clearly they had no intention of sparing the children. And in fact the homes were eventually raided and all the children deported to the east and murdered.

After a few weeks of trying to care for me and earn a

There is enough for everybody's need,
but not for anybody's greed.

~ Gandhi

MUCHO TRABAJO

One Man's Perspective

by Patrick McMahon

Seldom have I given my employee a task he's not been up to, but when recently, toward the end of a December afternoon, I had Martin sand the cap of a fence we've been building, he backed off in a fit of coughing. "Disculpa me," he excused himself, catching his breath: "Tengo la gripa. Este es no bueno para mi garganta": "I'm sorry—I have a cold, and this is bad for my throat."

Martin shouldn't have had to tell me what had been so obvious in his sneezing and coughing these last chilly days, but I'd been pushing hard to finish our job in time for the holidays. Enough. I instructed him to put away the tools for the day. "Mañana es mañana," I said: "Tomorrow is tomorrow." In any case, I hadn't wanted to work right up until the last minute, as I needed to talk with him about something before we headed off to our respective homes. In short order we found ourselves at the local taqueria doing business over burritos.

After a good deal of thought I'd finally decided what to do about Martin's bonus. He's worked faithfully for me all this last year, at a wage perhaps slightly better than the going rate for a Latino laborer with limited English, but less than I might pay an Anglo counterpart—though it's something of a moot point since there really doesn't seem to be a counterpart. I've never found an Anglo laborer nearly as able as the Latinos generally prove to be. My landscape construction business has come to depend on their strength, endurance, and expertise with regard to all things elemental: earth, stone, gravel, sand, bricks, concrete. Which brings into question why I would consider paying them less. I've reasoned that their usefulness is limited to what I can instruct them to do with my elementary Spanish, and that they can't communicate with non-Spanish speaking clients or suppliers or other contractors.

But for all my reasoning, at bottom I know I'm participating in the hypocrisy of the U.S. economy, and particularly the California economy, which relies so heavily on immigrant labor to do its manual work and do it cheaply. The dozens of day-laborers, most of them brown, waiting for work outside the local lumber store are a testament to capitalism, with its dependence on surplus labor. But Martin is lucky. He doesn't need to wait outside the lumber store. In the last year, by my calculations, I've provided him with around 1,500 hours of

work. I've made these calculations because I've been trying to determine how much of a year-end bonus to pay him. At 10 cents an hour—or one percent of his hourly rate—I'd be gifting him an additional \$150. From the standpoint of the service he's provided me it seems little enough. What he brings to the job is far more than a sturdy body and good sense. The invaluable extra he furnishes is an attitude of willingness for, and even relish of the work, an attitude summed up by his characteristic response whenever I tell him that we have another job coming up, perhaps another big job. "Tenemos mucho trabajo," I'll say. "Mucho trabajo es muy bien," he'll answer: "A lot of work is a very good thing."

There seems to be a special significance packed into that response, one I've heard over and over again from Spanish-speaking laborers. I can only guess what it is, hovering

*At the age when he was
wielding a machete in the
sugarcane fields, I was
learning to type.*

at the border of his world as I do, but it seems to me that his belief of work—by which is implicitly meant manual work, work of the hands—as a categorically good thing comes about because it's what he knows best. Coming from an agricultural background, his hands seem to be molded to the shovel, his mind to problems of weight and balance. At the age when he was wielding a machete in the sugarcane fields, I was learning to type. If my education has trained me in the verbal arts, his has trained him in the manual. As an immigrant in an urban culture so unlike his *pueblito*, dealing with a language not his own, he's had to be particularly resourceful. Work—*trabajo*—is a field in which to exercise his skills, to prove himself as an *hombre*. That he takes personal pride in work well done is of great value to me, and it's something that's increasingly difficult to find among Anglos. The contrast is reflected in the two languages. While "trabajo" in Spanish has an upbeat, respectable ring, in English it's come down etymologically to "travail" (from the French "*travailler*," meaning "to work"). With the conversion of North American society from agrarian to industrial, and then to technological, there's been a gradual erosion of the value placed on the work of the hands. I have crossed back and forth over class and cultural lines, been both landscaper and educator, produced both gardens and essays; I know that while the culture rewards me well (with respect if not with money) for work of the head—academic, intellectual, artistic, professional—for work of the hands it relegates me to the working class, down there close to lower class.

Secondly, packed into that energetic "mucho trabajo" is enthusiasm for the economic rewards of work. Of course

it's an enthusiasm most of us share, regardless of ethnicity. But in the case of immigrant Latino laborers, the formula "much work = much money" has particular meaning. The money side of the equation is multiplied several times over, relative to what they could expect to earn at home. Much *more* money is a very good thing indeed—especially in Martin's case.

I knew that Martin had a wife and two young children in Mexico. Family matters have been a surefire source of conversation, the language of such universal relationships being relatively accessible. But recently over lunch he mentioned that his daughter was coming to live with him. I made out further that he and his wife were recently *divorciado*, that she would be keeping custody of their two-year-old son. My Spanish was inadequate to get at the cause of the divorce, but I imagined it was connected with his having been away from home for two years now. Separation of families being a common story among the Latino laborers, I've often wondered how those families hold up over time. Now I saw that they sometimes don't.

At any rate, with his daughter here, and still having to send back support for his son (whom he's never seen), money has to go further than ever. Several times in the last month he's had to ask me for an advance on his paycheck, just for bus fare home. With the Christmas season having just made its demands on his pocketbook—a tree, presents, holiday cheer—the timing of a bonus would be perfect.

But again: \$100? \$150? It sounds like a lot of money to me at this time of year, what with my own holiday expenses, plus taxes coming up before long. Not to mention that I've been feeling myself squeezed out of the overheated real estate market of the Bay Area. In my hometown of Berkeley the average price of a house is over \$400,000, and a passable rental is \$1,500–\$2,000 a month. What am I doing giving money away when I'm working—travailing even—harder than I ever have in my life, and still worried about a roof over my head?

On the other hand, for \$500 a month Martin shares a studio apartment with up to seven other people: his daughter, aunt, sometimes his mother, one or both of his sisters, a brother-in-law, a visiting cousin....(I suspect that his lingering cold comes from sharing such close quarters with so many.) I wouldn't want to live in the part of town he lives in. I wouldn't feel "safe."

How can I not be generous? Pressed though I am, sore as I feel about living and working in an economic and class system that takes for granted those who build its foundations, wire its power, keep its toilets running—even so, I enjoy the many privileges of being white and educated. Within the system I occupy a place that has its

own rewards and responsibilities. I have the language and confidence to negotiate with people of the dominant culture, who themselves have what it takes to fund their taste and my projects, to pay for the stones, bricks, and wood I require for my work, my *trabajo*. There are times when it indeed feels like travail: I'm working myself into the ground, my back has been aching for 30 years, my hands have become too work-worn to play a guitar or manipulate a calligraphy pen. But five days a week I get to drive my truck into another day's adventure; five days a week I

My hands have become too work-worn to manipulate a calligraphy pen, but five days a week I get to drive my truck into another day's adventure.

take others along, passing on to them what they need to continue *their* work, exercise their skills, send money home to the sick grandmother, put presents under the Christmas tree and well-made things into the world. Regardless of upper class, working class, lower class, I have a place, they have a place, my clients have a

place, and together we make up the system, sometimes with fellow feeling, often with injustice. But no matter where you stand, for better and for worse the whole thing *works*, call it *trabajo*, call it travail.

Martin and I finished our burritos and I reached in my satchel for what, after all my calculations and hesitations I was now eager to give. "*Gracias para su trabajo excelente en el ano pasado*,"—"Thank you for your excellent work in the last year," I said as I handed over the envelope. I watched his face as he unfolded the card, with the *two* hundred dollar bills I'd put into it. Would he be embarrassed at the unexpected boon? (Was I uneasy because it was more than I can afford? Or less?) Would he be frustrated at not being able to put shades of feelings into words? I realized I could only guess what our relationship—employee and boss, younger man and older man, Mexican and American—meant to him. I imagined he might wonder in his turn what it meant to *me*.

He looked up from the bills and reached his hand over the table: "*Gracias, Patricio*." He then reached into his backpack and pulled out a wrapped present. I wasn't caught by total surprise, as he'd mentioned some days before that he and his daughter were wanting to give me something for Christmas. I opened it to find what at a glance looked like a work shirt, of the khaki color I customarily wear. Of course, I thought to myself, because he didn't know me beyond work, his imagination would stay within its bounds. "*Gracias, Martin*," I said, as we walked out of the taqueria into the early nightfall. I took him to his bus, and we parted with our customary "*Adios*."

It was only when I got home and looked more carefully at his gift that I realized this was no khaki shirt, but a kind of cotton suede, with mother-of-pearl buttons, a shirt for a New Year's Eve party. I was chagrined at my

(continued on page 27)

BEYOND SHAME

by Tova Green

My Aunt Etta tried all her life, unsuccessfully, to get rid of her Yiddish accent. She didn't want people to know of her immigrant background. Despite her mink coat and her diamond rings, when she opened her mouth there was no disguising her Eastern European origin.

My mother received Aunt Etta's clothing when she had grown tired of it. My mother was ashamed to wear handed-down dresses and coats, but she liked fine things and couldn't afford them herself.

Aunt Etta was married to my father's uncle, Uncle Sammy, who had worked his way up to become the owner of a fabric company. My parents met when they were both just out of high school, working for Uncle Sammy and going to City College in New York. They both dropped out of college after the first year; the hours on the job were too long.

Their parents couldn't help them get through college. My mother's parents, immigrants from Russia, worked as peddlers; they had a stall in the Essex Street Market on the Lower East Side. My father's parents, from Poland and Austria-Hungary, made ladies' hats. They all struggled to learn English.

When I was five, my father began to work at night in the post office, a job he had for the next forty years. After working all night, he would go to Macy's at 9 in the morning, where he worked part-time as a stock clerk in the pots and pans department. When he got home from Macy's in the afternoon, he'd go to bed and sleep until he had to get up at 10 PM to have dinner and return to the post office. My mother got a job as a secretary in another uncle's company.

My parents said they were working so hard in order to enable me and my sisters to go to college. They valued education; my mother had been valedictorian of her high school class. I was the first in my family to go to college. When I graduated, my mother put on my cap and gown and had her picture taken, as if to pretend she was finally getting a college degree herself. Her pride in my achievement was mixed with her regret that she hadn't had the opportunity to go to college herself.

In fourth grade I won a scholarship to study cello. It was a Mayor LaGuardia scholarship for musical children from non-musical families, offered at the Henry Street Settlement Music School, and after three years of lessons I was given a cello. I continued playing cello, and went to the High School of Music and Art, a public school in Manhattan that you had to apply to. There

I had classmates whose parents were artists, lawyers, writers. When I went to their homes I was impressed by all the books and amazed that my friends had their own rooms—I always had to share a room with my sisters. I didn't know how to take part in the conversation at the dinner table, because my family rarely ate together—we ate in shifts. I never invited those friends to my apartment in the Bronx. I was ashamed of my parents' lack of education, of the small, crowded rooms with shabby furniture, of my father being asleep when most fathers were awake and with their families.

I was ashamed of the small, crowded rooms with shabby furniture, of my father being asleep when most fathers were awake and with their families.

Once I started college, the gulf between me and my parents grew. I didn't know how to talk to them about what I was learning, about my budding political activism, about my new friends. They didn't understand why I was studying philosophy rather

than something practical that would enable me to earn a living, and so they were relieved when I decided to go to social work school. As it turns out, I left social work after 25 years, became an activist, and now work as Development Director for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, not exactly what they imagined for me.

In the mid-seventies, when I was in my thirties and living in Boston, I took part in a series of monthly Sunday workshops on Unlearning Racism offered to a group of white feminists. We were preparing to lead these workshops for white women at a National Women's Studies Association conference. One Sunday the topic of the workshop was *class*. We formed groups according to our class backgrounds and, for the first time, in the company of other people like me, I was able to acknowledge my working-class upbringing. Along with the shame, I began to recognize some of the positive things my parents had taught me: to work hard, to save money, to fix things and make them last, to be generous. My relationship with my parents began to improve and I was able to show my love and appreciation for them.

As I began to take pride in my working-class roots I also had to examine my stereotypes of wealthy people: they had easy childhoods, they were self-centered, they got everything they wanted. I was surprised to hear how isolated one friend felt because her parents were always away and she was raised by nannies; how another had been sent to boarding school when she was very young and was terribly homesick. My friends with inherited wealth gave much of their money away, unlike the wealthy aunts and uncles in my family who had spent their money on big houses, fur coats, and trips to Europe. My friends spent a lot of time learning about

how they could use their money to make the world a better place. One of these wealthy friends and I attended a five-day workshop on “Dismantling

I can help other people realize their dreams, but I myself am dream-impaired. It's hard for me to “think big.”

Classism” to explore our class differences; this deepened our commitment to understand one another. We later developed and co-led a workshop on “Taking Pride in your Class Background” for Resourceful Women, a San Francisco organization for women with inherited wealth.

In “Cross-Class Dialogue,” (p. 12) Jennifer Ladd writes about how difficult it is for working class people to allow themselves to dream. “Internalized oppression prevents one from even being able to imagine, stunting those ‘possibility muscles.’” That rings true for me. I’m pragmatic, good at organizing, and often work with people whose dreams and visions are strong—I can help them realize their dreams, but I myself am dream-impaired. It’s hard for me to “think big.”

This is one of the many challenges I’m facing now, having taken on the job of Development Director for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. In this job I have to think big, to hold BPF’s vision of a peaceful and just world. I also have to think creatively, as BPF’s staff and budget grow each year.

My job demands that I build relationships with people whose financial resources are much greater than mine. Sometimes the old feelings of shame return. When I have a lunch date with a major donor I wonder if I will be able to hold up my end of the conversation. I often feel as shy as I did in high school. The nicer the restaurant, the more uncomfortable I feel. I breathe and remember the purpose of the meeting. It helps that I usually go to these luncheons with Alan Senauke, who is from a middle-class family, and is more at ease in these situations. I think we’re a good team. And, once the conversation starts, I find that I have a lot in common with BPF’s supporters: we share a commitment to Buddhist practice and to making the world a better place. These donors are not only generous with their financial resources, they also give their time and advice. I learn from their suggestions, stories, and experiences.

Recently I had a discussion with one of the teachers at Zen Center that shed light on where my shame comes from. I told her that I had gone out for dinner with a friend and realized after we were seated that the restaurant was too expensive for me. I knew that my friend had more money than I, and I was too embarrassed to tell her that I couldn’t afford to eat there. So I ate there anyway, aware that I would have to scrimp for the rest of the week. My teacher asked, “Is your sense of self-worth connected to the amount of money you have?” I realized that even after all the work I had done to reclaim my class background with pride, that feeling still lurked within me. She helped me to see that the amount of money I

have now is connected to many choices I have made in my life, and I made those choices based on my values, some of which are not typical mainstream American

values. Not being able to afford expensive dinners out has nothing to do with my worth as a person.

I feel vulnerable writing this piece and “coming out” about my class background, but I write with the hope that my story will promote discussion. Doing development work brings up class issues for *everyone*, of every class background.

When I was a girl, I never imagined that I would be an engaged Buddhist fundraiser. Now, as I look at my life, the pieces fall into place like the bits of colored glass that make beautiful patterns in a kaleidoscope. ❖

Besides being Development Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Tova Green is a Zen practitioner currently living at San Francisco Zen Center.

Mucho Trabajo, continued

assumption that Martin would limit his perspective to the strictly workaday. What, I wondered, would *he* be wearing on New Year’s Eve? What did he wear as he danced *salsa* of a Saturday night? Who is he, what does he express, when he speaks in a Spanish not simplified for my limited comprehension?

Now, as I think about Martin, anticipating the coming year, I realize we’ve got our work cut out for us, beyond this or that project: that is, to open our eyes and ears yet more to the other, navigating our way across the borders of language, culture, and class. *I’m* the one who gets the jobs, give the orders, writes the checks, gives the bonuses. *He’s* the one who figures out from my struggling Spanish what he’s being asked to do. He’s the one who lifts the stones, digs the trenches, carts the soil. That much is clear. But beyond: what is actually transacted between us? How is he developing me, how I him? What more could I be doing for him, him for me? There’s the English class I’ve been encouraging him to take. There are ways he could help me more with my Spanish, seeing himself more in the role of my teacher. And then there’s the kind of communication two people who spend a lot of time together would want to have with each other, over the morning break, in the truck on the way to and back from the job, around the holidays, around heartaches. How does it feel to be away from one’s *pueblito* at Christmastime? From *el padre y la madre*, from one’s estranged wife and *niño*?

It’s work to look forward to in the coming year and years: Not travail, I trust, but *trabajo*. ❖

Patrick McMahon is a landscape contractor, writer, and Zen practitioner living in Oakland, California

SHORTENING THE DISTANCE

An Interview with Jan Willis

Robin Hart conducted this interview in fall 1999.

*Jan Willis is Professor of Religion and Walter A. Crowell Professor of the Social Sciences at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. She has taught for 26 years and studied Tibetan Buddhism for over 30 years. She is the author of *The Diamond Light, On Knowing Reality, and Enlightened Beings*; and the editor of *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*. Willis' latest book, *Dreaming Me: An African-American Baptist Buddhist Journey*, will be published by Riverhead Books in January 2001.*



Robin: How would you describe your economic background?

Jan: I came from a place called Docena, Alabama, outside the city limits of Birmingham. Docena was a mining camp, but my dad didn't work in the mines; he was a steel worker. He was valedictorian of the same high school of which I was also valedictorian, but his father made him work in the steel plant. Both Blacks and Whites worked there, although the approximately 150 households were segregated, with Blacks living on one side of the camp and Whites living on the other. The good part about my father being a steel worker is that he kept a job. Everybody else was laid off because the mine closed.

We lived with this violence on a daily basis. You had to keep your car windows rolled up because people would throw acid in.

Robin: Did your mom work?

Jan: No, she took care of the household and my sister and me.

Robin: What was the political and social climate of Docena during your childhood?

Jan: Jim Crow laws were in effect. The Ku Klux Klan was a presence. The Klan area chief lived on the White side of the mining camp. In high school, after I received scholarships to various places—to Bryn Mawr, Vassar, and Cornell—the Klan burned a cross in front of our house.

Robin: Because you received scholarships?

Jan: Well, this was about 1965, when a number of Black kids in the South were receiving scholarships to attend Ivy League schools. In our area, three Black boys and myself were interviewed by Northern filmmakers for a documentary. The Klan leaders watched them film me

with their big cameras, in a staged walk from the bus stop to my home, with kids holding onto the banisters of the poorer houses. It was a big production. Now I see the whole event as exploitative and, in hindsight, wouldn't have participated; but, the result is that the Klan marched on our house.

Robin: You say that so calmly, but it must have been terrifying for you and your family.

Jan: Oh, it was really scary. My dad was working the graveyard shift, so only my mom was there, and my sister. There was a whole caravan of cars and trucks. Men, women, and children in hoods and robes got out and lit a cross. My mom had a little .22 pistol and she stood by the door, and then she had us get down by the bed. We just held our breaths, hoping that they wouldn't toss a bomb. They did their thing, you know, their mumbo jumbo, and then they got back in their cars and drove off. That was a close brush, but you have to understand that there was a lot more violence going on in the South than was reported. Everyone knows about the four little girls in the Sixteenth Street Church, but we lived with this violence on a daily basis. You had to keep your car windows rolled up because people would throw acid in. So that

was the political climate of Birmingham in the early '60s. My family and I marched with King, Shuttlesworth, Abernathy and all those folks.

Robin: How did you get exposed to Buddhism?

Jan: I first majored in physics at Cornell because of my love of math, but then I took a philosophy course and switched majors to philosophy. I began reading books by Alan Watts and D. T. Suzuki. I was particularly interested in Buddhism as a result of seeing Buddhist monks and nuns in Vietnam setting themselves on fire to protest the war. I started reading to learn about and understand this type of activism. One day I was talking to a student who had just spent his junior year in India. He told me to stop reading about Buddhism and to go meet some Buddhists. In my junior year, I went to India.

Robin: Why did you choose to go to India, of all places, particularly during that period when the Black Power movement was so prominent, and Blacks, if they traveled internationally, often went to Africa or Cuba?

Jan: Well, at that time, Cornell had eight African American students—seven men and me—in a White student body of approximately 14,500. The Black Power movement hadn't yet hit its stride. I was basically having a good time in college, studying all these new things, hearing Bob Dylan for the first time and checking out what he was saying in his songs. Hey, the world was opening. Then I got hit with the sophomore slumps, where you feel like you've learned everything and now it's time to see the world. So I chose India because, at the time, I was already reading about Buddhism. My parents freaked out. It was bad enough that I had gone away from Alabama to attend Cornell. They couldn't understand why in the world I wanted to go to India where they thought people just died in the streets.

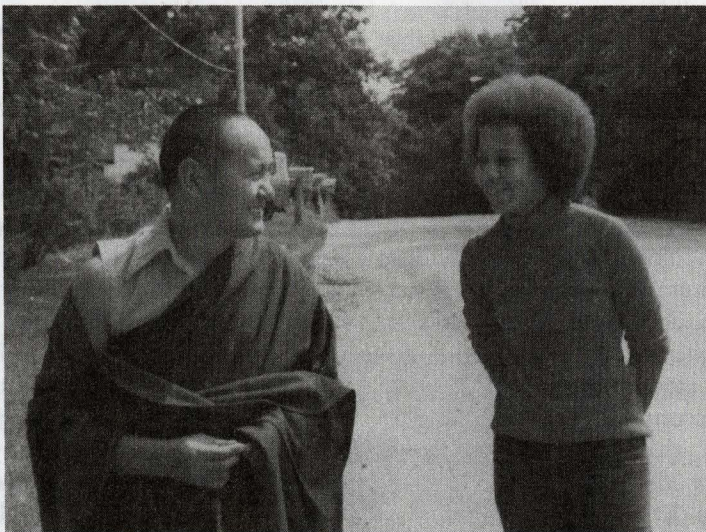
Robin: So you ended up going all by yourself?

Jan: I was the only one from Cornell, but there were 25 kids selected from all over the country in the Wisconsin Program which sponsored our year abroad. I was the only Black person. Nine of us went to Benaras, the holiest Hindu city in India. I took classes in Buddhism at Benaras Hindu University and for a whole year I studied with seven Thai monks and the professor. That was my academic program.

That year, I met the Tibetans at Sarnath, the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon. Buddhists from other countries come to pilgrimage spots like Sarnath and establish monasteries. When I was there in 1967–68, the biggest group of pilgrims was the Tibetans. They just bowled me over.

Robin: How so?

Jan: Because of their bearing, because they were strikingly different from me and from my perception of Indians, in stature as well as in joy. They were light-hearted, even though they had suffered historical trauma and were having to flee their country. For some reason, they just took me right in. So I made a ritual, at least weekly, of going out to Sarnath. I met lots of Tibetans that year. When I was initially attracted to Buddhism and reading Watts and Suzuki, I figured I'd go to India first, and then I'd go to Japan and study Zen meditation. But once I met the Tibetans, I forgot all about Japan.



Jan Willis with Lama Yeshe, Madison, Wisconsin, 1974

Robin: How did you meet your teacher, Lama Yeshe?

Jan: Just before I came back to the States, I made a trip to Nepal. A group of Tibetans there asked me to stay and study with them, but I wasn't able to at that time. During my senior year, I corresponded with a Tibetan monk in Nepal who asked me to come back to visit his monastery. After I graduated in 1969, I decided to return to Nepal with two friends of mine, Randy and Robbie, and take this monk up on his offer. I was 21

years old. When we got there, however, the monk wasn't there. I asked the other monks at his monastery to tell me who was the lama in the area. They pointed up to this place and said, "Lama Yeshe." So my friends and I walked an hour and a half uphill to get to the monastery. Zeena, another Western woman who lived there, fed us because of our long journey, but then said that the lamas were too tired to see us. As we turned to go, wanting to

get down the mountain before dark, a little door opened and Lama Yeshe poked his head out. We snuck in. He was my teacher for the next 15 years, until his death in 1984.

In those days, besides Zeena and me, there were no other Westerners living at the monastery. Randy and Robbie lived with a Nepali family nearby and came from there to the monastery. Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa hadn't started teaching their annual Fall course, which eventually attracted 200 people each year. We would sit in a room with Lama Yeshe every day and have meals with him. It was really a remarkable year. He put us on the path of meditation and we talked about everything. We went to India and spoke with the Dalai Lama about guns on campus and Kent State.

Robin: You've spoken a lot about your fascinating background. What do Buddhist teachings have to say about class distinctions, about inequality?

Jan: According to Buddhism, we're all equal in that we're all human beings. We all suffer, we all desire happiness. As the Dalai Lama says, "I'm a monk, but basically I'm just a human being." All beings are equal that way, and all beings have Buddha nature. What do Buddhists say about class distinctions? There shouldn't be class distinctions, and yet you can't dismiss the idea

that Buddhism was and is a product of its culture and its time. Siddhartha was a prince. He was raised in an upper-class environment during a time when India was very rigidly hierarchical. The Buddha was one of the high-class folk. But he was radical in the sense that he accepted followers from all the castes. He didn't discriminate. He didn't say that only Brahmins could study with him, for example. That was one of the radical things he did, and it was one of the reasons he was ostracized by the bigwigs in the society.

Robin: Would you make a distinction between Buddhist teaching and Buddhism as an institution in defining the source of classism?

Jan: Yes. You know, I've been studying Buddhism for over 30 years now, and reading the texts in Sanskrit and Tibetan. There's some pretty radical stuff in those scriptures, including talk about ecological stuff. But Buddhist institutions follow their cultural settings, and those settings prescribed that men and women shouldn't sit together, that men were higher in rank, that women couldn't attain the same level of spiritual accomplishments as men, and that women couldn't propagate the dharma. So I think there's a definite distinction to be made between Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist institutions.

Tibetan Buddhism helped empower me to feel confident in the world, after I had been raised in a place that told me I was less than a human being.

Robin: Would you say that in the United States, the institutions of Buddhism are microcosms of the society as a whole and contain the same class and race distinctions?

Jan: Yes. The extra layer here, and I think it's an unfortunate one, is that you get Buddhism in the hands of some ardent followers and they become more "Buddhist" than Buddhists in Asia. That is, they want to do the chants in the foreign language, they want the place to look really "Tibetan," and I would put that in quotes, because what is Tibetan? One of the wisest things I ever heard came from Kalu Rinpoche. He said, "Don't swap one pretense for another." I think Western or American Buddhists really need to learn that, because Buddhism's going to have to find a way to be American, unencumbered by all the cultural baggage of Asia. In trying to be more authentic here in the West, people bend over backwards trying to be Asian, and they're just pretending.

Robin: Why do you think African Americans and other people of color are very few in number at non-Asian Western Buddhist centers?

Jan: Well, I think it's largely economic, and you might want to call that class. In this country, the way the institutions are set up, Buddhist practice takes time, leisure

time, free time. But people have to work, you know. And Buddhist practice takes money.

Robin: Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA) is an organization that also requires money and time. NSA members must purchase altars and *Gohonzons*, they chant for long periods of time, and they attend many meetings. Nevertheless, NSA seems to attract a large number of people of color and people of different economic backgrounds.

Jan: I think it's because they're in the cities. I think it makes a difference. I go to Vajrapani, which is up in the mountains. To get there, one has to travel miles of really rugged roads which are washed out every winter. Many Buddhist retreats are far away from residential areas. But I think NSA has chapters in New York City and L.A. They are where the folks are, which is where churches and other religious organizations ought to be, not somewhere inaccessible to most people.

For many people, retreats are time- and cost-prohibitive. Take, for example, a month-long retreat. If you've got a regular job or you're not upper class, you get your two weeks off a year. If you start wanting a month every six months, then you might have some trouble with your boss. I think I'm really fortunate. I'm a professor. I get summers off, so I can usually do

things in the summer at least, and spring break. But my sister is a nurse. She gets two weeks. She gets three if she scrapes, putting days together, but it's very carefully negotiated. Then when she gets her time off, she really wants to rest.

Robin: How can Buddhist practice be made accessible to a more diverse group of people, and still allow for a more advanced Buddhist practice?

Jan: You could have a sliding scale of fees for retreats. You could have scholarships for students, or others, with time but not money. I think it's important to have more people of color leading those retreats. As long as there are not Black or other faces of color at retreats and other kinds of Buddhist venues, then the perception is that it is unnatural for them to be there. The idea is to make it more natural. Having retreats at times when more people have traditional breaks is another suggestion. But I think it's really important to have faces of color at the retreats so that such occurrences stop being viewed as abnormal.

Robin: There are so few Buddhist teachers of color and they're from different lineages and traditions. Since many retreats follow one lineage or tradition, how would that be addressed?

Jan: I think it should just be addressed by saying "Buddhist" in the same way that women practitioners come to different kinds of traditions and teachings. It doesn't matter how many traditions of Buddhism are represented. That just makes for good dialogue. It shouldn't matter that I practice Tibetan Buddhism or that this guy in Salt Lake City does vipassana. You know, we're people of color who do Buddhism. We can talk to each other about different meditation practices, but ultimately, when you sit on the cushion, it's you and that meditation. "Buddhist" can cover all the traditions, with everybody invited.

Robin: Do you think that there are more subtle forms of discrimination that keep people of color from embracing Buddhism?

Jan: I saw a videotape of members of the L.A. Zen Center doing a walking meditation around the two blocks of that center. They were wearing their Zen robes proudly. People of various ilks were on the other side of the street watching them. But none of the meditators approached those observers to say, "We're having an open night on Buddhism on Sunday. Please come over."

Robin: Do you think Buddhist centers have an attitude of "Why are you not coming to us?" as opposed to "Why and how can we be available to you?"

Jan: Yes. A more positive approach would be for European Americans to discuss the issue among themselves initially, if that is a serious concern of theirs. Instead of saying, "Why aren't the people here?" they should be discussing, "How can we make our practice more accessible? How can we open it up?" The concern has to be genuine, because otherwise the pretense continues.

Robin: One of the criticisms of NSA is that they are evangelistic. Some Buddhist practitioners might think that if they become assertive in trying to attract a diverse membership, then they would get into recruitment.

Jan: You know, the earliest Buddhists were enjoined by Siddhartha Gautama to go forth, when they weren't in the rainy season. For nine months of the year, they were instructed to go out and teach Buddhism. They met under trees at the noon hour, when everybody was resting, and they would give discourses on Buddhism. I'm not for recruiting, either, but I'm suggesting that there could be open days at the centers for the community at-large. It's about doing whatever is necessary to shorten that distance between the center and the community that surrounds it. It's really about how perceptions breed misunderstanding among people. I'm just saying that it would be nice if some of those folk in the zendo talked to the people across the street, and if they could say, "If you're wondering what we're doing here, we

Christopher Ikeda-Nash, CPA

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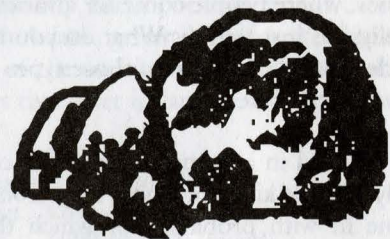
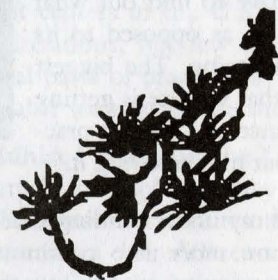
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have an open night every Sunday. You're welcome to come over." There should be some outreach.

Robin: In your article in *Buddhist Women on the Edge*, you state that Buddhism offers a methodology for enhancing self-confidence. Why wouldn't this be appealing to people of color, particularly those who feel disempowered?

Jan: My book, *Dreaming Me*, is about how Tibetan Buddhism helped empower me to feel confident in the world after I had been raised in a place that told me I was less than a human being. It works with visualization. In the book I talk about the movie *Space Jam*, and Michael Jordan, for example, and how some athletes visualize. That's what Tantric Buddhism is based on. Meditation and transformation is based on visualization. So I know that Buddhism can be empowering. I think it's a positive teaching in the world, and I'd like to see more people know about it.

Buddhism is about becoming an authentic human being, realizing your buddha nature. Your buddha nature is calm, clear, wise, compassionate. These are ideas that anybody can understand. But if the ideas are couched in and cluttered with inauthentic cultural baggage, it clouds their essence. I think one of our greatest dilemmas is that, in trying to make Buddhism our own, we have to find out what Buddhism is, as opposed to its cultural packaging. The biggest challenge that we face is getting to the essence of Buddhist practice, without misperceiving it.

Robin: It's my understanding that the sanghas in Asian countries are more like community centers, like the Jewish community centers or the African American churches, where people come for a variety of things, not just religious instruction. What do you think is creating obstacles to the existence of those types of sanghas here in the United States?

Jan: I've lived in a monastery and the center of activity actually was the kitchen, where folks from the community came in with problems for which they wanted the monks to perform a ceremony, a ritual. Those problems ran the gamut from mothers being ill to "I'm about to smuggle these jeans across the border. I want to have a safe trip." I think religious institutions ought to be in the

community, in the center, and people ought to feel like they can come at any time. That goes back to the open door thing. In the West, we have an idea, through movies or books, that monks are constantly in an otherworldly space doing otherworldly things. But in Tibet, for example, Lama Yeshe came from a monastery of 6,000 monks. He said maybe only 50 of them were meditators, who were released from duties, so food was brought to them. But the others were farming, or cooking, or cleaning the monastery. Some were talking to the folks of the community about what they needed. It was much more socially active and grounded in the here-and-now.

Robin: That ties into the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's goals of engaged Buddhism. If Buddhist centers were more engaged in the affairs of the community, then maybe a more diverse group of people would be attracted to them.

Jan: Yeah, it's just natural, you know. People go where they feel like they are welcome and where their needs might possibly be addressed.

Robin: Have you felt marginalized by Western Buddhists because you are a person of color?

Jan: I think I've been shown respect because I'm a Buddhist scholar. My status as a professor has opened doors. But I feel marginalized in the sense that I feel badly when I look around and see that there's only one or two or three of us at a retreat or event, because I always hope there will be more. The one respite I get is from my students.

The longer I'm here at Wesleyan, the more Black students come to my classes. That goes back to my own experience and how I first learned about Buddhism at college. The number of students of color overall has decreased, however. I feel badly that there aren't more. I wish there were more, because I think Buddhism has something positive to give to all people.

I think the biggest benefit of my practice comes through my teaching. That's how I'm engaged. ❖

Robin Hart is an attorney and writer in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has an MA in Theology from the Pacific School of Religion, is a consulting editor of Turning Wheel, and has published articles on Buddhism and racism.



Jan Willis teaching at Vajrapani, 1996

THE COST OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE: *Class, Access, and Diversity*

by Joe Parker

Buddhism has costs in at least two senses. The first is the direct, economic cost of our practice: meditation cushions and robes; altar paraphernalia; the time lost to economically productive work; and the fees for retreats, workshops, and other intensive practice periods. But there is also a cost on another level—the price that Buddhism as a tradition is paying for certain choices it makes by following, often uncritically, the United States socioeconomic system.

Members of a wide range of social groups are largely prevented from practicing Buddhism in the U.S. due to the direct costs. The exclusion of these groups arises from the structural complicity of many Buddhist centers with the U.S. economic system and its class inequalities, a complicity which often arises without mindful awareness of these socioeconomic consequences. In this article, I explore the ways that class is interconnected with other inequities in our society to limit access to Buddhist practice. I focus on the challenges facing Buddhist centers that serve primarily non-Asian populations. As we will see, centers that serve ethnic Asian Buddhists draw on historically established ways to make their practice accessible to people of various economic resources. As we consider class issues in relation to other types of subordination in U.S. society, we may find ways to build a broader-based, more socially conscious Buddhist tradition in this country.

Buddhism and the U.S. Class System

Buddhism was transplanted to North America by immigrants from Asia during the post-Civil War era, just as capitalism began to consolidate itself in the United States. In the same way that Buddhism adapted itself to different economic systems in Asia, so it has begun to conform to U.S. economic conditions. From its beginnings, Buddhism in the U.S. has been entangled with the class stratification process associated with an industrialized market economy, along with the intensifying injustices and suffering that generally come with the so-called “free market.” Inequalities in wealth and incomes peaked in the late nineteenth century with the railroad and steel barons, and again in the late 1920s before the stock market crash. These inequalities have been peaking yet again in the 1980s and 1990s, with increasing attacks on government regulation and antitrust protections, declines in

labor union membership and general job security for the middle class, skyrocketing executive salaries, and an increase in low-wage service sector employment.

As the number of non-Asian practitioners has mushroomed since World War II, Buddhism in this country has increasingly adapted to the Euro-American economic practices of late capitalism. This is most obvious in the use of fees for retreats, and other market-based mechanisms that tend to limit access to Buddhist teachings, practice venues, and religious supplies. A Thai Buddhist activist has pointed out that she and others from historically Buddhist countries are shocked and disappointed to discover that centers in the U.S. charge fees for meditation retreats. From the perspective of Buddhists living in Southeast Asian countries where meditation retreats are generally offered free, charging fees for retreats seems like a violation of a spiritual practice that should be open to all.

It may be hard for us in the U.S. to imagine an

exchange system that is not based in capitalism. Yet there are examples from Buddhist traditions—communal ownership, bartering systems, or volunteer labor and in-kind donations of edible goods and even housing facilities. These are the sorts of arrange-

ments that make Thai and other Asian Buddhist meditation retreats in the U.S. possible without the fees. Of course, many Buddhist centers in the U.S. do rely on volunteer labor and donations, but few do so to the extent that such central parts of practice as meditation retreats are made available without significant fees.

Direct Costs of Buddhist Practice in the U.S.

Based on an informal, incomplete survey of recent Buddhist center publications and websites that I conducted in late 1999, there is a clear difference in the fee structures and other costs of practice between centers that serve a predominantly Asian population and those that serve mostly non-Asians, generally dominated by whites. Here are some of the average costs at North American Buddhist centers that cater to largely white populations:

1-day retreat	\$50
3- to 4-day retreat	\$100–\$200
7- to 9-day retreat	\$200–\$300
seasonal residence	\$500 or \$550/month
membership	\$10–\$120/month or \$100–\$2500/year

The overall cost of practicing Buddhism at these centers can be quite considerable over the long term. Based

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Buddhism in the U.S. has been
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on the figures above, the cost for a person who attends two three-day retreats, two week-long retreats, and holds a membership at the center would be over \$1,000 per year. For many people, such a large cost is impossible to budget for because of other pressing needs, like health insurance, transportation, rent, and food. While an economically privileged person like myself can put the cost of a retreat on a credit card, many people cannot qualify for credit cards and some may have little familiarity with the use of credit cards or even checking or savings accounts.

In contrast, U.S. Buddhist centers that serve Asian immigrants showed a consistent pattern of offering retreats for free or, more commonly, for a voluntary donation. These two practices seem to be drawn from Buddhist countries in the Third World as well as from a highly industrialized society which is also historically Buddhist, such as Japan, where class-based social stratification is deeply entrenched. This suggests that Buddhists from these countries can draw on a long history of meeting the religious needs of individuals from a broad spectrum of economic means. Centers that serve primarily white Buddhists could learn much about alternative fee structures and funding approaches through a dialogue with these Asian immigrant centers.

The Social Cost of U.S. Buddhist Economic Policies: Who's Being Excluded?

A considerable portion of the U.S. population cannot afford the current fees required to practice at many Buddhist centers. This group includes poor women; disproportionate numbers of people of color and gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; and many immigrants without U.S. citizenship. To explore the overlapping ways that these groups and subgroups are affected by such fees, I draw on the work of two social scientists, Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill. Their work demonstrates how participation in society involves us in multiple interlocking and mutually reinforcing systems of inequality and domination. They suggest that we may be privileged in one area, such as being white, and at the same time belong to subordinated groups, such as working class lesbians. This approach acknowledges the deeply rooted character of socialization in an often sexist, racist, classist, xenophobic, and homophobic society.

Gender is a major determinant of class inequality, and higher costs for Buddhist practice impact women disproportionately. Eighty-eight percent of single-parent households are headed by women, and 46 percent of these women and their children made do under the poverty line in 1992 (\$16,700). Recent changes in welfare laws have exacerbated this situation. In California, for example, single parents with young children comprise 60 percent of the welfare recipients being put to work. While single mothers would find the fees and other costs of Buddhist practice outlined above a huge financial challenge, they are doing well compared to the growing ranks of homeless

women and their children, who now total 40 percent of the homeless population in the U.S.

Race, like gender, is a mechanism by which our society limits access to the economic resources necessary for Buddhist practice. In 1996, for example, Latino, Asian American, and African American men earned only 59 percent, 89 percent, and 63 percent respectively of what white men earned, while Latinas, Asian American, and African American women earned 70 percent, 108 percent, and 87 percent of what white women earned. Race and class are configured differently depending on gender, producing a complex and uneven map of class inequalities spread over different racial and gender groups. For example, the percentages of families headed by single women varies dramatically by racial group, ranging in 1993 from 14 percent among Asian American and white families to 23 percent for Latino and 47 percent for African American families. The percentage of racial groups living in poverty has increased since the mid-1970s, countering the arguments of "progress" used to support global capitalist development and domestic "free market" economic systems.

These inequalities show us how the cost of retreats clearly impacts non-whites more heavily than whites. If Buddhist temples and other organizations wish to reach larger numbers of non-whites and make practice accessible to people of all economic means, they need to find ways to reduce their direct economic cost to practitioners.

Sexual orientation also intersects with class, race, and gender issues. The stereotype of a white gay male usually assumes the class dimension of an economically privileged life. Yet a working class lesbian of color certainly occupies a different place in the social order from the stereotypical professional gay male. While all members of this category may encounter various economic losses due to homophobia in the workplace, lesbians and gay men of color also fight an uphill battle against salary and wage differentials that result in lower pay for persons of color, whatever their class or education levels.

Immigrants coming from Buddhist countries often have access to centers which do not require fees for retreat practice, but those from non-Buddhist countries face many obstacles that interact with class if they wish to practice Buddhism. Those with temporary immigration status or undocumented immigration status now have to contend with increasingly stringent citizenship document requirements for employment which are applied differently in employment sectors for men and women, as are English-language barriers to employment and access to social services.

Strategies for Change

Zinn and Dill's model is useful because it shows us how Buddhist centers and sanghas transmit both oppression or privilege through their participation in the unequal structures of U.S. society. Yet Zinn and Dill's model also may

help us to think and act against the grain of our socialization and the suffering it produces. Buddhist communities may become sites of social transformation, as individuals and groups begin to exercise their ability to change and fight against class oppression, racism, heterosexism, sexism, xenophobia, and other modes of domination.

Multiple strategies may be developed to make Buddhist practice more accessible and open to members of all economic classes and other subordinated groups. An important way to start developing such strategies is to look at access issues arising from fees and other direct costs. For example, if Buddhist institutions wish to reach out to lower-class immigrants, they clearly need to make bilingual materials available, but they also need to develop means for these immigrants to practice in ways appropriate to a two-parent household with children. This contrasts with effective strategies for welcoming single-parent families on welfare, three-quarters of whom are English speakers. Yet both these groups include women who would find it difficult to attend retreats and become involved in sanghas unless centers offer child care and other concrete relief from their highly demanding workload, scheduling requirements, and economic circumstances.

Buddhism has much to offer our society, including its long practice of non-capitalist-derived social relations, which historically have helped to relieve suffering and address desires. Some of these relations, such as the master-disciple relation and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, have become well established in U.S. Buddhism. Other relations that are not easily supported by a capitalist economic system have not taken root very effectively in this country. Mendicant begging nuns or monks provide a model for Buddhist teachings of impermanence. At the same time, they undermine the fundamental capitalist institution of private property and the assumption of a nuclear family that pays for a residence and avoids the experience of homelessness. Imagine the effects on class relations if well-respected Buddhist leaders advocated a law to make it possible for these wandering, propertyless, and homeless nuns and monks to take up occasional residence in cemeteries and parks. What would it mean for class relations if groups of people with Buddhist lay ordination status took vows of poverty and lived simple lives together, as was done in Japan, overcoming the anomie and consumerism that can be so endemic in a capitalist society? Further study of Buddhist history and economic practices gives more information about these traditions (see some suggested readings, below).

Ultimately, Buddhist organizations must face the ethical and social consequences of adopting capitalist market-price mechanisms as a means of funding their operating and capital expenses. By following the lead of the U.S. economic system, Buddhist centers are implicitly reproducing the pervasive—if often subtle—racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic nature of our society that produces class differences. Attention to these exclusions

can deepen our mindfulness of the impact of Buddhism in the U.S. socioeconomic system, and increase our awareness of the ways in which we might follow or diverge from the path laid out by U.S. class structure and its unequal and sometimes savage effects. It is up to us as individuals and institutional members to find new paths for Buddhism which can help release more sentient beings from the suffering that pervades our world. ❖

Suggested readings on Class, Gender, and Race:

- Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, *Women of Color in U.S. Society*, Temple University Press, 1994.
- Esther Ngan-ling Chow, Doris Wilkinson, Maxine Baca Zinn, *Race, Class, and Gender: Common Bonds, Different Voices*, Sage Publications, 1996.

Suggested historical readings on Buddhism and Class:

- Martin Collcutt, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan*, Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Jacques Gernet, translated by Franciscus Verellen, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, 1995.

Joe Parker has practiced Buddhism in the Japanese and Vietnamese Zen tradition since 1979. He teaches East Asian Thought, and International and Intercultural Studies at Pitzer College, one of the Claremont Colleges in Southern California. He wishes to acknowledge Ouyporn Khuankaew for giving him the idea for this article.

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INDIA'S BROKEN PEOPLE

The Untouchables Still Struggle for Survival

by Christopher S. Queen

Few people in the West seem to realize that the caste system, India's religiously based social hierarchy, is still in place and still oppressing tens of millions of citizens. According to Human Rights Watch, more than one-sixth of India's population, some 160 million people, are still treated as Untouchables, or Dalits, which means "broken people," and denied access to economic and educational opportunities. In a report on caste violence against Untouchables, the humanitarian organization found that

Dalits are discriminated against, denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused or killed at the hands of the police and higher-caste groups that enjoy the state's protection. Dalit women are frequent victims of sexual assault. In what has been called India's "hidden apartheid," entire villages in many Indian states remain completely segregated by caste. National legislation and constitutional protections serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below the "pollution line."

The report says that most Untouchables live in extreme poverty and are relegated to degrading jobs, such as manual scavenging, removing human waste and animal carcasses, street sweeping, leatherwork, and mining.

Forty million people, including 15 million children, work as bonded laborers in slave-like conditions to pay off debts. Many, earning as little as 50 cents a day, work in mines or salt fields, while more than a million remove feces manually from public toilets.

Dalit women face the double burden of caste and gender. Thousands of girls are forced into prostitution before reaching puberty, many as *devadasis*, "female servants of god," serving village priests and other upper-caste men. Unable to marry, they are eventually auctioned off to urban brothels. Sexual violence against women is used by landlords and the police to inflict political "lessons" and crush dissent within the community. Dalit women have been arrested and tortured in custody as a means of punishing their male relatives who are hiding from authorities.

Upper-caste militias enforce vigilante justice against Untouchables in rural India. On the night of December 1, 1997, for example, the Renvir Sena, comprised of landowners in the state of Bihar, killed 16 children, 27 women, and 18 men in the village of Laxmanpur-Bathe. Five teenage girls were raped and mutilated before being shot in the chest. The Untouchable villagers were

reportedly sympathetic to a party that had been demanding more equitable land distribution in the area.

The Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 prohibits specific abuses against members of the "Scheduled Castes and Tribes" (the government's term for Untouchables), including: forcing Dalits to drink or eat inedible or noxious substances; dumping excreta, other waste, or carcasses in Dalit neighborhoods; stripping Dalits naked and parading them with their faces or bodies painted; fouling water supplies reserved for Dalits; denying right of passage to Dalits on public sidewalks; and exploiting Dalit women in the workplace.

In the United States, 35 homeless people were murdered or assaulted in 1999, according to the National Homeless Civil Rights Organizing Project of the National Coalition for the Homeless. By comparison, the Government of India reports that between 1994 and 1996—the latest years for which statistics are available—98,349 atrocities were registered with police under the Prevention of Atrocities Act. Of these, 38,483 were for offenses of the kind mentioned above. A further 1,660 were for murder, 2,814 were for rape, and 13,671 were for assault—criminal offenses covered elsewhere in the law. "Given that Dalits are both reluctant and unable (for lack of police cooperation) to report crimes against themselves, the actual number of abuses is presumably much higher," according to Human Rights Watch.

Class and Caste

The caste system in India goes back to ancient times. In the Vedas, one of the world's earliest literatures, society is divided into four social-economic groups (later called *varnas*, meaning "colors," a possible reference to racial differences): *Brahmin* (priest, teacher), *Kshatriya* (ruler, warrior), *Vaishya* (trader), and *Shudra* (peasant, servant). While these early occupational groups may date back a thousand years before the common era, the notion of Untouchability did not crystallize until the second century C.E. At that time, ancient ideas of religious purity and pollution were formalized in a steep hierarchy, with Brahmins at the top and Untouchables—people even lower than the Shudras—at the bottom.

In Hindu society, most instances of purity and impurity are temporary or limited: women are considered polluted during menstruation, and should not cook food for the family during this time. The left hand is polluted by its use in cleaning the body. Birth and death entail greater pollution: the mother must be separated for a time after childbirth, and corpses pollute those who touch them.

Alone in Hindu law, however, the people called

“Untouchables” are permanently polluted. Because of the unclean work they perform, they must be strictly, and sometimes forcefully, separated from “touchables,” that is, everyone else in the Indian class system.

Class is generally defined by sociologists as a group that shares similar living standards, property, opportunities for employment, life experiences, and power to dispose of goods or skills in a market economy. Class mobility—the opportunity to change one’s class status through increasing or decreasing income, or through education, association, or political circumstances—is taken for granted in most analyses of class. Marx exhorted the proletarian working classes of his time to revolution, promising “You have nothing to lose but your chains!”

Caste, the social system found only in South Asia and the Hindu diaspora, is significantly different from class. Caste members may not intermarry, choose occupations other than those required of their caste, or, in the case of the Untouchables, associate with members of other castes. Separate eating utensils are provided for Untouchables in restaurants that serve them at all, while the very shadow of an Untouchable is still thought to pollute a caste Hindu in many parts of India.

The very shadow of an Untouchable is still thought to pollute a caste Hindu in many parts of India.

Gandhi and Ambedkar

It is well known that Mahatma Gandhi deplored Untouchability and attempted to outlaw its practice in the decades leading up to Indian independence. He encouraged his followers, most of whom were upper-caste Hindus, to help clean the toilets at his ashram, for example, and he advocated use of the term *Harijans*, meaning “God’s Children,” to soften the stigma attached to outcastes in Indian society.

Gandhi was not the only leader in India to speak out against Untouchability. More strident in his criticism of the practice—and of the caste system itself—was Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, born an Untouchable in 1891 and educated in Bombay, New York, London, and Bonn, thanks to the financial and moral support of a liberal Hindu prince. Ambedkar earned doctoral degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics, as well as a law degree from Grey’s Inn in London. He returned to India in 1923 determined to apply his academic training to the scourge of caste in his native land.

In the years leading up to independence, Gandhi and Ambedkar came to disagree on solutions to the dilemma of caste. Gandhi was born into the Vaishya caste, traditionally merchants and bankers, and he knew that the wealthy and influential supporters of his Congress Party were conservative Hindus, as he was. To them, caste was a benign division of labor that was later corrupted by the development of moral hierarchy and Untouchability.

They believed that once the violence against Untouchables and the very concept of Untouchability were outlawed in a new constitution, the Indian state could be built on the inherent strengths of the caste system—a social safety net for members of each caste and a guarantee that all jobs in the society would have workers.

This kind of reasoning was repugnant to Ambedkar, who discovered upon his return to India that, despite his historic academic accomplishments, he was unemployed and unable to find housing. In the following years, as a writer, activist, and representative of the Untouchables in the Round Table Conferences with the British, Ambedkar demanded the abolition of the caste system. When Brahmins blocked his campaigns for access to drinking water and Hindu temple-entry, Ambedkar declared in 1935 that he would find and convert to another religion.

India won its independence from Britain in 1947. Ambedkar was appointed Law Minister and chairman of the constitution drafting commission in Nehru’s first cabinet. The Indian Constitution, finally outlawing Untouchability but not the caste system—the best that Ambedkar could do in the face of staunch opposition by Congress Party leaders—was ratified in 1950. Deeply disillusioned, Ambedkar retired and devoted the rest of his life to the question of religious conversion. Six years later, and only weeks before his death, Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism as a religion that respected “worth over birth” in its vision of a society based on humanistic values such as liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Millions of Untouchables have become Buddhists since Ambedkar’s historic conversion.

From Untouchable to Dalit

In the half-century since Indian independence, the plight of the Untouchables has worsened. Despite government-sponsored scholarships and employment opportunities for Untouchables (“affirmative action” in American parlance), the social, economic, and political conditions afflicting many Untouchable communities such as the Mahars, Chamars, Bhangis, Doms, and Mangs have only grown worse. As for the effectiveness of the Atrocities Act, a sharp increase of reported violence has marked each decade since independence.

One explanation for the increased violence against Untouchables has been their very outspokenness. A militant group of Untouchable leaders in Maharashtra state took to calling themselves the Dalit Panthers, after the Black Panthers in the U.S. The word “Dalit” (broken) had been deliberately used by Ambedkar as a grim challenge to those who “break and grind down” others, and Dalit Panthers proclaimed their humanity in their political

speeches and their poetry.

But in spite of these parallels, "oppression of low-caste Hindus should not be treated as a phenomenon comparable with, say, racism directed to African Americans. That racism stands as contradiction to the egalitarian principles of American society, whereas the principle of hierarchy is intrinsic to Hindu society" (Mendelsohn and Vicziany).

What Can We Do?

In the face of such great and long-standing suffering, we cannot do much. But we can, and we must, attempt to do something. A good place to start is to log onto the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights website (www.dalits.org). There you may read more about the history and conditions of Untouchables today, and take part in a petition drive directed at Indian Government officials and member states of the United Nations.

Among the objectives of the campaign are to pressure the Indian Government to enforce its own laws, particularly Article 17 of the Constitution (outlawing Untouchability) and the Prevention of Atrocities Act; to recognize Untouchability as a "crime against humanity" under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and to appoint a Special Rapporteur (investigator) on the practice of Untouchability in Asia.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights may also be contacted by e-mail <info@dalits.org>; conventional mail: National Campaign on Dalit Human

Rights, First Floor, Premier Residency, Plot No. 165, 1-8-142/B, 3rd Cross, Prenderghast Road, Secundarabad 500 003 India; Phone: +91-40-78 44 613; or Fax: +91-40-78 96 871.

Another excellent website is that of the International Campaign on Dalit Human Rights: www.dalitusa.org. This campaign represents a global effort to erase Untouchability through a wide range of lobbying and petition drives. ❖

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Chris Queen teaches Buddhism at Harvard, where he is Dean of Students for Continuing Education. He edited Engaged Buddhism in the West, recently published by Wisdom Publications (review forthcoming in the next Turning Wheel). He travels to India regularly, to study the new Buddhist movement there.

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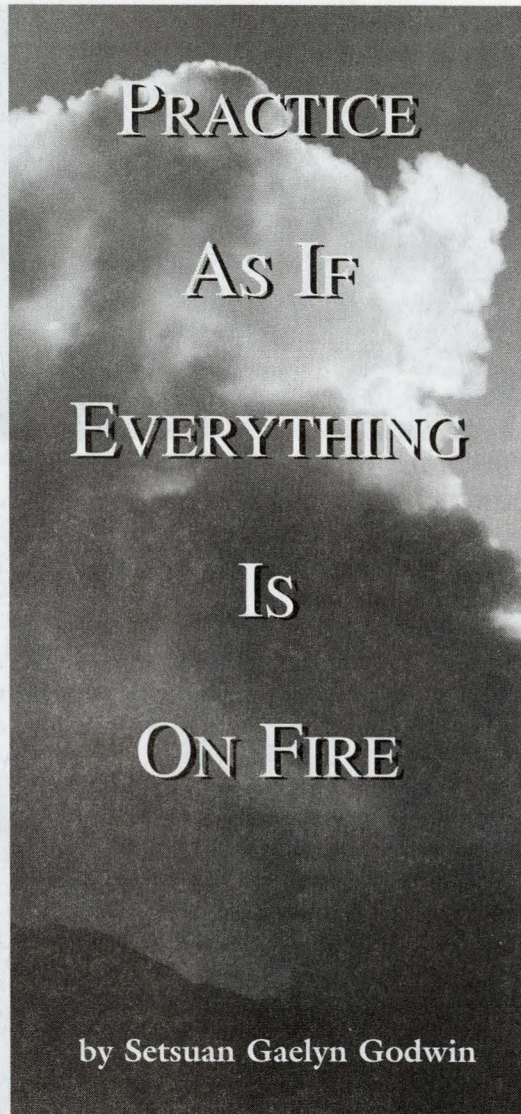


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During September and October 1999, forest fires blazed throughout the Los Padres National Forest and Ventana Wilderness, eventually consuming more than 70,000 acres of forest. Protecting Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, which sits in the middle of the wilderness, was one of the primary objectives of the National Forestry Service effort. While thousands of firefighters from all over the country were at work throughout the forest, 84 were assigned to Tassajara, waiting, poised and ready, while the forest fires raged just over the ridge, sending billows of smoke and flame up into the sky. The firefighters arrived expecting to remain at Tassajara for weeks, sealed in by fire. More than 75 Tassajara residents were evacuated, leaving a group of 26 volunteers, including the Tassajara fire crew. As it turned out, the fire never came close enough to damage the monastery directly.

It would be hard to say which of the three groups occupying Tassajara lived more "monastically": the core group of Tassajara residents still following the zendo schedule (although the predawn wake-up bell was canceled in deference to the firefighters, who slept in sleeping bags next to their engines), the 53 professional firefighters, or the 32 prison inmates assigned to protect the fire line. We shared many common approaches to life: the firefighters' deportment was mindfully calm yet focused, to encourage calmness in others during a crisis; everyone took care of tools and equipment as if the simplest item were a precious resource; water, fire and natural forces were studied carefully, with respect and awe; contact with each other was courteous and respectful; everyone had a schedule to abide by; and each crew had its own particular uniform.

The inmate crews led a slightly more removed life, out at the western end of Tassajara, sleeping outside like the firefighters, but coming to the central dining room for meals. The inmates received reduced sentences for this work: each day out on a fire counts as two days served. Eligible inmates are those serving time for substance abuse. Tassajara residents were allowed very little direct contact with the inmates, and the inmates were



not allowed to come to the discussion on Buddhism that was arranged at the request of the regular firefighters. However, there was much more contact than the captains officially approved of, and the inmates were allowed to attend a 12-Step meeting as well as to engage in short conversations when working with Tassajara people. Some of the inmates decided that Tassajara was a martial arts training camp and that our *Ino* (the head of the meditation hall), a bald, gentle, young man in robes, was the most dangerous of all.

As the firefighters relaxed, it became clear they had been treading very cautiously around Tassajara at the beginning because their leaders had impressed upon them that they were entering a rarefied environment where meditation, silence, religious rituals, and who-knows-what are attended to. One of the most reassuring features of Tassajara for them was the bright yellow fire-stand pipes along the paths throughout the monastery. They told us that most places try to hide or disguise their fire protection equipment, and the fact that we put our equipment on display, and took good

care of it, pleased them.

As the urgency of the situation eased, and it looked like the firefighters would be staying for quite a while, we began to study each other. Firefighters tend to be young, with a mandatory retirement age of 55. They are a very hardy, buffed group of people, by and large. As we became friends, we learned more about them. Most start out essentially as apprentices, taking summer positions during or right after high school. Job openings are few, and there is stiff competition for any full-time opening. The usual course of training is to move from summer work to half-time work; there is strong incentive to attend college for at least two years because, among other reasons, "it looks good on your application." The more initiative they show during the years of half-time work, the greater is the likelihood of being hired on as a regular crew member. It is considered a very prestigious career; people look up to them as protectors, but without the intimidation or fear associated with police officers. Firefighters place a high premium on being personable, on working well with a team, on hard work,

neatness, and respect for seniors—all solid working class values, and similar to monastic values as well.

Whatever their family backgrounds, firefighters belong to a solid working-class trade. Tassajara residents are drawn from a broad class background—one current resident describes himself with pride as a “third-generation construction worker”—but most would define themselves as middle class. The divide between our groups was perhaps best expressed by the question asked by one firefighter, who had been committed to his vocation since high school. Looking at many of the Tassajara residents, in their thirties, without a career, without definite plans, he asked, “Why are these people here?”

These conversations were reminiscent of a conversation that took place with a Japanese dignitary who visited Tassajara. From his point of view, coming from a culture with a strong work ethic and a deep sense of familial obligation, it was difficult to understand how so many people could be free enough to spend years at practice, without a career or a place in the family firm. In our society, freedom to live like this is associated with either a privileged background or with irresponsibility. The firefighters saw that the Tassajara residents weren't irresponsible, so, they must be privileged. And they *are* privileged: some by material comfort, but others by education and an exposure to Buddhist teachings.

The normalization of our relations happened around work. The firefighters couldn't believe how competent and nice everyone was, and how we included them in our activities. The Tassajara residents were working nonstop to feed the firefighters and to do ongoing maintenance and repair projects as well. The firefighters began to approach us: “Can we help?” Tall people in blue uniforms appeared in the kitchen. The firefighters and, more vocally, the inmates had thought we might be

a pretty effete group (I heard other less polite terms) but once they worked with us, that notion disappeared. A group of three Tassajara people—slim, even slight, compared to the firefighters—led the two inmate crews up a steep mountainside to cut brush around the phone transmitter. After that, there was a new respect, and good-natured joking. All the



Ten firefighters and an Ino, September '99

work projects that had to be abandoned due to the fire were started up again. We worked together to finish the urgent projects. Two engine crews worked on different wheelchair ramps. One captain came into the courtyard while everyone was admiring the wheelchair ramp and said, “Wait till you see *our* ramp,” speaking of the one she and her crew had finished near the bathhouse.

One fire captain, who had friends and family members in Los Angeles gangs as a youth and who feels lucky to have evaded gang life, strained his back helping on a big carpentry project. He walked slowly toward the bathhouse for a soak, but stopped part way; he'd left his bath kit in his engine and his towel somewhere else. The two monks walking with him immediately went back, one to get his kit, the other to get a towel. When they returned, his eyes were moist with emotion and he couldn't speak. Later he said, “You people are so kind.”

The dining room was packed with firefighters for the informal evening meeting to talk about Zen practice and Tassajara. The questions were great: “How can I start a meditation practice?” “It's such a paradise here. Do you people have any difficulty relating to people outside?” It was an informative and humorous evening, and the Ino offered to provide further information about meditation in the zendo the next day if anyone was interested. The next afternoon, as I walked through the garden, I saw that the zendo shoe rack was full of large, heavy firefighter boots. It was a cheery, and at the same time, a deeply moving sight.

When the firefighters were finally called away, with barely any warning, Tassajara residents lined the road to wave farewell. Each engine crew drove out with all its lights flashing and bells ringing. Several firefighters put their hands in gassho. The final two buses carried the inmate crews, who smiled and flashed “V” signs. It was an emotional parade.

We had all grown closer indeed, and because there was a fire, there was danger. As Buddha said, Everything is on fire. It is a good situation to use to find out what is really important. ❖

Setsuan Gaelyn Godwin is a priest with the San Francisco Zen Center and is currently living at Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery, where she is head of maintenance.



Firefighters turned Zen prep cooks

INTERSECTION POINT

Buddhist Activism at the WTO

by Diana Winston

As we made our descent into Seattle-Tacoma Airport, the pilot's voice came over the loudspeaker: "Thanks for flying with us, folks. I'm taking an informal survey. Who's here to protest the WTO?" The airplane crowd went wild. "And who wishes the protesters would turn around and go home?" A few assorted cheers, mostly coming from first class.

Having been an activist for most of my life before becoming a Buddhist, and then denying my activist-self during my early meditation years, I at last found an internal synthesis in socially engaged Buddhism. Here I could pull together the fragmented pieces of myself—my seemingly rival passions, and work for change from a dharma basis, while meditating for the sake of all beings. Over the years my life has continued to swing in and out of retreat, in and out of action. My understanding of how the dharma fits with social action continues to grow, and each new experience deepens my discoveries.

Last November, I found myself engaged in my first political action since I returned from retreat in Burma in 1998. Some friends and I decided we *had* to go up to Seattle to protest the World Trade Organization (WTO)—missing it would be like missing the Civil Rights Movement (if we had been old enough to have been there) or Stonewall 25, or something like that. My time in Seattle led to much thinking and acting in that site of intersection: Buddhist activism.

In Seattle

Through networking with the Seattle Buddhist Peace Fellowship chapter, friends in Seattle and I created a Buddhist activist or BPF affinity group. There were 30 or so people who wanted to attend the week of events as Buddhists first and foremost, putting aside for the time other geographical or political allegiances.

Because of the solidarity or *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friendship) we created, we were able to deepen our understanding and practice of Buddhist activism.

Buddhist activism became our koan to study, work with, and uncover. My own personal exploration was augmented by every other person's discovery. And the process of creating a group was in itself an expression of Buddhist social action.

We held our first affinity group meeting at a local Buddhist center. Rick, the BPF Seattle Chapter coordinator, and I designed the meeting to include head and heart, contemplation and action. We had check-ins, sitting, a discussion on a Buddhist response to globalization, and a strategy segment to decide if and how to come together as a group at the various events of the week. Finally we planned to have a dinner after the meeting for more discussion and socializing.

In the course of three hours, we came to several agreements. We would participate in the Jubilee 2000 Interfaith Service and March to end third-world debt; attend and support (without risking arrest) the direct civil disobedience action to shut down the WTO; participate in the labor-organized protest march; and, throughout it all, stay together as a coherent unit devoted to bearing witness and being peace. We ended the meeting with *metta* (lovingkindness) practice for all parties.

Over the week, the group members bonded and explored communally what Buddhist activism was about. We had slumber parties, and stayed up late talking about issues. We cooked together. We made posters together, encapsulating our discussions on Buddhist approaches to globalization in a few banner-worthy sound bites: "Interbeing is based on diversity, not global monoculture," "The end of suffering comes about locally through global solidarity," "Consumerism does not equal happiness."

We attended teach-ins on globalization and economics together. We learned civil disobedience techniques together. We performed puppet theater in the streets together. We marched, protested, and strategized together. One rainy night, a sopping wet 15 of us piled into Rick's van. We drove to the stadium for the "people's gala" where we



Buddhists at the WTO

danced to the political hip-hop/funk band Spearhead. And during it all, we spent hours informally discussing our paths and lives and how our love for the world and our practices intersect. At the end of the week we had become hard and fast friends. Addresses were exchanged: "If you're ever in Texas..."

(Beginning) Tenets of Buddhist Activism

During my time in Seattle, I asked myself the question: What distinguishes Buddhist activism from any other kind of activism—faith-based or secular? What's so special about Buddhist activism? I offer these tenets, which came out of my experience with the group in Seattle, to encourage discussion.

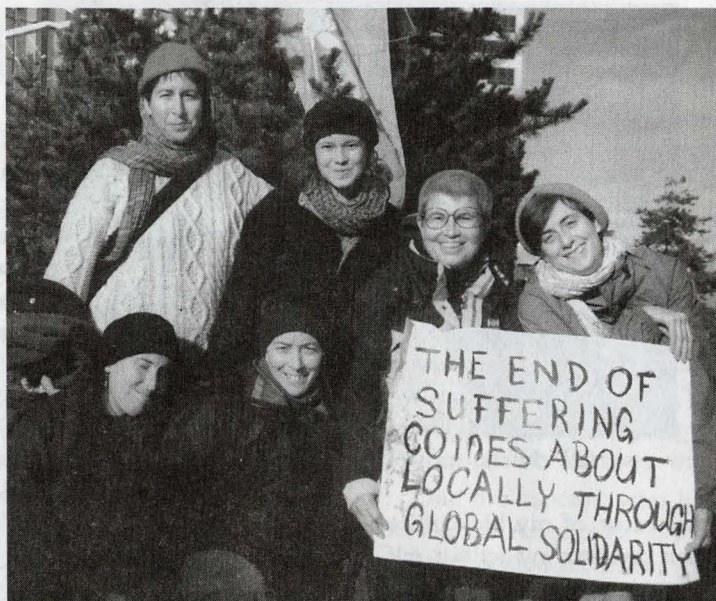
1. Setting motivation

Since the starting point in dharma practice is the motivation behind the action, our group continually worked to clarify our motivation. We dedicated our actions to the liberation of all beings. On the morning of the large direct action, about 15 of us came together for sitting and intention setting. After the sit, we went around the group and spoke about our intentions for the day: "To be as present as I can," "To hold this all within the space of equanimity," "To benefit the countless suffering beings around the planet whom we are representing."

2. Interbeing—There is no us/them—We are all implicated

The same structures of greed, hatred, and delusion are in my mind as in the minds of the CEOs in the WTO. What is globalization except internal, personal *tanha* (compulsive desire) writ large and played out in the world theater? Demonizing the other is demonizing myself. If it weren't for my own wants (a car, out-of-season produce, clothes made by someone in Vietnam working for 50 cents a day), then corporations might not be seeking to relax trade laws.

So, on the day of the direct action, I purposely put on a shirt from the Gap, a gray tank top I bought last year because I thought it looked nice on me. As I slid it over my head I whispered a mantra to myself, "I am implicated, I am implicated." On the day I am fighting so-called injustice, can I see that it's far more complicated than I could ever untangle? Our lives are not simple. When I got



*Some members of the Buddhist affinity group.
Back: Leslie Isaac, Deirdre Larson, Kate Savannah, and the author. Front: Ruby Phillips and Mora Rogers.*

angry because the protest was supposed to be non-violent, and the so-called "anarchist" group captured the media's attention by its Starbucks window-smashing performance, I asked myself: Why am I so angry at this action? Am I upset by their anger because I hate my own internal anger? We are all implicated.

3. Not Knowing—Holding that we may be completely wrong

We didn't know what effect our actions would have. The organizers of the civil disobedience did not know that protesters would shut down the

WTO. Some of us, myself included, wondered in advance if shutting it down would be a good thing, anyway. Wouldn't dialogue be more useful? And what value could the protest really have? Could my presence as one of 100,000 opponents make the slightest difference? Many questions swam through my head. It was only by the practice of "not knowing" that I could avoid the extremes of either disillusionment or kneejerk "I'm right-ism." OK, I don't know. I don't have the answer to any of these questions. My job isn't to have the answer. My job is to be present with whatever is coming up.

4. Knowing equanimity without being attached to results

As an organizer, my mindfulness practice, with its hard-earned smattering of equanimity, came into play around issues of control. I was continually aware of my desire for things to work smoothly. I didn't want our group to be late for the protest, I wanted a decision to be made quickly, I wanted someone not to talk longer than the allotted two minutes, I wanted the march to start on time, I wanted our group member to come back from the toilet faster, I wanted an end to the Third-World debt, I wanted, I wanted, I wanted....

With each desire, if I wanted something to be different than it was, the feeling of *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) automatically followed. I watched my mind lean forward and cling, and then, prompted by mindfulness, a bell would go off. "You're suffering." Next I'd observe a battle in my mind: "Let go, relax, you don't have control, if it happens it will happen." "But what if the bus never comes!!?!" Ultimately the need to let go of suffering would win out over the clinging. I would relax the wanting and my stomach muscles would release their clenching. And always at

that point, of course, the bus would come.

This letting go didn't mean not acting. It meant acting from the place of letting go, a very different experience from acting out of full-on desire. When I see suffering caused by unfair trade laws I still fight against them, but I hold the wanting and the letting go simultaneously.

I think of the impossibility of the Bodhisattva Vow. I am going to save all beings. Yeah, right. Am I taking on an impossible task by trying to end global inequity? Probably. And yet I still act. I remind myself that my equanimity does not depend on what the CEO of any corporation does. The insight of the Bodhisattva Vow is that if one of us does not know our true nature, then all of us do not know our nature. If one of us is impoverished, we all are.

5. Being Peace

The diversity of our affinity group and the limited advance time together prevented us from reaching consensus on strategy. Some wanted to risk arrest. Others wanted to witness. Ideological differences within the group (after all, our commonality was Buddhism, not a political congruency) divided us between those who felt the slogan "1-2-3-4 meditate! 1-2-3-4 smash the state!" perfectly reflected their brand of Buddhist activism, and those who were appalled by it. The one point we could agree on was "being peace." In the face of police violence and chaos on the street, we wanted to have a Buddhist presence that said simply, in Thich Nhat Hanh's words, "I know you suffer, that is why I am here for you."

So, on the day of the direct action, we roamed the streets as a group, in solidarity under the BPF flag. We did metta practice for the police and the activists, we listened compassionately to delegates who were trying to get past blockades of protesters. And we tried to hold a stance of peace in the midst of it all, including the violence. Were we successful? Watching our own hearts and minds and being present in the chaos was enough success for the time being. Perhaps more radical actions will follow.

6. Mindfulness in Action

At the Direct Action Network space—where the civil disobedience was organized—Rick and I attended a strategy meeting for those planning to block the Convention Center entrance. We were in a large warehouse, surrounded by hundreds of activists, mostly young people. There was a puppet-making workshop and a jail solidarity training going on simultaneously. The loudspeaker could barely be heard over the din. About two-thirds of the way through the meeting, when I was most annoyed and antsy from sitting on the cold cement floor, a note from Rick landed in my lap: "When I look over and notice you're here, it makes me more mindful." My irritation dissolved.

On the morning of the direct action, as I drove to pick up one of our group members, a pedestrian walked out onto the street while I had the green light. Anger welled up inside me. I remembered my practice: If

you're angry here, what are you going to be like in a few hours when you're standing in front of police outside the WTO meetings? Notice the anger, don't repress it, or act it out, let it arise and pass.

In the late afternoon we had moved away from the labor march, curious to see how the blockaders were holding up. We headed down the street into the downtown area. All of the windows of Niketown and the Bank of America had been smashed. Behind us we saw large whitish clouds that could only be tear gas. The crowd was shrill and excited, tense with expectancy and fear. Some of our group wanted to leave the area, but the streets leading out of the downtown were blocked; the protesters sat stalwart and unmoving in one direction of potential exit, and the police, with their riot gear and Darth Vader gas masks, stood poised to leap in another. A few of our group members became frightened. So we stopped, gathered together, and focused our collective mindfulness on the tenor of the group. We comforted the frightened ones and some chose to find their way to safety while others stayed in the area to support the protesters.

7. Developing Patience

Sometimes activism is just standing around patiently while nothing happens. We are not going to change things immediately; in fact we may not live to see the completion of our work. Instead we develop a "long-enduring mind" for the benefit of all beings. As my friend Kate said to me, "It's not your job to finish the work—it's your job to *do* the work." I pay close attention to my need for all problems (inner and outer) to be solved immediately. The development of patience leads to a more awakened mind in each moment.

Later

It is a few months later and my eyes still glow when I think back to that week in Seattle. In this era of apathy and despair, the entire experience was a turning point for many activists and peacemakers worldwide; for Buddhist activists, it was a step towards the fusion of theory and practice.

As I write now, I am remembering: Tuesday afternoon in the labor march, our group is walking side by side with the Dock Workers and the Queer Quakers. Caitlin is singing an old spiritual. Sarah and Stefan are holding the BPF banner, noticing their breathing. Dave stands tall and peaceful. Ruby runs to each of us and shouts, "Isn't this great? We're here for the benefit of so many people!" Leslie stops to dance with a group of drummers. Kate and I make up a chant, "We're Buddhists and we're here now!" Our group and a few of the surrounding marchers burst into laughter. In a dramatic moment, the sun breaks through the clouds, and we wonder if the world will be different after this day. ❖

Diana Winston is the Associate Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and a regular contributor to Turning Wheel.

DIALOGUE IS NOT ENOUGH

On the Importance of Direct Action

by Matthew Williams

Engaged Buddhists in the U.S. need to take part in more vigorous forms of dissent, such as protests and nonviolent direct action. Many engaged Buddhists seem content with gently engaging oppressors in dialogue to try to get them to change their ways, believing that disruptive actions are violent in thought and spirit, even if not physically; but I believe direct action is an essential element of nonviolence.

Dialogue is simply not enough. The very dynamic of an oppressive relationship is that the oppressor does not listen to the oppressed—oppressors give orders, they do not engage in dialogue. But through nonviolent direct action, oppressors may be made to listen to (and act on) the demands of the oppressed.

What went down in Seattle at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting is a good illustration of this. The rules of the WTO are written by corporate lobbyists; First World governments seek to force these rules on Third World nations by blackmailing them with loss of loans and foreign aid if they don't sign on. Everyone else is shut out of the proceedings.

In the face of the massive protests that the Clinton administration knew were in the offing, they hand-picked a few moderate critics of the WTO to participate in consultative forums. But even those groups would—unlike big business—have no say in the actual shape of the WTO. It wasn't until the nonviolent blockade by the protesters scuttled the first day of the WTO's meetings, completely disrupting the elite's plans, that Clinton changed his position to include the need for labor standards in the WTO's rules. It took nonviolent direct action on a massive scale for the elite to even begin taking into account basic ethical imperatives.

Early pacifist movements, such as the American abolitionist (anti-slavery) movement, relied almost exclusively on dialogue and education; their methods generally failed them. Most abolitionists found themselves supporting the Civil War as the lesser of two evils. It was Mohandas Gandhi and the Indian independence movement he led that first brought together the traditions of nonviolence and direct action. They found a way to force the British oppressors to respond to the oppressed without threatening the persons of the oppressors themselves. Through a massive campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience, the people of India made their country ungovernable, forcing the British to the negotiating

table and then out of the country—without physically harming any of them. The British had far fewer compunctions about killing nonviolent Indian protesters.

Nonviolent direct action threatens the power and privilege of the oppressors, yes, but these are things that are not properly their own anyway; indeed, power and privilege blind the oppressors to their interbeing with those they oppress. Direct action is not incompatible with compassion for the oppressor; I suspect it is actually easier for people to arouse compassion for their oppressors when they are actively resisting oppression than when they are simply letting themselves be ground into the dust of despair.

Taking direct action does not exclude engaging in dialogue. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. explained the nature of nonviolent direct action to white moderates who criticized him for committing civil disobedience and not negotiating with the city authorities. He explained that he had tried negotiating,

"but the [white] political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation."

To continue to accept the injustice of segregation was intolerable—it would be to go along with institutionalized violence, not to practice nonviolence. King told the white

moderates, "You are right to call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue."

King willingly admitted that nonviolent direct action creates tension, but he pointed out that it is a creative not a violent tension. Further, "we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive," so that steps can be taken towards a nonviolent resolution of it.

A parallel can be drawn with meditation: mindfulness brings to the conscious mind internal conflicts that have long been repressed; once we are conscious of them, we can begin to creatively and constructively transform them. Nonviolent direct action can be seen as a form of social meditation, bringing social conflicts to light so that healing can begin.

The dynamic of an oppressive institution has a force of its own that is very difficult to resist from a position of power within it. The executives of major corporations often must pollute, use sweatshop labor, and bust unions, if their company is to succeed in a market where

The oppressor does not listen to the oppressed—oppressors give orders, they do not engage in dialogue.

their competitors do these things. Usually the only really honorable course for a person in a position of power is to resign in protest.

Few in power make this decision though. Most don't realize they are trapped in a situation where their own spiritual growth (as well as that of the oppressed) will inevitably be stunted. I believe the oppressors as well as the oppressed will benefit more if we struggle against the exploitative social institutions within which they try to hide than if we let them remain there, only trying to coax them out with kind words which they refuse to hear.

One of the concerns of the advocates of pure dialogue is that the means they use to achieve change remain ethically pure, so that they do not end up acting in the same manner as those whose behavior they wish to change. I share this concern. The problem is that there is no purity in this world. When you boil water, you kill micro-organisms. When you walk, you crush insects.

In practice, the line between violence and nonviolence is not necessarily a clear one. In *Love in Action*, Thich Nhat Hanh notes, "Some army generals conduct their operations in ways that avoid killing innocent people; this is a kind of nonviolence."

Is smashing windows violent? Certainly the "violence" against property committed by the "black bloc" (who, please note, constitute a small minority even among anarchists) in Seattle was trivial compared to the violence of the rioting riot police, who had been smashing people's heads (rather than windows) for several hours before the property destruction began, or the violence of the corporations targeted, who, in their turn, wreak immense violence on individuals, communities, and the environment. My feeling is that property destruction, because of the violent atmosphere it can so easily create, falls into a gray zone that pushes the limits of nonviolence. Therefore it ought to be saved for extreme circumstances (which the Seattle protests were not), such as last-ditch efforts to save old-growth forests by sabotaging machinery (in such a way as to ensure that no other living beings come to harm either).

If we do not interfere with the actions of the oppressors and merely counsel them to change, while they blithely ignore us, we are letting violence and oppression continue; we are not perhaps as complicit as are those who remain silent, but we are still complicit. If we choose to engage in armed struggle against the elite, we will most likely end up no better than they are, perpetuating the same atrocities we condemn. Nonviolent direct action seeks to walk the middle path that transforms society with the least amount of suffering possible.

David Dellinger, a radical pacifist leader of the 60s, made the point that if you can't provide an oppressed group with a viable nonviolent method for seeking justice, you have no right to tell them not to resort to violence—

the violence of oppression is almost always greater than that of even violent resistance to it. If we who believe strongly in nonviolence do not attempt to formulate a realistic strategy of social change embracing nonviolent direct action, we can hardly condemn the downtrodden for resorting to other means. Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to riots as "the voice of the voiceless."

Concerns about the *spirit* of protests still remain, however. Some protesters do have emotionally (if not physically) violent intentions towards those they seek to pressure. If the atmosphere at protests or direct actions is loud and angry, this may alienate most passers-by instead of persuading them to listen, and it may bring out the worst in protesters. I have left at least one protest because I found the atmosphere so ugly.

But who among us does not have violent thoughts, especially in our violence-soaked society? Just because I daydream about smashing the windows of the local Starbucks outlet after seeing one local cafe too many driven out of business by their dirty tactics, this doesn't mean

I have left at least one protest because I found the atmosphere so ugly.

that I will *do* it. Violent thoughts do not automatically lead to violent actions. Rather than condemning ourselves or others for having violent thoughts, we should try to transform these violent thoughts into creative action, such as urging people to boycott Starbucks.

There are also ways to transform the spirit of protests so that they are more positive. In my experience, most protests that rely on marching and chanting slogans tap into people's perfectly justifiable anger and exacerbate it. Other methods of protest can lead to the transformation of negative emotions. Some engaged Buddhists hold silent vigils or join together in seated meditation, as BPF members have done at the gates of San Quentin Prison at the time of an execution. Other occasions call for celebratory, life-affirming protests that build community, attract passers-by, and attempt to embody the spirit of the society we are working for. The carnivalesque protests against the WTO held worldwide and in Seattle on June 18 were a step in this direction. Having participated in several festive protests, I can say they work. Not just other protesters but passers-by—even people trapped in their cars—smile at you and enjoy themselves. Some participants actually find it spiritually uplifting.

While I hope more engaged Buddhists (and people of all spiritual stripes) choose to participate in nonviolent direct action, I appreciate the emphasis some place on dialogue. In the heat of organizing and protesting it can be easy to forget the humanity of those whose actions we oppose. We need both dialogue and confrontational, disruptive, nonviolent direct action to heal our society. ❖

Matthew Williams lives in the Boston area, works against sanctions on Iraq with Boston Mobilization for Survival, and practices in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh with the Old Path Sangha.

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion

by Marshall B. Rosenberg

Puddle Dancer Press, 1999, 164 pp., \$15.95 paperback

Reviewed by Diana Lion

Who doesn't enjoy a juicy bit of gossip from time to time? Who hasn't noticed painful difficulties arising from unresolved conflicts in their sangha? Evidently "right speech" has been a challenging practice since the time of the Buddha. He regarded it as such a significant issue that, of the ten "unskillful actions," he named four aspects of communication explicitly: false, harsh, idle, and divisive speech. He stressed the importance of examining our intentions before speaking—and all other actions. But many of us likely need more of a road map than the Buddha's injunction to use honest, kind, and mindful speech.

Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication* serves as that map. Rosenberg, a deeply spiritual clinical psychologist, walked away from a successful practice to pursue a passion for exploring our use of language and how it shapes our hearts and minds. Over the last 30 years he has traveled to 23 countries, refining his model of "Nonviolent Communication," also called "Compassionate Communication." Now he has compiled his ideas into an easy-to-read book that clearly explains this communication model. *Nonviolent Communication* is filled with stories of mediations designed for many different kinds of groups: families, corporations, cops and gangs, Rwandan village tribal chiefs, Israelis and Palestinians.

Rosenberg encourages us to stay in contact with our hearts and the truth of radical interdependence. This is, because that is. He developed this model out of grave concerns about our tendencies to categorize and pathologize people with our thoughts and words. When we put each other in boxes by calling people names—and he means *any* name: activist, savior, beginner, enemy, jerk, anything that describes who or what we are instead of seeing us as being an unfolding process, which is actually closer to the truth—we may potentially plant small seeds of violence. These can easily grow into harmful actions and conflicts.

In NVC terms, the violence occurs because we have stopped seeing the other person or ourselves as changing and changeable. In Buddhist terms, we are adding to the solidity of the person's identity. Obviously, this model is a challenge. As we delve more deeply into the habitual language patterns we use, we will not want to discard evaluative ways of speaking. But this practice acts like a laser, clarifying the habits of speech and mind so that we are able to distinguish clearly between when we are observing and when we are evaluating.

The Compassionate Communication model offers specific pointers about communicating our experience as nakedly as possible, taking responsibility for our own feelings and needs without subtly shifting the focus of these onto someone else. This bare awareness in speaking our observations, feelings, needs, and requests is a deep (and difficult) practice. I have at times felt awkward in finding new ways of communicating that don't sound like "Rosenberg-speak"! The book makes it clear, however, that the fruits of this practice are greater possibilities for freedom, joy, and compassion. The author describes how, in numerous conflicts, once "enemies" have been able to hear each other's deeply felt needs, they are able to connect compassionately. At those times, the tightly grasped needs of each party to the conflict fall away and new solutions to previously "impossible" impasses are discovered.

Like many aspects of meditation practice, Marshall's model is very simple—but not easy. *Nonviolent Communication* outlines a four-step process of speaking from the heart in a responsible fashion, and a parallel process for listening. Rosenberg has divided the steps into logically sequenced chapters, each containing relevant exercises.

In the section on empathy, Rosenberg gives a striking example of a woman who was able to immediately put to use what she had learned about this practice in an NVC workshop. The woman worked the front desk in a low-rent hotel. She was approached by a man who needed a room desperately for that night, but none was available. He reacted by holding her down on the floor at knifepoint and threatening to kill her. She describes how the NVC training she had learned earlier that day allowed her to listen to the man empathetically, guessing his feelings and needs rather than trying to fight him off or jump to problem solving. In the end the man left peacefully, and she had the experience of having gained a deeper understanding of his desperation—which was not so different from hers.

I have been teaching NVC for a couple of years, mostly in prison settings. Frequently inmates tell me tearfully after a workshop that, for example, they finally have some tools to help them reconnect with their estranged children after many years; or that, if they had known this model before, they might not have returned to prison repeatedly. Prisoners are not the only ones who can benefit from these tools. If you, like me, have experienced a lot of judgment of self and others in your life and want to learn ways of more skillful speech, I highly recommend this book, and I encourage you to attend an NVC workshop if one is offered in your area.

Diana Lion practices vipassana, coordinates the BPF Prison project, and is a certified trainer of the Center for Nonviolent Communication. She finds it easier to deal with conflict since she has been practicing NVC.

Success

by Norman Fischer

Singing Horse Press, 2000, 136 pp, \$14.00 paperback
Available from Singing Horse Press, (215) 844-7678; or
through Small Press Distribution, (800) 869-7553.

Reviewed by Barbara Hirshkowitz

Imagine sitting down each day for a year and writing a twenty-eight-line poem, and you have *Success*, almost. This collection, written during 1999 by Norman Fischer, also includes the essay, "Do You Want to Make Something Out of It? Zen Meditation and the Artistic Impulse." Fischer was co-Abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center and has authored several other books of poetry.

This compact volume, full of love and wonder, is a delight to have and hold. Savoring it slowly, bit by bit, the reader is offered something fresh each time, like looking at a multifaceted crystal, the perspective sliding from moment to moment as the light changes imperceptibly. Here's just one day. Actually it's a quite famous day—Bloomsday, James Joyce's birthday, and the day that unfolds in the course of *Ulysses*. I have a feeling the poet is aware of this historic reverberation.

Saturday, 16 June

Language is power
Languish is powder
Lightly on the snow
The snow of power that gently falls
On them who speak up correctly
And with the proper inflection
Yet locked in the greed that is the heart
Is the ear that won't listen to talk
That twists it always into spirals of hate
For it's talk that's not listening to talk
And hearts that are stone
You who live in the future
Watching us here malingering in the present
Know that we too are aware of the mess we're in
Only unlike you we don't have the perspective to laugh
Nor can we ever let our hair down
We think
If only we knew what you know
Better off singing
Than thumping on that thing
Only way to talk is to listen
To give everything up
Especially a place to be in
No one believes me when I say this
Take a few lines to think it over...
...
...
Now what will you do? ❖

Barbara Hirshkowitz lives in Philadelphia and is a publisher by profession.

It's a Meaningful Life—It Just Takes Practice

by Bo Lozoff

Viking/Arkana, 2000, 280 pp., \$23.95 paperback

Reviewed by Judith McCullough

To the strains of "America the Beautiful," the man's voice in the radio ad brightly intones an "Ode to Competition," describing it as "the foundation upon which this great country was laid. Hell," he continues, competition is "the foundation for the whole human race." So, he asks, "What's wrong with beating the next guy? Standing up and screaming to the world, 'I won, I'm loaded, I'm going to buy stuff?'"

Plenty, says Bo Lozoff in *It's a Meaningful Life*. A veteran of more than three decades of prison activism and spiritual practice, with this book Lozoff has created a guidebook for the spiritual, socially engaged life. In his previous books, including *We're All Doing Time*, Lozoff focused primarily on the thousands of prisoners he has worked with over the years—and the millions he has not. But just as his earlier books spoke to all of us, not just to prison activists, his latest work has meaning for all those who seek to live in a more spiritual and service-oriented way. *It's a Meaningful Life* is filled with wisdom and practical tips useful for anyone along the path.

The book is divided into two parts: "The Inner Journey of Communion: Creating a Personal Spiritual Practice" and "The Outer Path Toward Community: Practicing Service." It is replete with quotes from sages of all traditions, as well as many personal anecdotes and lessons learned. In each chapter, the principles and wise admonitions are followed by a section on "Practice," with specific, practical suggestions for spiritual and community efforts. These could be used to good effect by couples, families, sanghas, or other community groups.

Lozoff draws from Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and Jewish traditions. There is much talk of God and expressions of certainty—"Nothing befalls us without some purpose" (p. 72)—that might be off-putting for some readers. But such language is well worth getting past in order to get to the good stuff, such as a critique of the bumper-sticker approach to life, in which "self-esteem," being right, and personal success are the only things that matter. What *really* matters, Lozoff says, is striving for excellence, living simply and with integrity, and behaving decently: "There is no spiritual practice more profound than being kind." (p. 107) "Human life is very deep," he concludes, "and our dominant modern lifestyle is not." (p. 137)

With tools for each step of the path, *It's a Meaningful Life* invites us into the deep end. ❖

Judith McCullough coordinates the prison correspondence for BPF's Prison Project and leads meditation/writing groups for women prisoners. A freelance editor, she co-edits Touching BASE, the newsletter of BPF's Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement program.

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Doing Time:

25 Years of Prison Writing

Edited by Bell Gale Chevigny

Arcade, 1999, 349 pp., \$27.95 clothbound

This anthology features unforgettable stories and poems by winners of the coveted PEN Prison Literature Awards, given to “writers behind bars...to help them stay alive and sane, preserve their dignity and retain their humanity.” BPF member Jarvis Masters is among the 51 authors represented here, whose powerful voices speak for the 2 million men and women now behind bars in the United States. The introductory essays by editor Bell Chevigny are a brilliant tour of America’s lockups and the courage and humanity of those trapped inside them. Chevigny’s incredible efforts to track down the authors took her from prison to prison, to family members outside, and sometimes to graveyards. The moving foreword by Sister Helen Prejean invites us to “Step Inside. You’ll never be the same.” This is a book to return to again and again.

—Melody Ermachild

Off the Map:

An Exploration Deep into Imperialism, the Global Economy, and Other Earthly Whereabouts

by Chellis Glendinning

Shambhala, 1999, 182 pp., \$21.95 clothbound

This book charts a vast terrain, from the sixteenth-century roots of European colonialism to the present-day struggles of native Indian-Hispanic New Mexicans to retain and preserve their sovereignty and land-based culture. Within the narrative framework of a horseback ride through their disputed lands—a journey which takes her literally off the map—Glendinning, an ecopsychologist and land-rights activist, attempts to trace the links between the legacy of the Western “imperial mind,” mirrored in the disturbing events of her own childhood, and the destruction of indigenous cultures and ways of being. This blending of personal, political, and cultural history owes much stylistically to the work of Susan Griffin, to whom the book is in part dedicated. An ambitious and courageous effort from the author of *Waking Up in the Nuclear Age* and *My Name is Chellis & I’m in Recovery from Western Civilization*.

—Marianne Dresser

Voices of Insight

Edited by Sharon Salzberg

Shambhala, 1999, 281 pp., \$23.95 clothbound

Subtitled “Teachers of Buddhism in the West Share Their Wisdom, Stories, and Experiences of Insight Meditation,” this anthology offers a solid introduction to the Western vipassana community, anchored by the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) and Insight Meditation West (IMW). Well-known IMS founders and teachers are represented, including Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Sylvia Boorstein, and Sharon Salzberg, who also edited the volume and provides a brief introduction to each of its three sections: “The Buddha and the Lineage of Teachers,” “The Dharma and Understanding Practice,” and “The Sangha and Practice in Daily Life.” Especially interesting are contributors’ descriptions of their life-changing encounters with such accomplished Asian Buddhist masters as Ajahn Chah, Dipa Ma, and Sayadaw U Pandita.

—Marianne Dresser

Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists, Volume 2

Edited by Winston Leyland

Gay Sunshine Press, 2000, 222 pp., \$16.95 paperback

This sequel to the groundbreaking 1998 anthology *Queer Dharma* focuses on the integration of spiritual practice with sexuality and relationships. Contributors explore an intriguing array of themes—including Michael J. Sweet’s historical essay, “Pining Away for the Sight of the Handsome Cobra King: Ananda as Gay Ancestor and Role Model,” the personal recollections of “The Bad Buddhist and the Good Gay Heart” by Mark Marion, “Presence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Gay Relationship as Spiritual Practice” by James Thornton, and Alzak Amlani’s “From India to Africa to Buddha: Weaving a Path Home.” Another thoughtful and useful effort from editor Leyland, who nearly singlehandedly is creating a significant body of gay Buddhist literature.

—Marianne Dresser

CORRECTION

Phelps Feeley writes from Nepal, where she recently attended the Sakyadhita International Conference of Buddhist Women: “In my review of *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* [in the Winter 2000 issue], I reported that the articles were from the first conference held in 1987 in Bodhi Gaya, India. In fact, the papers in the book were chosen from the several conferences since then. I regret the oversight and apologize for any inconvenience or offense.” —Marianne Dresser

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Class

Class is one of the less visible dimensions of our society. Often, we focus on gender and race as places of separation and oppression (and indeed they are), but the effects of class are more insidious and woven into the fabric of our lives. Becoming aware of the ways that class affects us as individuals and as communities is the first step toward overcoming classism and economic injustice.

I. Increase Your Awareness

Notice how class permeates your own life, neighborhood, work, and sangha. As you encounter people of a class different than your own, ask yourself:

- What assumptions do I make about people in a different economic class than me?
- What are my family secrets around class?
- What is the relationship between fear and class?
- Where does my security lie?
- What feelings of discomfort do I have when interacting with people who have more money than me? With people who have less?
- How does my social class limit my Buddhist practice? My enlightenment?
- How can we find a way to talk about class issues with other Buddhist practitioners?

II. Begin a Dialogue

Start a group made up of people from a variety of economic classes. Work with the above questions, and put taboo topics on the table for discussion: how much money we make, how much we save, how much we spend, how much we owe. For guidelines, see Jennifer Ladd's article, pg. 12.

Look around your sangha and notice who's not there. What barriers might people encounter that make it difficult for them to practice with the community? Contact a center near you that serves primarily white Buddhists and a center that serves primarily Asian Buddhists. Learn about fee policies for retreats and teachings. Within your own sangha, discuss how fee policies and other factors impact Buddhists of different economic means. Imagine how alternative policies would open practice up to working-class and poor people.

III. Practice Alternatives to Capitalism

Look at a dollar bill—it simply represents an agreement for exchange. Consider alternative exchange systems that cultivate a more equitable society, and participate in them. Two examples are:

- *Ithaca Hours*, Box 6578, Ithaca, NY 14851, ph: 607/272-4330, email: <hours@lightlink.com>, website: www.lightlink.com/hours/ithacahours.
- *BREAD* (Berkeley Region Exchange and

Development), P.O. Box 3973, Berkeley, CA 94703, 510/704-5247, email: <bkbread@pacbell.net>, web: www.breadhours.org.

For a comprehensive list of local and alternative exchange economies around the U.S., see the Ithaca Hours website. To learn more about how to set up a local currency system in your area, order the Hometown Money Starter Kit from Ithaca Hours.

IV. Take Action Toward Economic Equality

☞ *United for a Fair Economy* is a nonpartisan organization that focuses on the dangers of the growing income, wage, and wealth inequality in the United States and coordinates action to reduce the gap. To order research reports, find out how to hold "The Growing Divide" workshops in your community, and get more information about UFE, see their informative website at www.ufenet.org, or contact: 37 Temple Place, 2nd Floor, Boston, MA 02111, ph: 617/423-2148.

☞ Contact your Congressional Representative telling him or her to support and co-sponsor the Income Equity Act (H.R. 740), legislation that would limit the ability of corporations to take tax deductions on astronomically high executive salaries.

☞ If you are economically privileged, think of ways that your money can be used as leverage to work toward a more economically just society. Invest in companies and programs that put money back into local community banks or loan programs for lower income people. One example: Self Help Association for a Regional Economy (SHARE), an innovative micro-lending program to help individuals start small businesses. For more information, contact the *E. F. Schumacher Society*, 140 Jug End Road, Great Barrington, MA 01230. 413/528-1737, Fax 413/528-4472, email: <efssociety@aol.com>.

☞ For general information on socially responsible investing, see the website of the *Social Investment Forum* www.socialinvest.org, or contact SFI at 1612 K Street NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20006, ph: 202/872-5319, email: <info@socialinvest.org>.

Suggested Readings

(Also see Joe Parker's list on pg. 35.)

Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, by Karl Marx, Penguin Classics, 1992 edition.

Bridging the Class Divide, by Linda Stout, Beacon, 1996.

Savage Inequalities, by Jonathan Kozol, Crown, 1991.

Women, Race, and Class, by Angela Davis, Random House, 1983.

Taking Back Our Lives, by Schwartz and Stoddard, Berrett-Koehler, 2000

Our Mutual Friend, by Charles Dickens ♦

—Maia Duerr

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

In January, the executive committee of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) came together for five days in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Five of us on the EC—Ouyporn Khuankaew from Siam, Ven. Sumanalankar from Bangladesh, Hkun Okker from Burma, Jill Jameson from Australia, and myself—were joined by facilitator extraordinaire Arthur Del Vecchio, and INEB Executive Secretary Panadda Kosakarn. Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa, co-founder of INEB, also participated in the last part of our meeting and contributed to our review of INEB's vision, principles, and strategies.

We all worked very hard, guided with great patience by Arthur. (The model for nonprofit conferences these days seems to be to go some place distant and beautiful, sit indoors, and talk!) We were aware that because of limited resources, changes in staff, and longstanding unclarity about its mission, INEB was in a very fragile state. And yet we all recognized the need for an international organization bringing together socially engaged Buddhists from north, south, east, and west. By the time we finished, the walls were papered with charts and diagrams, and we had renewed our commitment to keep INEB vital and growing.

We identified INEB's three main programs as:

- training for grassroots groups living in oppressive and conflict situations in Asia
- face-to-face forums for networking, sharing our stories, victories, struggles and celebrations
- information exchange involving different media

These programs are spelled out in greater detail on the INEB website: <www.bpf.org/ineb.html>.

Though I was still jet-lagged and worn down by five long days of meetings, there was no gap between activities. After lunch on the last day of EC meetings, Hal Nathan, from our BPF affiliate Burma People's Relief Group here in the Bay Area, arrived with van and driver and we were off for five days on the Burma border. We were joined by my musician friend Henry Kaiser, who also serves on the board of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, which, through BPF, has been supporting medical work on the Burma border for the last five years. We were also fortunate to have along Pippa Curwen, director of the Burma Relief Centre in Chiang Mai. Pippa is a priceless connection for us in the confusing tangle of politics and priorities along the border.

In the far north of Thailand we visited with unrecognized refugees from Burma's Shan state. Their lives are precarious, but they are grateful for the refuge from armed hostilities in Burma, and for agricultural work in Thailand—picking fruit or onions, applying toxic pesticides for a dollar a day.

In the south, in and around the Thai town of Mae Sot,

our activities pivoted around Dr. Cynthia Maung's Mae Tao Clinic (see *TW's* Winter '98 issue on health). We spent time with clinic staff, Western doctors and nurses who come to offer medical training, and backpack medics who travel inside Burma at great personal risk for up to six months at a time. Dr. Cynthia arranged



Dr. Cynthia

for us to visit two refugee camps for mainly Karen people. Umphien, on a barren, windy hilltop, a long three hours south of Mae Sot, is home to 20,000 refugees. Inside Burma, 4,000 people live at Mae La Po Hta, just across the Moie River, north of Mae Sot. The Burmese army has ringed Mae La Po Hta with landmines, so people cannot return to their villages. In each camp, school-age children, who comprise nearly ten percent of the population, were getting a good education, despite the lack of reliable food and water, electricity, medicine, and books. And yet their faces shine just like our children's faces. Their gifts and capacities are the same as children everywhere. Being there on the Burma border drives me to help these children and my own find a life of peace and safety.

Bearing witness brings forth a vow to act and support. I will remember and speak of Burma, and return with whatever gifts we can assemble.

Writing this column is my last BPF activity for the next two months. A year ago the board generously offered me a sabbatical, and it has taken an awfully long time to clear the decks so that I can actually accept their offer. For the next two months, which will doubtless go by quickly, I plan to practice zazen, hang out at home with my kids, write, study, and record some music. The idea is refreshment as I enter my tenth year at BPF. Meanwhile Tova Green and Diana Winston are taking care of business for me. I am grateful for their support. ❖

—Alan Senauke

Let one not take upon oneself
the burden of riches...
Let one not desire great possessions,
even for one's family...

—Metta Sutta

BPF ACTIVIST NEWS

Chapter and Activist News

Welcome to new contact people: Gus Adams in Missoula, MT, Jim Mills in Idaho, and Algernon D'Amassa replacing Rebecca Capolungo-Hartman in Rhode Island.

Tonen O'Connor writes from **Milwaukee, WI**: "During the fall, the members of the Milwaukee Chapter collected food donations at their various sanghas for Hope House, a shelter for battered women. On January 1, a Buddhist Ecumenical Celebration for Peace for the New Year, sponsored by BPF, took place at the Shambhala Meditation Center and was well attended by people from different Buddhist traditions who gathered for meditation and the sharing of readings. Donations were collected for the Chapter's Prison Ministry.

"BPF members Tonen O'Connor and Abhaya Karuna are now working with inmates in six Wisconsin state prisons, with actual practice groups established in two of them...The BPF Chapter is also working on the creation of a small brochure on the basics of Buddhism to be distributed statewide to prison chaplains."

In **Philadelphia, PA**, Barbara Hirshkowitz has been using her organizing skills with Books Through Bars. She notes, "In addition to the regular work of sending books to prisoners, a small group of us is organizing a prisoners' art show. I'm also in charge of the library project. After years of asking, we are finally getting a reputation...We've also linked up with the local county system and are helping to set up libraries in residential areas of the prisons and to train volunteers to collect the needed books."

Ric Dunworth, the **Vermont** contact person, works with prisoners at a maximum security facility over the border in New York State.

Lee Lewis, coordinator of the **Twin Cities, MN Chapter**, writes, "Just this week I attended the first meeting of Buddhist leaders in the Twin Cities, an effort to get dialogue and energy going among various Buddhist communities. It gave me the opportunity to present BPF's purposes and aims to many folks who didn't know of it."

The **Honolulu, HI Chapter** meets monthly "with a Buddhist discussion group in a lovely tree house, for a vegetarian potluck and a program," says coordinator Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Recent programs included slides of her trip to Tibet, the video *Women in Buddhism: Unity and Diversity*, and the video *Living and Dying in Buddhist Cultures*. The chapter also helped organize the performances of Gangchenpa, a Tibetan performing group. Lekshe organized the February Sakyadhita (International Buddhist Women's) Conference in Nepal, "an amazing gathering—international, intercultural, interactive, grassroots, socially engaged to the max." ❖

—Tova Green, Chapter Coordinator

BASE News

Happy Birthday, BASE! BASE is now five years old!

After many committee meetings, decisions were recently made that shape the near future of BASE. The heart of BASE is in the integration of social change work, Buddhist study, training, and practice. Keeping these principles, we'll be expanding the forms of BASE. We will maintain the ongoing BASE programs in California, deepen community ties among current and former participants, seed new groups in different parts of the country, and share what we've learned in BASE with a wider community.

Home BASE is starting as you read this. Nine people are meeting in San Francisco to practice and discuss issues of homelessness, while working in service or activist organizations for the homeless. Participants range in age from 22 to 59, and are volunteering in a range of programs, including a homeless garden in Santa Cruz, a tutoring program for homeless children, and transitional housing for homeless youth. Educators' BASE continues with a group of eight sharing the experience of bringing the dharma to their teaching.

Many BASE alumni are local to the Bay Area. We continue to hold quarterly retreats and publish the newsletter *Touching BASE* to build our BASE community. We also attend political events, social gatherings, and occasional BPF workshops. Through a BASE email dialogue, we discuss issues of socially engaged Buddhism and notify each other of important activist and Buddhist news.

Over the years, BASE programs have been located primarily in the Bay Area, with a few exceptions in Boston, Tennessee, and Arcata, California. This year we are working to expand BASE nationally. We are interested in working with your chapter, sangha, or group of friends to help create a BASE group anywhere in the country.

It is not difficult to form a BASE group. All you need is a core group of people who are willing to work or volunteer in social service or social change jobs and to meet weekly for six months or longer, to practice, study, and learn from each other. We've found it to be a wonderful, inspirational support for our work as socially engaged Buddhists. Please contact Diana for help and/or more information, including the *BASE Handbook*.

Finally, we have realized that BASE has mostly benefited a small community of people who had the time to participate in a six-month program. We would like to share what we've learned with people who can't give six months to BASE by holding workshops on socially engaged Buddhism. We are also planning a shorter program of 6–8 weeks that follows the BASE model. Within the year we will hold a one-day workshop on socially engaged Buddhism, which can be repeated in various parts of the country.

These are our initial plans, and we're open to your ideas. Feel free to call (510-655-6169) or email Diana at dwinston@bpf.org. ❖

—Diana Winston, BASE Coordinator

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLASSIFIEDS

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

POSITION OPEN: Executive Secretary for the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Job duties include facilitation of internal communication with INEB members, fundraising, and information dissemination. Need to be willing to live in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Send CV, plus cover letter describing why you are drawn to work with INEB, to Ouyporn Kahunkaew: <ouypornk@hotmail.com> or to the INEB Secretariat: <ineb@loxinfo.co.th> by April 15, 2000.

CALL FOR PAPERS *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics* is accepting proposals and manuscripts for its April 2000 online conference: "Socially Engaged Buddhism." Contact Charles S. Prebish, Pennsylvania State University, Religious Studies Program, 108 Weaver Building, University Park, PA 16802. 814/865-1121, fax: 814/863-7840, <http://jbe.la.psu.edu>.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION Across Cultures (CONTACT) is designed to strengthen and support the community building and conflict intervention efforts of peacebuilders from the U.S. and around the world. For information about our June 2000 Summer Institute in Vermont and our Graduate Certificate in Conflict Transformation, contact the Center for Social Policy and Institutional Development, School for International Training, Kipling Road, P.O. Box 676, Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA; Tel 802/258-3339, Fax 802/258-3248, Email: <cspid@sit.edu>, www.sit.edu/conflict.

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, or to be placed on their email list, contact Lauren Leslie: 415/642-7202 or email: <bebuddha@hotmail.com>.

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

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

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

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

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>.

TIBETAN NUNS at the Geden Choeling nunnery in Dharamsala, India have been suffering health consequences from poor nutrition. Financial support is needed to continue a project that has improved their diet. A gift of \$30 will provide a month's worth of food for three nuns. Checks may be made payable to the Tibetan Nuns Project and mailed to Tibetan Nuns Project, 2288 Fulton St. #312, Berkeley, CA 94704. For more information, call 510/647-3423.

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

HELP HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN by donating needed personal care items—toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, hairbrushes, combs, and hand lotion—to the Women's Daytime Drop-in Center in Berkeley. Volunteers are also needed to work with the women and children. For more information call 510/548-6933.

NEW DALAI LAMA CD, recorded during His Holiness' 1994 visit to Hawai'i, features excerpts from his talks and traditional Tibetan and Hawai'ian chants and music. Proceeds to benefit Sakyadhita. To order: 808/944-6294, fax: 808/533-2513, <tsomo@hawaii.edu>.

BUDDHIST ARTIST/WRITER, currently incarcerated, seeks others who pursue creative work as part of their spiritual path to form a circle of correspondence for mutual support and exploration. Please write to Oline Elliott, AHCC, P.O. Box 2139 TA-47, Airway Heights, WA 99001.

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

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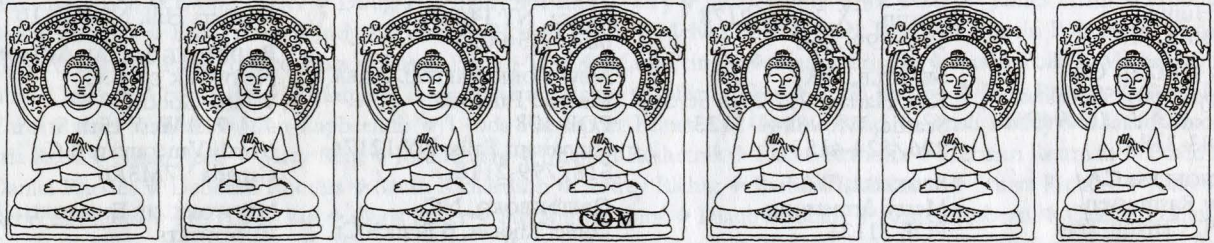
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