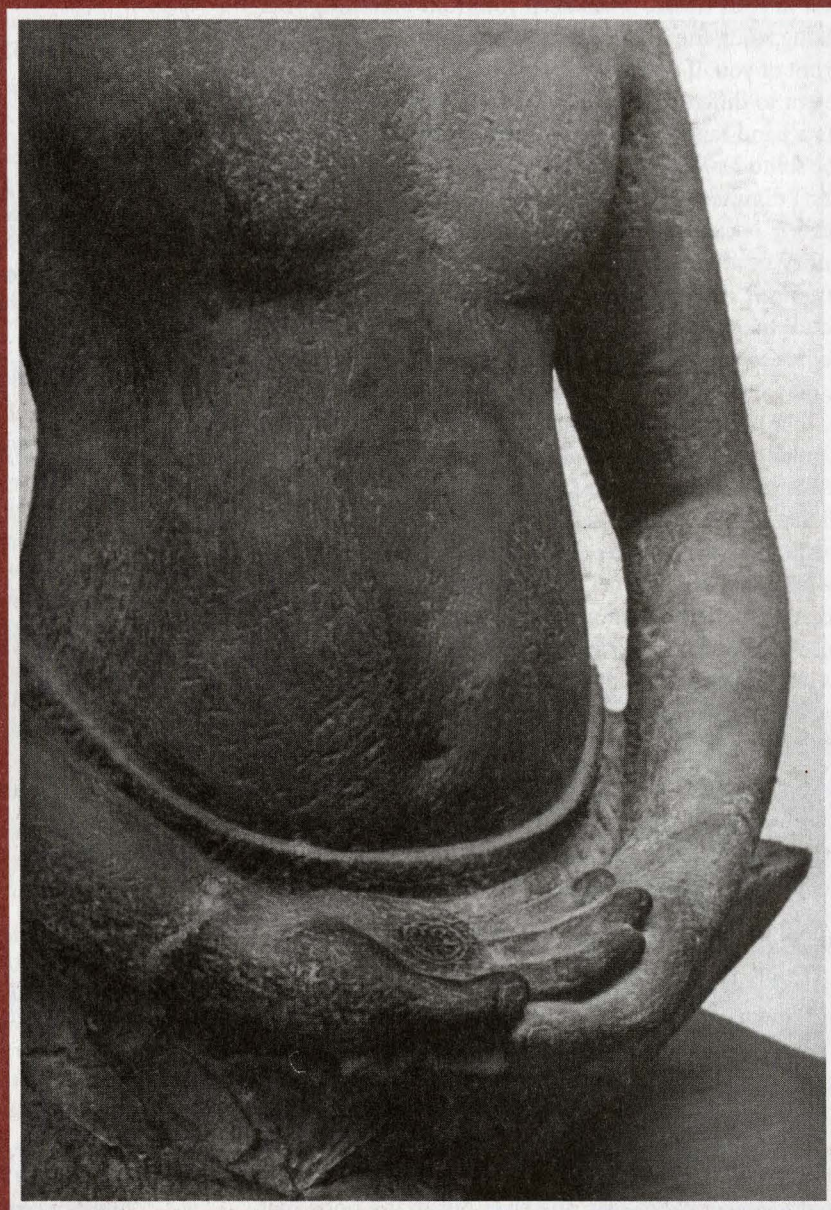


# TURNING WHEEL

*The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism*



• *Sitting with Pain* • *Practicing with Disability* •  
• *Nonviolent Communication in Sri Lanka* •  
• *"Election Sesshin" in Oregon* •



## From the Editor

### On Courage

This issue of *Turning Wheel* doesn't have just one theme. But one thing all the articles in this issue have in common is courage: a young person leaves home and goes out into the world to find out who she is, a man disabled by back pain lies down on the crowded zendo floor at a dharma talk, a woman comes out as disabled, even though nobody can tell by looking at her, a Tamil woman living in the U.S. returns to war-torn Sri Lanka to teach nonviolent communication, a woman travels to another state to knock on strangers' doors and talk to them about democracy.

Buddhism describes three kinds of gifts: the gift of material things, the gift of the teachings, and the gift of fearlessness, and the last of these is the greatest. The writers in this issue are giving the gift of fearlessness.

Fear can stop you in your tracks. It can keep you from becoming your full self. You're walking along the road, and all of a sudden you meet fear, standing right in front of you. If you're like me, you shrink and stiffen.

Fear looks different to different people. Maybe it's a mountain lion in the path. Maybe it's a hand raised in anger. A cloud of fog, or darkness; a crowd of people, or solitude. Maybe it's a little thing, like the batteries in your flashlight getting dimmer. Maybe it's big, like the war in Iraq.

Whether the danger is external or internal, whether you're facing a tsunami or a memory of abuse, the fear itself is inside your head, and courage is what you need. The point is not to figure out how to get rid of fear, but to practice meeting it.

It takes courage just to be a human being, and we all do many small brave things every day, starting with getting out of bed in the morning, into the unknown. Take me, sticking with my hip-hop class at the Y, even though I've got the oldest and stiffest knees in the class.

Courage can be invisible. When you see a man walking down a sunny street, you can't tell that he was just released from prison and has no place to live, that he knows no one in town except some drug dealers, and that he's on his way to apply for a job. You can't tell that the eight-year-old goalie on your daughter's soccer team spent her morning at the laundromat washing her uniform, because her family doesn't have a washing machine, and the whole time she was in the laundromat, a crazy man was staring at her.

One of my favorite koans, which is surely about courage, is Case 46 from the *Mumonkan*:

A priest asked, "How do you step from the top of a hundred-foot pole?"

Another eminent master of former times said:

You who sit on the top of the hundred-foot pole,  
although you have entered the Way, it is not yet genuine.  
Take a step from the top of the pole  
and worlds of the Ten Directions are your total body.

In his book *The Gateless Barrier*, Robert Aitken comments that the eminent master of the koan is "our teacher of Zen in this age of grave danger to the earth and its music, art, animals, and everything else. He is urging that we move off our seats and transform our attitudes and our systems. If everything is one, then it is also vital that we show that fact in our conduct. Worlds of the Ten Directions are indeed my total body and yours, and we neglect this primordial truth to our peril."

We can cultivate courage not only for ourselves but in the hope that we will be able to share that courage with each other. Every time you find courage I feel braver. ❖ —Susan Moon

Coming deadlines for *Turning Wheel*: Fall '05: **No theme**. Deadline: June 6, 2005.  
Winter '05: **Disarmament**. Deadline: September 6, 2005.

Send submissions of essays, poetry, drawings, or photographs to *Turning Wheel*, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703-9906, with SASE; or to <turningwheel@bpf.org>. We also welcome letters. Send to "Editor" at address above or via e-mail.

# TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



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Cover and this page:  
Buddha in meditation, temple of  
Prah Khan, Cambodia, 12th Century

# Thich Nhat Hanh IN NORTH AMERICA 2005

## RETREATS

AUGUST 11 - 16, 2005

*Walking in Peace Today:  
Practicing Together in the Midst of Turmoil*  
Stonehill College, Easton, MA

AUGUST 20 - 25, 2005

*Touching Peace:  
Finding Inner Freedom  
Through Understanding and Love*  
Bishop's University, Quebec  
(teachings will be given in French,  
with translation into English)

AUGUST 29 - SEPTEMBER 3, 2005

*Finding True Freedom:  
Opening the Door of Understanding & Compassion*  
@ the Rocky Mountain YMCA, Estes Park, CO

SEPTEMBER 14 - 18, 2005

*Colors of Compassion:  
Healing Our Families, Building True Community*  
A Retreat for People of Color  
@ Deer Park Monastery, Escondido, CA

SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 2, 2005

*Liberty & the Pursuit of Happiness*  
@ Deer Park Monastery, Escondido, CA

## PUBLIC LECTURES

AUGUST 17 in Boston, MA

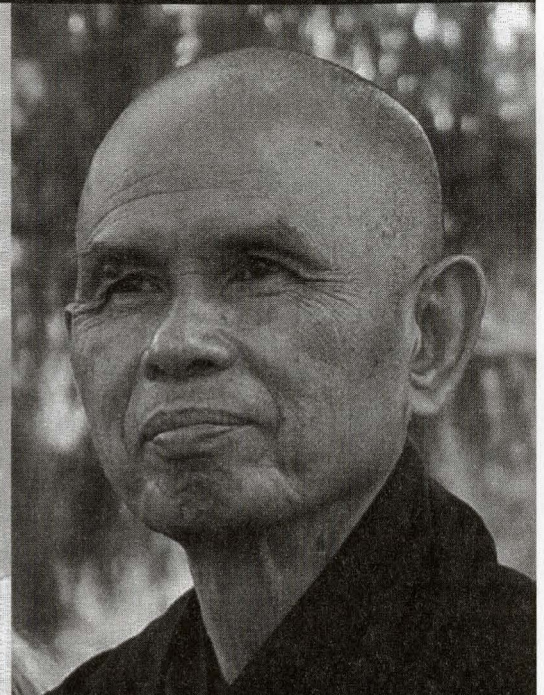
*Refreshing Our Hearts: Understanding True Love*

AUGUST 26 in Montréal - *Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World*

SEPTEMBER 6 in Denver, CO

*Nurturing Togetherness & Peace in a World of Fear & Separation*

SEPTEMBER 10 in Pasadena, CA - *Remembrance and Transformation*



*"From time to time, we can set aside some time for a retreat or day of mindfulness so we can sit, walk slowly, smile, eat lunch with friends and enjoy being together as though we are the happiest people on Earth. This is not just a treat, it is a retreat.*

*-Thich Nhat Hanh*

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## Letters

We welcome your responses to what we print. Write to Turning Wheel, P. O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703, or send us an e-mail at <turningwheel@bpf.org>. Letters may be edited.

### Not All Christians Are Warmongers

I have a concern that among Buddhists all Christians are being indicted as fearful warmongers supporting Bush in his infantile theological interpretations. The pope himself, as well as the National Council of Churches and many other "mainline" denominations, have denounced the war, and were opposed to it before it began. Many Catholics voted their consciences by supporting Kerry. Gay marriage and abortion are not issues that all Christians are opposed to. Even in my little Buddhist group, some people seem to assume that I am an unusual Christian who comes to conclusions about peace and justice only because of my contact with Buddhism. Christian bashing has become as acceptable in many circles as Muslim bashing is, and it is as reprehensible. How can people of peace and justice work together with trust and respect?

—Lois Rose, East Mountain Retreat Center  
Great Barrington, Massachusetts

### Suicide Prevention

Lauri Mattenson's "Four Noble Truths of Suicide Prevention" (*TW* Winter '04) really hit the spot. The dark topic of suicide was given appropriate light. It startled me, though, that Mattenson's mentor—who rescued Mattenson from her "lowest moments"—took her own life. Yet Mattenson had the strength to not judge her mentor and to understand her choice without knowing why.

I'd like to think that I am making gains towards this degree of spiritual maturity. I, too, have had close mentors who drifted into depression and behaviors I would not have thought possible. And the closeness in these special relationships makes the suffering worse. None of us can escape our own or others' foibles, nor adequately explain them. So what can we do? Practice. Mattenson's got it right: "I can only take refuge in the moment in front of me...any alive encounter and the silence after it."

—Keith Roper, St. Louis

### Prisoners Respond to "The Screaming Corner"

A number of people who are currently incarcerated responded to "The Screaming Corner" by Ed Bowers (*TW* Winter '04), about finding refuge on the street in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. They asked for a copy of *Living in the Land of the Dead*, from which the article was excerpted. If anyone would like to pay for sending a copy of the book to a prisoner, or begin a letter-writing relationship with one of them, please contact us at the Faithful Fools Ministry, 234 Hyde Street, San Francisco, CA 94102, <fools@faithfulfools.org>, 415/474-0508.

—Martha Boesing, Faithful Fools Ministry, San Francisco



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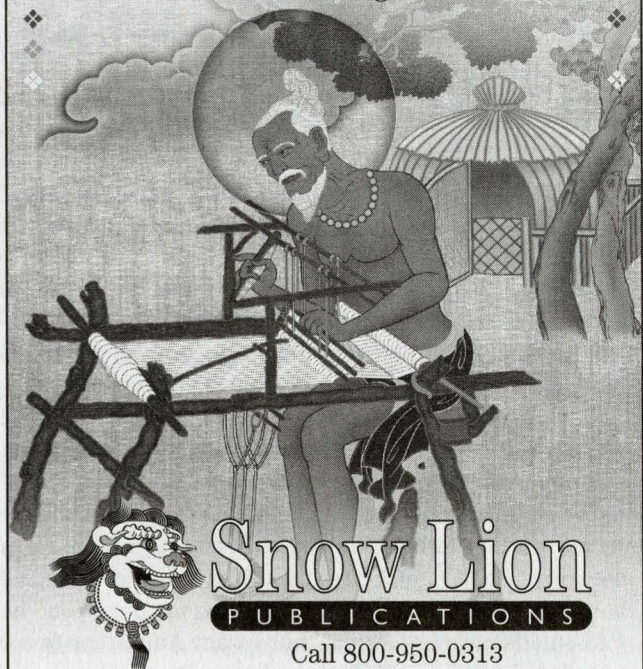
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# Indra's Net

Compiled by Annette Herskovits

*In the image of the "jeweled net of Indra," found in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the universe is represented as an infinite network of jewels, each of which reflects all the others. All our lives touch each other, as symbolized by Indra's Net.*

## A Buddhist Conscientious Objector in Abu Ghraib

Aidan Delgado, restless after his freshman year at New College in Florida, wanted to travel, so he joined the Army Reserve. Immediately after signing up, he watched the television broadcast of the World Trade Center Towers falling. He thought he had made a good decision in joining the reserves.

But then he began reading about Buddhism, and during advanced training he told his sergeant, "I'm not sure the army's right for me; I'm a Buddhist now."

In April 2003, ten days into the war, Delgado was shipped to Iraq, near the southern city of Nasiriyah, where he saw heavy fighting.

Delgado, a U.S. diplomat's son, has lived in Egypt and speaks some Arabic, so he helped soldiers run errands in town. "At first," he says, "the Iraqis were overwhelmingly friendly." But as the occupation dragged on, the sentiment changed to: "We're glad you're here, but when are you going home?"

Soon he decided he would no longer participate in the war and applied for conscientious objector status, "the first step in a very long, very harrowing process." Except for a few close friends, everybody was hostile. According to Delgado, his officers took the bulletproof plate out of his vest, saying, "You're an objector, so you're not going to fight." Yet ambushes were frequent.

In November 2003, Delgado's unit was sent to Abu Ghraib prison, months before the abuses became public knowledge. His job gave him access to records, and he found out that most of the prisoners were not insurgents but were being held in this extremely dangerous prison for minor crimes like theft and drunkenness.

Inmates conducted protests against the cold and the lack of food, and Delgado saw them being beaten nearly to death in response. Soldiers told him they had shot five prisoners dead for throwing stones and showed him photos of the bodies. The photographs were posted in the prison's command headquarters, as if they were something to be proud of.

Delgado knew nothing about the torture there, but he was not surprised when he learned of it. He said the prison was surrounded by "an aura of brutality."

He was finally granted C.O. status after he had already served his full tour of duty. Now back in school, he is speaking about what he saw, showing slides of mangled bodies of Iraqi civilians. "I'm not trying to shock you," he told an audience in Florida, "but I want Americans to see what is being done in their name."

Later, he told a journalist, "I never killed anyone, never fired my weapon at anyone, never struck anyone. But I feel responsible."

## The Dalai Lama Visits the Russian Republic of Kalmykia

The Kalmyks are descendants of Mongolian nomads who migrated to the Caspian Sea's northwest coast in the 17th century. On their 32-year trek, they were converted to Buddhism by missionaries of the Dalai Lama's Gelugpa school, then dominant in Tibet and spreading north to Mongolian peoples.

Kalmykia is now an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. Half its 300,000 people are Kalmyks. Before the 1917 Russian Revolution, there were over 100 Buddhist temples and some 1,600 monks in Kalmykia, and in the first years of communism, Buddhism actually prospered. But in 1929, Stalin, having consolidated his power as "Little Father" of the Soviet people, banned religion. Lamas (Buddhist teachers) were executed or exiled, and religious buildings were destroyed.

Then, in 1943, Stalin accused the Kalmyks of being Nazi sympathizers and he exiled all 150,000 of them to Siberia. About half of them died as a result. Only in 1956, three years after Stalin's death, were the Kalmyks allowed to return to Kalmykia.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Russia experienced a Buddhist renaissance. The Dalai Lama visited Kalmykia and Buryatia, another Russian republic with a large Buddhist population. Huge crowds gathered to listen to him.

Then Russia developed ties with China, which became the main customer for Russian arms manufacturers. Yielding to Chinese pressure, Russia's government banned the Dalai Lama from visiting.

In 1993, Kalmykia elected its first President: Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, then 31. Rich and charming, Kirsan seems to encourage popular devotion to himself. Yet he has visited the Dalai Lama in India, funded the building of several temples in Kalmykia's capital of Elista, and mandated that schoolchildren study Buddhism. Today, Buddha statues and bodhisattva images dot Elista.

Kirsan wanted the Dalai Lama to visit Russia again, but the government kept refusing H.H. a visa. Prominent Buddhists threatened to stage protests outside the foreign ministry in Moscow. Buryatia's Buddhist leader called the refusal "a violation of the constitutional rights of all Buddhists in Russia."

Finally the Russian foreign ministry relented, but asked the Dalai Lama to refrain from making political statements. The Russians assured China that "everything that goes on [in Tibet] is an internal Chinese affair," but noted it had to respect "the beliefs of more than a million [Russian] Buddhists."

His Holiness came to Kalmykia last November to consecrate a new monastery. Thousands of pilgrims walked over a mile through a windswept field to reach the monastery. Many carried silk scarves symbolizing a meeting with Buddha. China expressed its official displeasure.

### Thich Nhat Hanh Vietnam

Thich Nhat Hanh ("Thây," to his students) is in Vietnam for three months, accompanied by 100 monastics and 90 lay friends. This is his first time back in the country since 1966, when civil war divided Vietnam and neither the Communist government in the north nor the U.S.-backed government in the south would allow him to return following an American speaking tour. When peace came to the country in 1975, the Communist government maintained its ban and forbade publication of his books.

But last year, officials from Vietnam's embassy in Washington visited Thây's Deer Park Monastery in California, and Paris embassy officials joined retreats in Plum Village in southern France. Finally, Vietnam's government accepted Thây's conditions for a visit, agreeing that he would be allowed to teach freely and publish 12 of his books there.

On January 12, one thousand Vietnamese welcomed Thây with flowers and music at Hanoi's airport. Later, Thây said, "I know we will be observed by many people, even by—especially by—the police. But we don't mind because we believe the police officers also have Buddha nature."

### Tenzin Delek Rinpoche Will Not Be Executed

Good news! Tenzin Rinpoche's death sentence has been commuted. Rinpoche, a Tibetan monk much beloved in his native Sichuan, was convicted of masterminding a series of bombings (TW Fall '04). No evidence of his culpability was ever presented publicly.

Chinese authorities said they commuted his sentence to life imprisonment because he did not violate any laws while in prison, but it was clearly international pressure that prompted the decision.

Now we must protest the detention of Rinpoche and mistreatment of his supporters. Tenzin's student Tashi Phuntsog was recently released from prison in such terrible condition that he cannot walk or speak clearly. And Lobsang Dhondup, an alleged accomplice of Rinpoche, was executed in 2003.

China is particularly sensitive to international criticism as it prepares for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. To call for freedom for Tibetan political prisoners, see [www.actionnetwork.org/campaign/freetenzin](http://www.actionnetwork.org/campaign/freetenzin). ❖

### India: Catastrophe and Caste

Almost half the tsunami victims in India lived in the fishing town of Nagapattinam. About 5,600 died there; most were fishermen living in huts beside the beach.

The death toll among the *dalits* ("untouchables") was relatively low, as they tend to live inland. But dalits from neighboring municipalities were the ones who cleaned up the rotting corpses after the wave hit. According to Reuters journalist Terry Friel, some 1,000 dalits worked around the clock to clear bodies and debris from Nagapattinam, while local people just watched.

Mohan, a dalit municipal sanitation worker, said, "I am only doing what I would do for my own wife and child. It is our duty."

# DZOGCHEN THE NATURAL GREAT PERFECTION

## DZOGCHEN RETREATS WITH LAMA SURYA DAS

Dzogchen is the consummate practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Considered by many to be "the teaching of our time," Dzogchen is direct, immediate, essentialized, adaptable, and profound: a pure awareness practice applicable to any circumstance and readily integrated into modern life. Dzogchen, often translated as the Natural Great Perfection, directly introduces us to our inner Buddha, the inherent freedom, purity and perfection of being that is our true nature.

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## 2005: CULTIVATING PEACE, DISMANTLING WAR

In 2005, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship invites its more than 4,500 members and 45 chapters across the world to join in reflection and action on the theme, "Cultivating Peace, Dismantling War." We hope that the Buddhist community at large takes this call to heart and explores the connection between dharma teachings and peacemaking.

The past few years have brought many reminders of the ways in which we arm ourselves with weapons of all kinds: conventional, nuclear, chemical, and just as significantly, ideas and beliefs to which we hold tenaciously. This array of weaponry, both physical and psychological, is a major source of suffering in our contemporary society.

The year 2005 is also the 60th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More than 270,000 people were killed by the bombs and radiation. After all these years, there are still approximately 36,000 nuclear weapons in the world's arsenals, primarily in the U.S., U.K., Russia, France, and China. For this reason, BPF will focus a good part of our resources on the work of nuclear disarmament.

Throughout the year, BPF will publish writings on disarmament, demilitarization, and peacemaking from a Buddhist perspective; organize events and actions related to this theme; work in coalition with other activist and faith-based organizations; and provide a Peace and Justice Calendar for 2005. (See our website: [www.bpf.org](http://www.bpf.org))

Our vision is that during 2005 Buddhists and friends in other activist and faith-based communities will:

- show up in large numbers to offer a presence for peace at disarmament events, especially the May 1 New York City march and the August events commemorating the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki;
- engage in projects to dismantle the war machine, such as Peace Tax legislation and the Mayors for Peace Campaign;
- practice both inner and outer disarmament; train ourselves in nonviolence and peaceful methods of conflict resolution and communication.

We invite you to join in this work of "cultivating peace and dismantling war." At the end of 2005, *Turning Wheel* will publish reflections on what we have learned. Please visit our website, [www.bpf.org](http://www.bpf.org), for more information and articles on this theme. ❖

Many dalits lost their homes and livestock in the disaster. Their fields were destroyed and their wells contaminated. But according to international human rights workers, other survivors in relief camps denied the dalits food, drinking water, and use of toilets, and did so with the support of state officials.

Dalits number about 160 million, 16 percent of the total

Indian population. Despite laws banning caste discrimination, they are still routinely abused and still do jobs others won't, such as cleaning toilets, collecting garbage, and skinning cows.

Because the Indian Constitution reserves seats in Parliament and government jobs for dalits, many have risen to prominence and insist that dalits' rights be respected. Among them is Meira Kumar, minister for social welfare, who warned voluntary aid agencies that they would not get government support unless they accept a quota of dalits. —A.H.

## International Peace Walk for Hiroshima's 60th Anniversary

I am old enough to remember being sent for the newspaper every morning during the summer of 1945. I remember the day the war ended. It was years, though, before I understood the magnitude of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the relentless nuclear stockpiling during the cold war. Now, as modest disarmament gains melt away in a new wave of nuclear madness, I want to join the world community to say "never again."

As *TW* goes to press, an international peace walk is on its way from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where the 1945 bombs were assembled, to New York City. There, mayors from all over the world will gather on May 1 to lobby the United Nations for a stronger Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The treaty is to be reviewed in May.

Organized by local and international peace groups including the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist order, the walk covers 15 to 20 miles a day. Each day begins with interfaith prayer. Then monks and laypeople walk, chanting the Lotus Sutra's opening lines to the beat of prayer drums.

Everyone is invited to join for an hour, a day, or more. For me, it will be the last two weeks of April, starting at Three Mile Island in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. (The schedule is available at [www.footprintsforpeace.net](http://www.footprintsforpeace.net) or by calling 513/403-6698.) Organizers expect an international group of 25 to 30 walkers, both young and old, including musicians. Overnight accommodations are on the floor in homes, churches, or community centers; a van carries sleeping gear, costs are minimal, and food is simple, often donated.

Peace walks connect with communities in many ways, but this one has a special mission: to visit local mayors and encourage them to join Mayors for Peace. Begun by Hiroshima's and Nagasaki's mayors, this organization now includes over 600 cities in 150 countries. Following a May 1 festival linking international mayors with New York neighborhoods, mayors will meet with U.N. officials to discuss the NPT. To learn more about Mayors for Peace, see [www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/mayors/english](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/mayors/english).

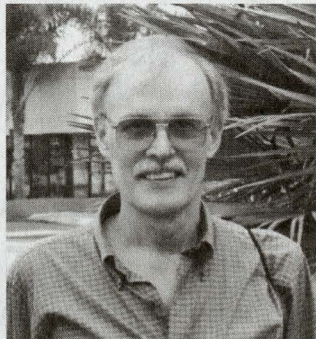
The European Parliament and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have endorsed the Mayors for Peace agenda, but citizen efforts like this walk (and campaigns in your hometown) are important for getting more U.S. mayors on board. For information on how to do this, see [www.westernmassafsc.org/mayors/mayors.html](http://www.westernmassafsc.org/mayors/mayors.html).

—Louise Dunlap, Boston Old Path Sangha and  
Cambridge Peace Commission



## In Memoriam

### David W. Chappell (1940–2004) Scholar and Engaged Buddhist



In an e-mail message he sent to me shortly before his death, David Chappell encouraged me to attend a conference he was helping to prepare, scheduled for April 2005. The conference will commemorate an event known as “Bandung 1955” that was held in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, 50 years ago. The governments of Indonesia and South Africa will be cohosting the official event, but the one that David was helping to prepare is a grassroots gathering intended as “an expression of peoples’ participation in the collective search for systemic alternatives to the present course of neoliberal globalization.”

As a scholar and practitioner of Buddhism, David’s ongoing passion was to bring his scholarship and his Buddhist spiritual vision to bear on concrete events and institutions in the world, on the local, regional, and global level.

David was also planning to join my wife, Maria Reis Habito, at another gathering in June 2005 in Jerusalem. Maria worked with David while assisting Dharma Master Hsin Tao, founder of the Museum of World Religions in Taiwan, in his work to promote peace through interreligious understanding. The Jerusalem conference is a think-tank meeting to prepare the ground for future Buddhist-Jewish-Muslim dialogues.

Unfortunately, because of David’s untimely death from an aneurism on December 2, 2004, these future gatherings will not benefit from his participation.

A professor of religious studies at the University of Hawai’i for nearly 30 years, David was well known as a

scholar of Chinese Buddhism, having written on T’ien T’ai philosophy, as well as Buddhist meditative practice and other academic themes. He also edited the volume *Socially Engaged Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sulak Sivaraksa on his 70th Birthday* (2003), with more than 60 contributors. At the time of his death, he was professor of comparative studies at Soka University in Aliso Viejo, California. He is survived by his spouse, Stella, daughters Cindy Rice, Gwen Demitria, Laura Demitria, and Jeannie Barns, son Mark Chappell, brother Gordon Chappell, and five grandchildren.

Those who knew David and worked with him over the years will continue to cherish his memory and his warm personal touch. And furthermore, those who knew him can’t help but carry on with the contagious vision that he manifested in everything he did.

This vision can be found in his many writings on engaged Buddhism. Among these is a volume he edited called *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace* (Wisdom Publications, 1999), a collection of articles by prominent engaged Buddhists from all over the world. In his essay summing up the key points made by the authors in the volume, David concludes, “In creating cultures of peace, inner peace must be balanced by ecosocial mindfulness and social cooperation as the heart of Buddhist peace work.” ❖

—Ruben L.F. Habito

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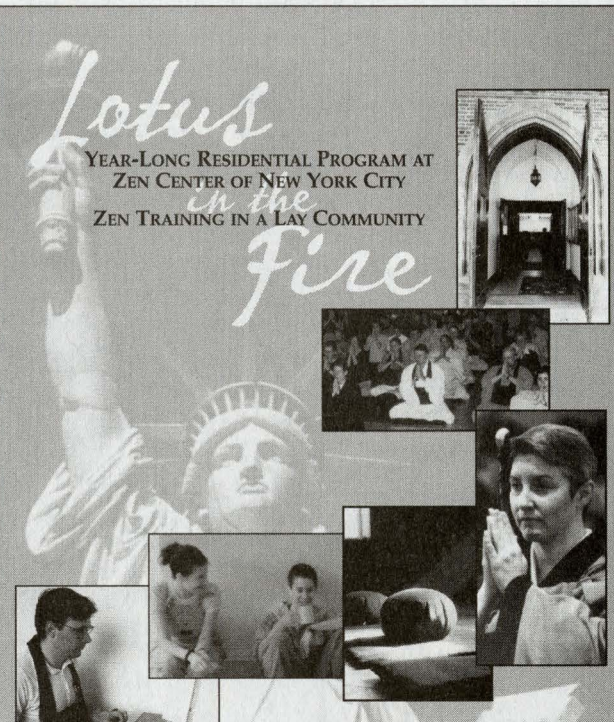
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*Water and Moon Kuan-yin, Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (Purchase: Nelson Trust) 34-10*

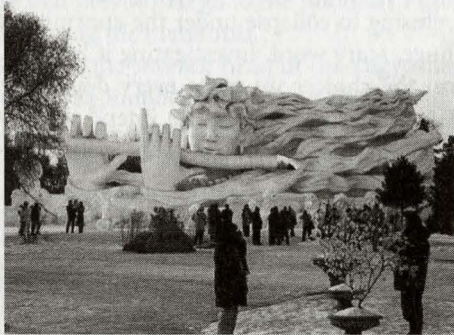
## The Sparkling Gates

by Stephanie Kaza

Email is a strange thing. You never know what will arrive on your screen. On a gray day in November with sunlight out of reach, I opened a message containing images from far northern Russia, where temperatures stay below freezing half the year. The scene was stunningly beautiful—an immense snow sculpture of spirited Pan with flowing hair, playing his 30-foot-long flute, his snowy flock of sheep gathered near. People were standing around at dusk, wrapped in scarves and hats, taking in the last brush of light on his cheek. Here in Harbin, 300 miles north of the famously cold Vladivostok, the locals were celebrating winter with their annual snow and ice festivals.

How could I ever have imagined that something so wonderful existed in the world? I opened more photos: of mama bear and bear cubs, sculptured portraits, and fantastical shapes, each more spectacular than the last.

Snow and ice sculpture in Harbin dates back to 19th-century Manchu times, with the first

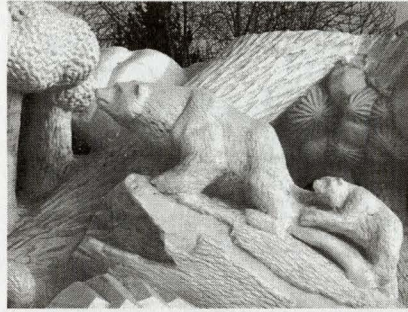


organized show held in 1963. The annual festivals began in 1985 and now draw millions of tourists from all over the world. Competition teams come from Russia, Japan, Canada, France, and even South Africa to make beauty with snow on the wide-open spaces north of Harbin's frozen river, the Songhua Jiang.

I felt my office world disappearing as I wandered among the sculptures, breathless with the magic of it all. I could not resist the astonishing scale of beauty and the human spirit behind such beauty.

The next photos took me to the evening ice festival, a few miles away. Castles, bridges, ships—life-sized architectural structures made out of ice and filled with neon light. Here was an entire city made of ice, stretching far into the distance. Brilliant yellows, pinks, blues, and greens beckoned visitors to the gleaming ice. For the sure-footed, there was a mock Great Wall made of ice. All along the green translucent parapets were luminaria of ice, glowing with light. If you made it to the top (with slick ice and no hand railings) you could take a dazzling ride down the long ice slide.

Staring at this magnificent tribute to winter, I felt surely some illuminating Zen clarity must be at work. This ice extravaganza beamed “through all the gloom...splendid and lustrous.” It was like seeing into the transparent nature of



mind, the true beauty of the material universe—in this case, the Songhua Jiang River with its limitless supply of meters-thick ice. Here in the dark days of winter, the

artists aligned themselves completely with existing conditions, bringing forth the radiant nature of cold and ice. Here, in a situation that would make most of us shiver and retreat, the mood was celebration and wonder.

In *Cultivating the Empty Field*, 12th-century Zen master Hongzhi writes that the inherently illumined Buddha spirit, “when recognized and received exhaustively, shares itself and responds to situations. The gates sparkle and all beings behold the gleaming. They then understand that from within this place, fulfilled self flows out.” Such teachings often seem out of reach, beyond our everyday experience of the real world. Yet here were these astonishing ice palaces, reflecting the human spirit expressing and responding.

“Isn't it great what people can do if they want to create beauty?” the e-mail caption said. Yes, I thought, it is amazing and it is possible. We can do this. We as humans can create other things besides war, poverty, starvation, and torture. We can align ourselves with the original brightness and express this truth. Mosses, lichens, waterfalls, and pines have all expressed this original brightness with their own true natures. Why not humans?

The last picture was a Thai Buddhist temple, lit with gold and orange, complete with halls and shrine rooms. I tried to imagine sitting on stone ice, earnestly seeking illumination in the midst of transparency. A sharp practice this would be, keen and to the point. But is that not the practice of making beauty? “Despite a hundred uglinesses or a thousand stupidities, the upright cauldron is naturally beneficent,” Hongzhi tells us. Receiving this beneficence, we are each called to express it as we can, “thoroughly observing each thing with the whole eye.” ❖

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### Transmission 24/7: Understanding and Dissolving Violence in Family Life

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

*All beings tremble before violence.*

*All fear death.*

*All love life.*

—from *The Dhammapada: Sayings of the Buddha*,  
trans. Thomas Byrom

Violence, inside or outside my home, scares the shit out of me. My husband, teenage son, and I live in Oakland, California, one of the more violent cities in the U.S., although our immediate neighborhood is quiet and safe enough. I thought I was doing OK with things until, at the end of a diversity conference last summer, I found myself sobbing passionately, not knowing why. When I tried to explain what I was feeling, I surprised myself completely.

"I don't want the school year to start," I told a sympathetic colleague, an educator working with a new community and education institute at Dartmouth College. "I'm afraid some of the kids at my son's school won't make it. What if they can't get jobs, can't get into college? What if they get mixed up with gangs or dealing drugs this year?" I felt that my friend understood completely the urgency of our situation in Oakland's public school system. Tears came to his eyes, too.

"I can't be there for every kid in every school," he said. "But I'll do my best, and I know you will, too."

In Zen Buddhism, it's sometimes said that we should practice as though our head is on fire. I don't have any trouble with that. I think of my husband, calling home from his office in downtown Oakland to say that a man had been stabbed to death. Police had taped off the area, and there was a big pool of dark blood in the street right next to his building. Last year our ninth-grade son came home

from school one afternoon, saying it had been a "bad day." An enraged parent of one of his classmates, mistakenly thinking that a homeless man who hung out around the school campus had cut his son's hand, had driven to the school and beaten the homeless man senseless.

And I lost it myself a couple of times when Josh was little, spanking him furiously. That's when I realized that sending an annoying or misbehaving kid to his room for a time-out was more for me than for him.

I don't want my family to live in fear, and neither do I want us to live in forgetfulness. So what does it mean to be awake in the midst of violence? That's a huge question, but I doubt there's one huge answer. As Buddhists, my husband, son, and I are working it out in a thousand small ways every day. When I'm tempted to go on automatic pilot, as though our lives are bound to be peaceful if we can just pay the bills on time and take out the garbage, I remind myself that my real job as a householder Buddhist is to take on the big issues, such as how my family is impacted by violence and how we're responding to dismantle it, while refusing to collapse under the enormity of it. *Violence* is a huge, scary word. Investigating it little by little sheds light on the choices we make every day—how we're spending time and money, what we intend to do with our human lives, and how we are actually treating one another in the name of love.

This is how I break it down in our home: anger, fear, manipulation, and intimidation in the way that we relate to each other need to be constantly acknowledged and then dissolved. Our family life is a place where we see how the raw edges of "I need, I want, and I've got to have" continually rub against each other. Are we holding resentments that might build up and eventually explode? My family knows me in my least dignified moments of rage and greed. I look to them for the best feedback as to how I'm doing as a spiritual practitioner.

All children are vulnerable to violence, and they look to us as parents and adults to model ways of coping with violence. Do we shut down, pretend it isn't there, either on the outside or the inside? Do we have skills that help us to prevent violence from happening, and to de-escalate it when it begins? What do we do when we're stressed and someone insults us?

It's important for me to remember that everything I do is being closely watched. I vividly remember one morning leaning back from the breakfast table into a leisurely stretch, my arms behind my head, fingers interlocked. Josh, about five months old, was sitting in his high chair, and when I glanced over I had to laugh. He was imitating me perfectly, a broad grin on his face. That's when I knew that there's no "off duty" in mothering. Whatever dharma I've been transmitting to my son, 24/7, for the past 16 years, along with all my problems and faults, will this be good enough when my young adult leaves home and enters a violent world? I honestly don't know, but I do know I'm doing my best to be there for him, each moment of every day. ❖



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## History

### Takuga and the Moral Ambiguities of Military Chaplaincy

by Diane Patenaude Ames

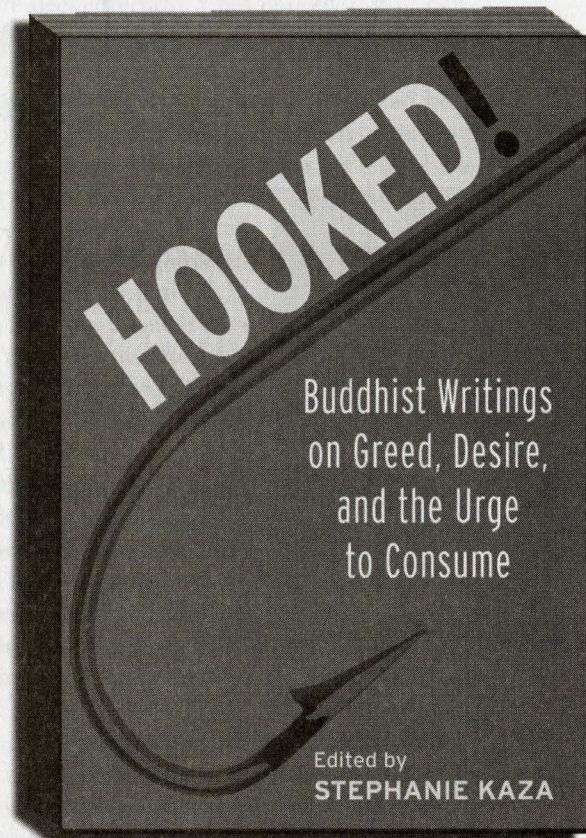
The Yugyo-ha school of Buddhism, later called the Jishu, was founded by Ippen (1239–1289), the wild child of Pure Land Buddhism. Ippen led a band of holy vagrants who danced through the Japanese countryside, chanting the *nembutsu* [the Buddha's name] and handing out tickets to the Pure Land to all they met.

Although the religious institution that sprang up in Ippen's name after his death was of course much more staid and bureaucratic, it continued to have popular appeal, particularly to the samurai and their lords. Both imperial authority and government by shogunate were collapsing, ushering in the troubled Muromachi period with its warlordism and constant feudal conflict. Worried that they might go to hell for killing people, warriors found solace in the promise that they would go to the Buddha's Pure Land if they died reciting the *nembutsu*.

Takuga (1284–1354), the seventh head of the Yugyo-ha school and its greatest expounder of doctrine after Ippen, knew that the school's close relationship with the feudal ruling class was a two-edged sword; it could be, and at times arguably was, a corrupting influence. How, for example, was the Yugyo-ha supposed to respond when warlords began requesting chaplains to accompany them to war? It was all very well for Yugyo-ha priests to care for the wounded, or to help the dying recite their final ten *nembutsu* as a sort of Buddhist last rite. Also, being on the front lines, these priests were in a good position to save non-combatants and even defeated warriors on both sides. But what was the priest supposed to do if the warlord asked him to, say, carry orders around the field? It was not easy to refuse a warlord with a sword in his hand. Nonetheless, in 1351 Takuga issued a strongly worded directive that military chaplains were to confine themselves to religious and humane duties, to do what they could to protect all non-combatants, and never to touch weapons or engage in any kind of paramilitary activities.

Similar issues came up in 1354, when a military governor named Nikki Yoshinaga demanded the expulsion of the resident priest in a Nagano temple because the temple had sheltered some warriors whom he, Nikki Yoshinaga, had just defeated and wanted to decapitate. Takuga replied that Yugyo-ha priests were neither the enemies nor the military allies of anyone, and that the Nagano priest had simply been performing a religious duty. Luckily Takuga had enough powerful friends to make this stick. Yugyo-ha temples got a reputation for sheltering defeated fighters and their families, many of whom became monks or nuns.

The relationship of organized religion to war is always a problematic one. Takuga at least made a serious effort to work it out. ❖



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## Winner of *Turning Wheel's* Young Writer's Award!

# Always at Home

by Hannah Tennant-Moore



*My life has been wonderfully open for several months now—the days unfolding with ease into a mixture of meditation, yoga, and writing, even though I am often in drastically different situations from one day to the next. Since graduating from Wesleyan University in Connecticut last May, I have been writing, taking care of babies and toddlers, swimming in oceans and lakes, and traveling around the*

*United States and British Columbia. I am currently staying in Vancouver, sleeping on the floor of my friend's apartment, and wandering from café to café in this friendly, rainy city, scribbling in my notebook.*

*Twice daily, I practice vipassana on my own, as taught to me by Munindra-ji and his student U Hla Myint in India. I really miss having a Buddhist community to practice with, which is one reason I may settle down somewhere soon.*

*Buddhist perspectives often pop up in my writing, and writing is one way I practice the dharma: it is a wonderful technique for dealing with monkey mind, being present with difficulty, and seeing the process as an end in itself. Both Buddhism and the practice of writing have helped me grapple with the question of how I can use my life to effect positive change in the world. My dharma practice and teachers have shown me ways of living that minimize conflict and help to spread joy and a sense of ease with whatever arises. Through my writing, I hope to pass these lessons on to others. I also hope my writing helps, at least in some small way, people who have suffered, loved, laughed, and healed in similar ways to my own.*

Four friends and I are piled in the back seat of a jeep on our way to the train station in Gaya, India. We are taking a three-day vacation from the rigorous schedule of meditation and study at the Buddhist monastery where we have been living for the past month. Our friend Bablu drops us off in front of the station at 10:30 PM, in time to catch our overnight train to Calcutta. We wear our backpacks on our stomachs and our passports strapped to our waists underneath our clothes.

As we approach the station, we are hit by a wall of heat and body odor. The open-air waiting room and the area for at least 50 feet in front of it are covered with

dark bodies sprawled out on the cement. Naked babies lie upon women's chests or wedged between sleeping adults. Dozen of hands reach toward our small group of white faces as we step over the sleeping and heat-paralyzed bodies, making our way slowly to the tracks.

Barefoot men carrying huge vats of tea and dozens of tiny clay mugs walk up and down the platform, yelling, "Coffee! Chai! Coffee! Chai!" Others balance wooden poles on their shoulders, from which hang strings of Masala Munch and Milk Biki cookies. Boys and men piss on the tracks and spit phlegm on the platform. Whenever a train approaches, a crowd of people rushes to the edge of the platform, shoving and yelling as they try to get near the doors of the train. The five of us stand huddled against the wall of the station. Our train is already an hour late, but we do not sit down because the ground is covered in an inch of sludge. Nearby, a mysterious brown liquid drips from a pipe onto the platform.

Suddenly, my friend Christine grabs my hand and points. "There's Munindra-ji!" Several meters down the platform stands our 80-year-old vipassana instructor, Anagarika (meaning "homeless one" or "wanderer") Munindra. He clutches a small sack to his chest and smiles softly as he stands still among the throngs in his white robes. We gather our things and hurry toward him, so thankful to be able to say a final goodbye; our three weeks of study with him have just come to an end and he is heading back to his family home in Calcutta. "Munindra-ji!" Derek calls. As our teacher turns toward us, we all press our palms together and bow. The strain in each of our faces has been replaced by a grin.

"Oh, hello my dhamma friends," he says gently. "I am very glad to see you. You are going to Calcutta too?"

"Yes," Kristen says. "We are so excited to see a new part of India. Are you happy to be going home?" Glancing down, I notice that Munindra-ji's thin white sandals are stretched tight over his swollen feet. His feet have been causing him much pain lately; at times, he had to be carried to his cushion in the Buddha hall to give his dharma talks. I am also aware that it is nearing one in the morning, well past his usual 8:00 PM bedtime.

Munindra-ji smiles at us all as he answers Kristen's question. "But I am happy now. I am already home." "Coffee! Chai!" yell the barefoot men. "One rupee money?" ask the boys and girls as they pass us, tugging at our bags. "I am always home." Munindra-ji smiles at us and turns back to face the tracks.

\* \* \*

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Growing up, I had two loving parents, a very close relationship with my sister, a full refrigerator, a comfortable bed. My parents divorced when I was two, but I saw them both equally and had my own space in each of their homes. Throughout my childhood, I spent a lot of time making my rooms my own. I painted the walls blue and yellow. I set up a candle altar on my windowsill. I covered the walls in collages made from magazines and, later, poems. But I still found myself overwhelmed with inexplicable tears many nights after being tucked in, wanting my mom or my dad or warm honey-milk—things that represented comfort—even though I always knew on some level that none of these would really console.

I remember the intense relief, when I was in fourth grade, of discovering that my best friend Stephanie also experienced this mysterious “homesick feeling”—a feeling of longing for “home” which would descend on us for no apparent reason, often when we were in our own bedrooms. Only now can I understand those tears as a natural part of being alive. We all feel groundless and at sea at times, particularly when we hold still—as I did at night, lying alone in the dark—because we are forced to come face-to-face with the knowledge that we have no fixed place in this thing called life. Feelings and events over which we have no control descend on us without our understanding why. Our wishes go unanswered, and when our desires are met, we still feel discontent.

These feelings of homesickness did have possible concrete explanations for both Stephanie and me, as they often do for everyone. For Stephanie, this feeling could be at least partly attributed to a longing for her mother, who had died when Stephanie was two. For me, it may have been related to growing up with divorced parents and moving from house to house once a week or more. I often longed for a place of my own—to be *settled*. I always thought that once I was older and could finally set roots somewhere, I would be completely secure, totally happy.

Now that I am old enough to settle down on my own, however, and have traveled extensively in the last few years, I have come to accept that the physical place I think of as home is no guarantee of security and comfort. This may sound like a disheartening recognition, but I have actually found it freeing to realize that no one place defines my sense of security: it is really much wider than that. It is not an external place or a specific way of life that I can turn to for peace and shelter, but rather a place within myself that is available to me in any situation, even if I am not always successful in accessing it. It is possible to be at home anywhere.

When I was a sophomore in college, this place of unconditional security within myself could not have

been more deeply hidden. I felt entirely out of control—of my own life, as well as of the events around me. A couple of years before, the first presidential election I could vote in, in the year 2000, had been decided not by “the American people,” but by the nine people on the Supreme Court, leaving me feeling dis-

*I called my mom the first night after I pitched my tent on the Lake Erie beach, to tell her that I loved her and I was OK. I didn't say, “I miss you.” Instead I thanked her for letting me go.*

connected from the decisions that govern world affairs. Then there was the shock of September 11, still fresh in my mind; we were approaching a war with Iraq, and had been bombing Afghanistan for months. Aside from world events, I felt dissatisfied socially and overwhelmed academically. I became confused about where my personal grief ended and where it bled into the collective suffering in the world, and I felt entirely helpless to do anything about either. It seemed that I could not help the world while I was nearly debilitated by my own sadness, and I also could not seek solace in the outside world when all I could see around me was suffering and violence. I felt there was no secure place in the entire world.

Sensing that I needed a change in my way of looking at things, I planned a year abroad. I would spend four months in Bodh Gaya, India, living and studying at a Buddhist monastery with 30 students, then would head immediately to Paris to live at a university there for five months. I could feel that I was doing the right thing, but in the weeks before my departure date, I became increasingly afraid: if I was feeling this “homesick” at home, how would I cope with spending a year in entirely new environments? After saying goodbye to my mom and sister at the airport, I was immediately seized by a tangible, stinging fear. This feeling stayed with me for the next several days of the orientation program in London, as I dragged my bags through airports, tried to navigate the London subway system, and ate potato chips in phone booths for dinner. On the plane from London to Delhi, I remember thinking that I could not understand why people chose to put themselves in situations like this—diving alone into the complete unknown—when they could be secure in their homes, with friends to call, a mom to make breakfast, and a familiar coffee shop down the street.

After days of traveling by plane, train, and car, our group of new students arrived at the monastery in a succession of jeeps. It was after dark when we drove in,

and the only people out were a few old men sitting on upturned boxes, drinking chai on the side of the road. I was terrified about living in this tiny town with one main dirt road, sleeping on a cot in one of these old buildings, having to go to the tailor in town to get an entirely new set of clothes made, and having to let go of

*I say to myself: "Try feeling at home.  
Try remembering that you are at home,  
right here, in this scary moment."*

music and chocolate and partying with friends.

But then I got out of the jeep and was greeted by the monastery dog, her five puppies in tow, and the monks shouted *namastes* and welcomes as we unloaded our backpacks from the jeeps. I walked around the courtyard slowly, stopping at each peaceful, smiling Buddha statue. Suddenly, I could not stop beaming. During our first dinner, which consisted of rice and dal and chapattis, I could hardly believe myself as I turned to another American student, someone I did not know at all, and said, "This is the first time I've felt happy in so, so long," my eyes filling up with tears of relief. *I am at home*, I kept thinking.

While there were many difficulties in the beginning weeks—an entire weekend spent vomiting into a hole in the ground (our toilet), intense cravings for fresh fruits and vegetables, adjusting to getting stared at everywhere I went—I quickly felt at home in this monastic community of people all committed to living peacefully and with kindness, and to abiding by certain rules that made sense to me. Living at the monastery meant taking a vow to follow the five precepts—the rules the Buddha taught as the path to a fulfilling, healthy life for laypeople. The precepts forbid lying, taking any form of life, stealing, sexual misconduct (which meant abstinence in the context of the monastery), and the use of intoxicants. A monk on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya from Sri Lanka once told me, "There is no doubt. If you follow these five precepts, you will be happy. You will have a good life."

Giving my actions over to a strong trust in those guidelines freed me from the confusion that had been dominating my days at home. In college, I would often turn to pot and alcohol and one-night stands in hopes of finding security. I would always wake up with the homesick feeling intensified and my head and heart cloudier. Living at the monastery, I began to understand freedom not as a lazy day spent doing whatever I "wanted," but rather as giving myself the gift of following certain rules that made me feel good, spending time every day meditating, doing yoga, and writing—being present for my life, even if this some-

times meant staying with painful feelings until they passed on their own.

A gong woke us at five every morning (if the confused roosters in the front yard had not already gotten to us hours before). We dressed in silence in our *salwar kameez* and *kurtas*, listening to the loud rhythmic chanting coming from the mosque in town. We took turns at the sink, waiting to brush our teeth and splash cool water on our sweaty cheeks. Walking down to the Buddha hall, we passed the open-air kitchen where the two nuns at the monastery were chopping vegetables and stirring lentils in huge copper pots. A dog or two would be curled up on the kitchen floor, waiting patiently for scraps. The sun came up during the hour we sat in the Buddha hall on worn blue cushions. By the time we emerged from meditation, the little boys at the yellow house across the field would be playing cricket on the roof with sticks and rocks; the women would be hanging saris from second-floor windows to dry in the sun. We maintained Noble Silence throughout our breakfast of porridge or sweetened rice gruel, following the monastic custom of eating silently in order to taste each bite.

Gradually, I fell utterly in love with Bodh Gaya and with the monastic life of meditation and subsistence. It happened without my noticing it—while I was busy wringing dirty water out of my underpants, or chatting with monks over cups of chai. I loved giving my day over to the regularity of the gongs. I loved the mornings when it was my turn to get up early and sweep the Buddha hall before everyone else filed down for meditation at 5:30, and the afternoons spent carrying buckets of shit-covered toilet paper to the trash heap to be burned. I loved sitting on the cot outside my room, eating an apple and watching the rain flood the rice fields. I stopped missing certain things about home, and then I stopped missing at all. I just wanted to do yoga alone on the roof and speak with our Burmese meditation teachers about my practice. I just listened for the deep rumble of the gongs.

Looking back on my first night in India, and on the joyful months that followed, I have come to realize that often the most fearful times in our lives are pathways to the most beautiful ones. Within days of arriving at the monastery in Bodh Gaya—adjusting to an entirely new way of life, letting go of all the patterns and comforts of my life "at home"—I went from feeling totally groundless and out of place to enjoying an all-encompassing sense of ease and complete trust in the world around me. Once I learned how safe and at peace I could feel in an entirely foreign place, my idea of home expanded: all the world became a potentially peaceful shelter.

Since returning from India, I have chosen to put myself in many more new and initially uncomfortable



situations. Several months ago, after graduating from college in Connecticut, I packed up my car and drove out West by myself. I hoped to find affordable housing in a town or city I loved, and to attempt to make my living as a writer. I had no more definite plan than that. I had maps and a book of campgrounds, a sleeping bag and a tent.

The night before I left, I began to feel afraid and doubtful. I was rushing to do laundry and deciding whether or not I needed to bring that sweater and those boots and if so, where I would put them, and how many photographs to bring, and resigning myself to leaving behind my favorite pink Victorian lamp that I'd had in every room of my life since eighth grade. I did all this with the painful, shallow breath of panic in my chest, similar to the fear I had had in the early India days. At midnight, I called my best friend: "What do I think I'm doing? I have no plans, no friends out there, no job; I know nothing about California or British Columbia or Oregon. I just have all these maps in a pile on the passenger's seat of my car, and I've barely even looked at them. Why am I doing this?" And then I answered my own question, my voice suddenly calmer: "Because the other option is just to stay here at home, and I know what's at home. It's just time to leave."

In the morning, as I shoved shut the trunk of my car after four tries and went to hug my mom goodbye, car keys in hand, the panic returned. I felt guilty about leaving my family and terrified of facing the world on my own. I wondered briefly if I ought to just stay home. But then I filled up my travel mug with iced coffee and put on Liz Phair's song "Westbound" as I merged onto I-90, and I was suddenly shouting along with the music and laughing out loud because I felt so full of the possibility that was my life and I knew that I was doing the right thing. I was stepping into freedom, giving myself the chance to be OK on my own.

Throughout that drive, there were many other times when I found myself laughing out loud in my car, gulping down the air rushing through my windows, because I was so full of the fact of myself: the absurdity and the beauty and the importance of me alone in my '92 Camry, driving from Boston to San Francisco—the very fact that I was alive, here and breathing, seeing nothing but seas of corn for days in a

row. I had to be alone with my quiet self and see what there was to be seen. A line from a Joan Didion essay kept going through my head: "I began to cherish the loneliness of it all, the sense that at any given time no one need know where I was or what I was doing."

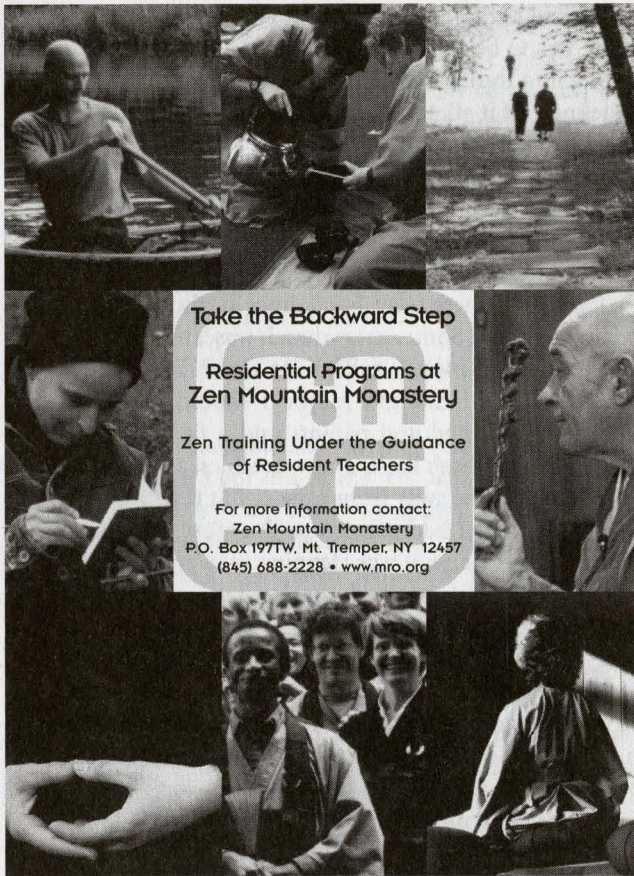
I called my mom the first night after I pitched my tent on the Lake Erie beach, to tell her that I loved her and I was OK. I didn't say, "I miss you." Instead I thanked her for letting me go.

Of course there were hard times in the days and weeks to follow. Sometimes when it was late and I was running out of money and was lost and didn't know where to stay, I thought maybe I should go home where I had a bed and parents and a fridge full of casseroles and fresh fruits and vegetables, and friends to call to take me away from myself. But then I would remember why I had left; it was the most important thing I'd ever done; it was stepping into my own life, owning the mistakes and the hard times and the laughter and singing and bathing in streams on the side of the highway. It was learning that security is fluid, that perfect shelter may be a dusty tent in the Wyoming mountains one night, the pull-out couch of a friend of a friend the next, and a Zen center in San Francisco the night after that.

India taught me that I have to leave what I've always known. It's how I get wide and open and scared, and then learn that the fear passes and is often replaced by something wondrous. It's how I ended up alone on the beach in Montecito, California, a town I'd never even heard of, smiling into the sun and running along the line where the waves meet the land, kicking water onto my legs and stomach as the tide came in, and realizing suddenly that all I could hear was the sound of the

Drawing by Roberta  
Pyx Sutherland





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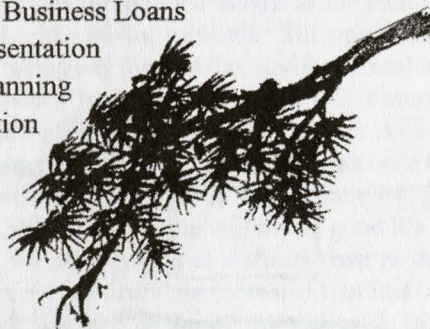
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ocean. My experience in India taught me not only how quickly our feelings of fear and groundlessness can give way to wonder and trust, but also gave me concrete tools for handling the panic of being unsettled. Although I had been exposed to the Buddha's teachings through my parents from a young age, it was not until really putting the teachings into practice and being surrounded by others embodying these teachings in all their actions that I began to truly understand what is meant by taking refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha.

This became clear to me during my first night in San Francisco. I was lost, it was getting dark, and I was hungry and tired. After parking my car to get directions and something to eat, I came back to find my car window smashed and most of my valuables gone. I found myself taking refuge aloud: *Buddham saranam gachami, dhammam saranam gachami, sangham saranam gachami*. Although I still felt shaken up, it helped immensely to remind myself that I have all the knowledge I need to handle anything that comes up (refuge in the dharma); that it is possible to wake up to that place where I am always sheltered, always at peace, where the thoughts and worries and stressful details and devastating collapses all pass over me like clouds through a big clear sky (refuge in the Buddha, and my own Buddhanature); that others have gone through the same pains as I have and are there to help (refuge in the sangha). It did all work out OK in the end. I found a place to stay and people to help me get my car window fixed and report the burglary to the police.

I think so often of Munindra-ji on those crowded, dirty tracks at the Patna railroad station, and I try to let myself fall into the truth of his words: "I am always at home." Even when I'm surrounded by strangers in a foreign city, or I wake up in the morning and out of nowhere comes that emptiness, that longing for something solid to cling to, so that I am not just floating in this giant world that offers no securities and makes no promises, I say to myself: "Try feeling at home. Try remembering that you *are* at home, right here, in this scary moment." I can't always feel this, but it helps just to turn to my breath, the natural rise and fall—this most basic action of life that happens without any effort from me—and I usually can gain at least a little trust in the process, in the groundlessness.

Leaving home has taught me that the journey is not about finding security. It is about accepting that I *am* groundless: even if I am ever "settled down" with a well-paying job and a family and a house in my name, the homesick feeling will still be there at times. Letting myself be inside that feeling, without fear—at home in the homesickness—is the most security I can hope for. ❖

# Journey into Pain

by Clay Taylor

Sometimes I forget that others don't face disabling, chronic pain as the central issue in their daily lives. They get up in the morning, have breakfast, take the kids to school, then put in an eight-hour day at their jobs. They ride on airplanes without difficulty; they shop for the foods they enjoy at the grocery store. They read the newspaper or talk on the phone while sitting in a chair. If they're Buddhists, they get to practice sitting upright. And they take all these activities for granted.

For most of the past seven years, I have been so incapacitated that going shopping or even sitting upright in a chair has been far beyond my realm of possibility. I have simply been trying to survive severe back pain. More recently, I've been able to sit for 20 minutes at a time, and I can make short forays to the market to pick up a few items for dinner.

Disability is hard to talk about because the gap between my experience and that of others is huge. Take, for example, attending a simple social function, such as my daughter Ellie's soccer game, or a preschool birthday party for my other daughter, Hannah. I cannot sit or stand long enough to participate in conversation or play with the kids, and other people don't know how to break the ice with me because I'm lying on my back—a little out of the way, so I won't get stepped on or tripped over. Why won't anyone talk to me? Someone could at least ask if I need anything or if I'm feeling OK. People avoid me because I'm different, and I know that uncomfortable feeling, too, so I try to simply enjoy the lively atmosphere, which beats the isolation of staying home alone. Fortunately, my wife, Anne, and our two daughters keep an eye out for me and say hello periodically. I'm there for them as much as for myself.

Our social circle has shrunk down to a few friends who are willing to accommodate me in their homes, who no longer feel uncomfortable when I lie down midway through dinner. And because I'm in less pain when I'm in motion, I have developed a network of friends with whom I walk.

I injured my back in the summer of 1997, right after I finished graduate school at U.C. Berkeley with a master's degree in environmental science. At the time, I was conducting a research project about the impacts of ranching practices on water quality in the Central Valley of California. I spent long days driving to distant ranches, and long hours at a computer summarizing data and writing up a report. When my lower back started hurting, I had to cut back my hours because I

couldn't sit without being in a lot of pain. Then I borrowed a laptop computer and typed up my project while lying on the floor. I went to the doctor, started physical therapy, saw a chiropractor, and really focused on taking care of myself. The MRIs showed a bulging disc, but conservative treatment was recommended over surgery. I was set to start a new job in September, and I thought I was doing everything right.

On my second day at work for the East Bay Municipal Utility District, I began a tour of the watershed in a four-wheel-drive truck on dirt roads. I only made it for an hour before the back pain sent me home for the day. What a dreadful way to start a new career! The doctor put me on half-time work and said no more riding around in trucks. Her opinion was that I would recover in a few months if I took care of myself. I set up a standing workstation and alternated between sitting and standing at my computer. Gradually, however, my back became more painful and I needed to lie down at work. People gave me some funny looks. I brought a pad to lie down on, propped my head up on a pillow and set my computer monitor on a chair beside me. My job required substantial writing and editing, but any fieldwork had to be curtailed.

Eventually my neck started hurting from straining to see my computer while I was lying on the floor. So no position was working for me anymore—not sitting, standing, or lying down. The doctor took me off work completely and put me on total temporary disability, and I cried that night at the dinner table when I gave this news to my wife.

I could not imagine that my back and neck pain would become a long-term condition. I had so much to do with my life. I was 34 years old, just starting an interesting career, and had my wife and one-year-old daughter to support. Long-term disability was not in my plans.

For the next four years, I tried an assortment of therapies and treatments, both conventional and alternative. Despite optimistic practitioners, these therapies provided no more than minimal, temporary relief, ultimately leading me to consult a pain management specialist for opiate (narcotic) drug therapy.

Maintaining Zen practice under these circumstances was very challenging. Sitting upright was impossible, so I began to practice lying down. Because of the pain medication, after 10 or 15 minutes I was usually napping. I talked about my struggles with the late Maylie Scott, a priest from Berkeley Zen Center

**People don't know how to break the ice with me because I'm lying on my back—a little out of the way, so I won't get stepped on or tripped over.**

**Despite the blanket of gloom I lived under, a deep instinct still flickered inside of me; it told me that I was still valuable because I was connected to others.**

(BZC), and we began meeting on a regular basis. I didn't think I could really practice at the time because I felt so out of it. I was really groggy, spent most of my days at home alone, lying down on ice packs, and I was very confused. The life I had known was gone. I didn't know who I was, although I was trying to keep up a good front.

Maylie was very forthright and compassionate with me. She clearly saw the physical pain I was in, and for several months she visited me weekly at my house when I was too incapacitated to go outside. Her presence alone was reassuring. We talked about my doctors and diagnoses, my loneliness and fear of losing control, and the basic ground of awareness that I was trying to maintain. This didn't seem like meditation practice to me. It was too ugly. I was too scared to admit my deep sense of failure, and I was desperately clinging to the hope of regaining my abilities. This cloud of gloom and dread was so foreign to me that I couldn't reconcile with it. So I quietly carried on with my denial and unspoken terror. I think Maylie recognized that my denial was a healthy self-preservation tool, and she encouraged my efforts to sort through the confusing loss of identity at my own pace.

Around this time, my osteopath encouraged me to begin walking again, using a special brace he had made for my pelvis. I started with five minutes a day, which was one trip around the block. Gradually, I added one minute to my walking time until I reached 15 minutes after several weeks. Over the next year I worked up to an hour's worth of walking, and this exercise began to relieve my pain.

One day in January of 2000, Maylie arrived at my house, and when I opened the door she looked at me with her big penetrating eyes and knew that my energy had changed. Color had returned to my face and my spirit was lifting. It was marvelous to feel that my condition was turning around and that I had potential for improvement. Unfortunately for me, that year Maylie moved north to Arcata, California, to head her own Zen center. Knowing that I needed to connect with people and was now able to venture outside my house, she encouraged me to give a student talk at Berkeley Zen Center. I had not gone to the zendo since my injury because I was unable to sit up in traditional meditation posture. But I had previously established a very consistent practice there, and in 1995 I had taken the precepts and been lay ordained by the abbot, Mel Weitsman. Although I was no stranger there, I certainly felt like one since becoming disabled.

Student talks are given at 6:30 AM on Mondays, so I dragged myself out of bed and went to the zendo with my foam mattress in tow. I gave my student talk lying on the floor on an ice pack with my head propped up

to see people. It's painful to recall how different I felt from the upright audience of 30 people during that first encounter with the sangha in my disabled state. No one was much aware of my situation besides Maylie, and she wasn't there. I spoke about what I was going through and the pain I was suffering. I don't recall the responses of anyone except Mel, who noted my embarrassment and thanked me for my efforts. No matter what people thought of me, this was my restart at formal Zen practice.

I decided to attend lectures on Saturday mornings, and I began participating in the sangha life again. The regulars got used to the sight of me lying there on my ice packs, looking through prism glasses. The newcomers would still look askance at me, but what did they know of my life? After lectures, I would take my pad into the courtyard to have tea and cookies, and friendly people would sit with me on the grass. That touched my heart. I began to feel part of the community again.

For two years I served on the board of directors of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. I attended board meetings and retreats and helped raise money as chair of the development committee, all while lying down. I learned to use voice recognition software and to speak to my computer from a reclining chair. I also coordinated a sangha support network at BZC to help people who were struggling with medical problems. I saw that the greatest difficulty for someone in need is simply asking for help. Sangha members are generally willing to help others when asked, and are often gratified to be of service. I was feeling connected and useful again, like I had a purpose in the world and my life had value.

And yet, I was still in constant pain. Since my condition appeared to be incurable, pain reduction through an ever increasing dosage of daily narcotics was still my only remaining option. My doctor prescribed OxyContin, a powerful, sustained-release narcotic. When I first started OxyContin, I'd get a pretty good buzz going, as well as a reduction in pain. But I was still unable to sit or stand still for more than a few minutes before severe pain flared up. So the doctor had to keep increasing my dosage, eventually to 80 milligrams per day—the equivalent of 20 Vicodin pills. At first I would feel some relief, but gradually my body returned to its old pain equilibrium. The scary part was that I became physically addicted to the drug, and if I missed a dose by only two or three hours, I would begin to have withdrawal sickness—body aches and fever.

I had always assumed I would return to work in some form or another. With the assistance of a vocational rehabilitation counselor, I developed a self-employment plan to consult as a natural resources manager, which would permit me to work from home part time. An ergonomist helped me design the optimal work environment, with a custom chair and a few

other modified office supplies. I figured I could work about four hours a day.

But after only three months of preparing to work, my body revolted against what my mind was telling it to do. My back and neck pain had increased to the point where I could only work from my reclining chair for 20 minutes at a time. After five years of being out of work, I finally faced the realization that no matter how hard I tried, my body simply could not perform the activities necessary for employment. My strategy of taking narcotics had backfired, because in masking the pain, I had further injured my spine by pushing too hard to get back to work.

Work had always given me satisfaction and purpose, but now, in the midst of my near-complete physical incapacitation, I had to reconsider my life on a very deep level. I love the sense of competence and challenge that a good job provides, not to mention the income, status, and engagement with the world. My hopes for a new career were shattered, and I was also no longer able to serve on the BPF board. I felt I had lost my role as partner, parent, provider, and professional, and I was overwhelmed by a feeling of failure. My hour of despair had finally arrived.

In frustration, I began to slowly withdraw from OxyContin, and the pain came roaring back. It took about 12 weeks until I was drug-free. The first few days of each dosage reduction were the hardest. I craved the drug and felt edgy and anxious. In the middle of the night, I would wake up and know that I was really a junkie withdrawing from smack. I wanted sex, candy, television—anything to relieve the desperate craving. I was in a terrible downward cycle of devastating pain and disability. I just wanted to die.

Prolonged, severe pain creates tunnel vision, and for the first time I considered ending my life. But despite the blanket of gloom I lived under, a deep instinct still flickered inside of me; it told me that I was still valuable because I was connected to others. I made a promise that I would talk with my wife before I took the irreversible step of suicide. My sister had killed herself in 1995, so I knew personally the devastation wreaked on a family—and I didn't want that for my wife and children.

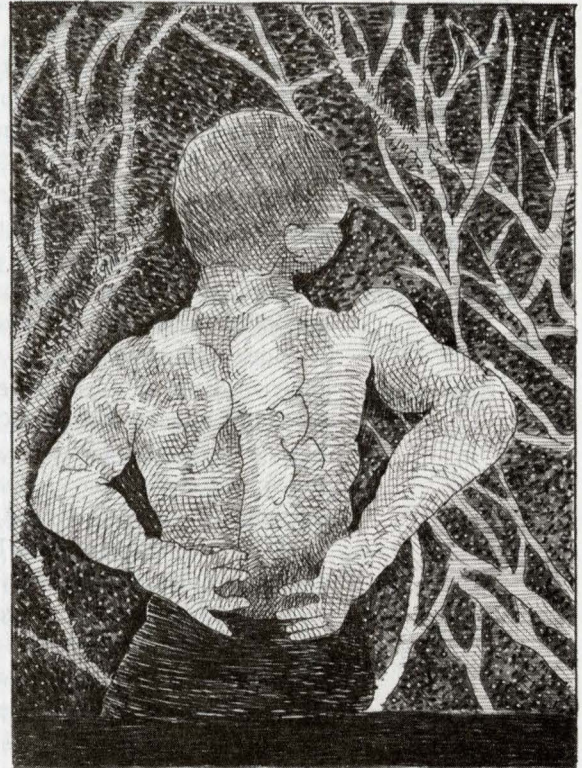
I was at a critical juncture in my life, and I needed help. So I turned to two compassionate men in my life who were also spiritual journeymen. The first was Skip, my sponsor in the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) program. Coming from an addictive family system, I had been involved in ACOA for many years. Skip played an indispensable role in my grief process by simply listening to me and validating my emotional wreckage. As I spoke of my deep shame and failure, he said I was right where I needed to be: "Feel your feelings, that's what's true right now. Just feel awful...

because life has served up a major catastrophe." A 12-step sponsor is a wonderful person to have in your life; you can call him anytime and it doesn't cost a penny. The second man was my therapist, himself a disabled Buddhist and 12-step veteran. He encouraged me to accept my disappointment as a way into myself, rather than seeing it as something to escape from. That helped turn me toward embracing my suffering.

Connecting with my rage and despair allowed me to move through the paralysis of physical and emotional pain. My heart broke wide open and for three months I cried at least once a day. I've experienced many losses in my life, but this kind of grief was unknown to me. To my surprise, I found it wonderful to really let go, to take my broken shell of identity and just throw it off and weep. The smallest things triggered my grief: hugging my children, watching a tragedy on the news, noticing flowers in my neighborhood.

During these months, I consulted a new pain management doctor who advised me to get up off the floor and start moving around as much as possible, in order to regain muscle strength. Exercising was challenging because I hurt all over, but lying down all the time only made me feel worse. I started going to the YMCA every day and using the cross trainer for cardiovascular exercise. Zen practice is said not to be about self-improvement, but when I was on that cross trainer, all I wanted was improvement. And improve I did, as the exercise released endorphins that relieved my pain.

I have maintained a daily physical therapy routine for the past two years, which has reduced my pain and improved my condition so that I can now enjoy hiking in the mountains and gardening again. My ongoing experience with pain has also confirmed for me the most enigmatic of Buddhist truths: that I have no abiding self. As the conditions of my life have changed dramatically, so has my experience of myself. I can see more clearly that my identity is truly a composite of the five *skandhas* (aggregates). As I realize the shifting nature of



Drawing by  
Hamlet Mateo

*Hamlet Mateo grew up in the Dominican Republic. He lives in Sonoma County, California, and is working on his second poem comic. He has practiced Zen meditation since 1998.*

**I was the first person at Berkeley Zen Center that I knew of to lie down during zazen, and I didn't really know if I was worth that much floor space.**

my life, I can live more freely within the present, rather than continually reaching for something better.

What happened with my formal meditation practice at Berkeley Zen Center during my crisis and its aftermath? I felt ambivalent about practicing at BZC; I needed support, but I was ashamed of my condition. It just didn't seem like the kind of place where sobbing occurred. The formality and upright conduct which dominate practice life didn't match my psychological state. Here was an obvious contradiction: I was in a deep spiritual crisis, but I didn't feel my spiritual practice center was the right place to go for help. People were aware of my chronic pain because I had been attending regularly, but no one had reached out to me since Maylie left. The silent practice of meditation can perpetuate a culture of silence in which addressing personal issues may create discomfort. I hadn't seen any role models at BZC disclosing personal troubles, which would have made me feel comfortable articulating my own deep level of despair.

However, my spirit said to practice anyway. When there appeared to be no refuge from the pain, I chose to return to sangha and BZC. I needed something beyond results and circumstances, and I didn't have much left to lose. After all, Buddhism is about suffering, isn't it? I could lie around at BZC just as well as I could lie around at my house. In rejoining the sangha, I developed deeper faith in my practice.

I quietly returned to the zendo three mornings a week. It took a lot of courage to practice with others when I was in pain. In my fragile state, I was terrified of being rejected. On the other hand, to be accepted by the community as a disabled person would mean for me to accept my disability. I cried quietly during zazen for the first few months. Getting my aching body up in the morning for 5:40 zazen was a tremendous chore. So was doing services, which I chanted while lying on my back. Gradually, I began to do standing bows during service. After a year I could complete the nine full bows to the floor.

Other obstacles to formal practice were considerable, the first of which was simply occupying three spaces by lying down. I was the first person at Berkeley Zen Center that I knew of to lie down during zazen, and I didn't really know if I was worth that much floor space. During walking meditation in the zendo, I needed to leave and walk around the block at a brisker pace to relieve the pain in my back. Oryoki, the formal Zen meal with elaborate guidelines for folding napkins, proper use of utensils, and washing the bowls was preposterous for me. The servers didn't know what to make of me lying there in silence, trying to manage bowls and utensils while on my back. But I persevered, wanting to experience the full ceremony. For me, practice became a matter of balancing my abilities with the

requirements of traditional Zen formality.

I wondered how other people with disabilities or chronic pain would navigate formal Zen practice. I was willing and able to adapt the forms to my abilities, largely because I already knew them from my previous experience as an able-bodied Zen student. An uninitiated person with chronic pain would find it virtually impossible to integrate into Berkeley Zen Center.

I joined the practice committee in 2003 and brought some of my concerns to the sangha. As a result, BZC created a disabled parking space, began asking people if they needed preferential seating for Saturday lectures, and offered rides to sangha members who were unable to drive themselves.

BZC deserves much credit over the past decade for constructing two wheelchair ramps and an accessible bathroom. As the sangha has aged and begun to face their own degenerating bodies, BZC has regularly offered partial-day sittings with shorter zazen periods for those with physical limitations. I organized two meditation groups for people with disabilities, which now meet at BZC. These milestones represent great progress, but BZC could still have a more personal touch—welcoming people with disabilities and asking them if they need some help to develop a practice to match their abilities. The next step toward inclusiveness might be to appoint an outreach person to fill this role. This kind of contact would have helped me manage many of the substantial obstacles I encountered along the path.

Eventually, through my gritty efforts, I became fully involved in sangha life again. I meditated full-day sesshins and joined the practice committee. Mel, the abbot, gave me a leadership position of head *jiki-do* (temple cleaner), and I coordinated weekly cleaning of the zendo. I'm unable to clean the zendo myself, but I can instruct others in doing so. Mel conducted *dokusan* (practice discussion) in his office, where there was room for me to lie down, and we began walking together in the Berkeley Hills, which helped both my back and Mel's weight loss program.

As I further customized my practice at BZC, no one ever said to me, "You can't do that," so I kept doing things I had thought were forbidden because they broke with tradition. I shared my struggles with the sangha via two Monday morning student talks, and people became very understanding and supportive of my practice. At the end of my first all-day sitting (or lying, in my case), I realized deeply that sitting is the glue that binds this community together. I missed that feeling of belonging—I had not been able to participate in retreats for six years. But somehow I came back, I persevered, and that spirit of practice matters most—just keep trying. ❖

*Clay Taylor and his wife and children now live in Colorado. His condition is gradually improving. He invites your responses at <claytaylor5@hotmail.com>.*

# Being with What Is

## Teaching Meditation to People with Chronic Pain and Disabilities

by Naomi Weissman

The label “disabled” is so frightening. Out of fear I separate my longing for connection to other disabled people from the terror of what I might become. For more than 10 years I’ve been trying to pretend I’m not disabled. After all, I look normal—I can walk, talk, sit, stand. Hardly any of my friends are disabled. I have no wheelchair, no attendants. I’m not like the others in the disabled community. I walk along like everybody else. But it’s painful to walk, painful to sit, often painful to lie down. Back pain awakens me at night and greets me in the morning. After various doctors, tests, procedures, and contradictory theories I still have a lot of pain and it doesn’t go away.

I stopped working almost six years ago when the pain in my body was simply too intense for me to continue the life I had. I hoped that by slowing down, getting rid of the pressures of work, spending time doing my art, working with various healers, it would all change. I’d be cured. Or I’d wake up one morning and the pain miraculously would be gone. Or someone would invent a painkiller that keeps working and has no side effects. Western doctors call what I have “degenerative disc disease,” but opinions are all over the map when it comes to what’s actually causing the pain, and there are even more opinions about what, if anything, can be done. At times I try new treatments, new doctors; other times, I tire of being a patient and I work on my own with an amalgam of exercises I’ve put together from yoga teachers, physical therapists, chiropractors. I don’t notice that they help much, but people say I’d be in worse pain if I did nothing.

Since about 1980 I’ve been meditating in the vipassana tradition. I’m the third kind of meditator the Buddha spoke of—one for whom it’s hard in the beginning, hard in the middle, hard at the end. My faith wavers, yet I go on week long retreats and try to be with my body, pain and all. It’s easy to fall into resentment, self-pity, comparing mind, and especially aversion to the pain. Even so, I invariably leave retreats feeling deeply connected to the practice and to a part of myself I barely know. For me it’s another way of looking at things, experiencing life at a level of ease and acceptance so different from my conditioning. I continue to find the Buddha’s teachings a practical and meaningful system of dealing with suffer-

ing, my own and others’. So I continue to practice. It’s often a struggle, but then, I’m a struggler.

A year and a half ago I signed up for a group at the Berkeley Zen Center called Suffering and Delight, run by Darlene Cohen, a Zen priest with rheumatoid arthritis. The group was to meet once a month and explore how one could have a joyful life living with pain and disability. As I entered the community room for the first time and looked about, I was flooded with an almost overwhelming level of compassion. Two people were in wheelchairs while the others lay about on the floor with a varied array of cushions and pads, following Darlene’s dictum of getting as comfortable as possible. People told their stories and I listened with a mixture of horror, fascination, sadness, and care. One person had muscular dystrophy, another could not speak without great pain, and others had varying degrees of disability, all much worse than mine, or so I judged.

By the end of that first afternoon I had begun to comprehend the tremendous courage of the people around me in simply being willing to live their lives. My own trials seemed trivial by comparison, but on some level I understood that I was, after all, part of the group and as such, deserved as much compassion as I felt for the others. It was a revelation that marked the beginning of an ongoing question: how to hold my pain more compassionately and in a way that allowed for not only suffering but delight as well. Darlene’s message was that we could see pain as just one aspect of our lives, and that we could also cultivate moments of pleasure and joy. We could move toward resting in what Trungpa Rinpoche called “basic goodness.”

Our ongoing assignment was to meditate for 30 minutes, five times a week. During the year and a half that the group met, we practiced Zen, vipassana, and body awareness meditations. To be honest, I often didn’t do the whole 30 minutes—it was just too much to be with my pained body for that long. I did what I could.

Each month’s session had a theme that Darlene spoke to, and we then worked with it on our own during the month. One theme was “connecting to our pleasure.” During the month we were to track one pleasant experience each day, noting when we were aware of it, how the body felt during it, and whether the experience was something we had intentionally brought about or whether it was a matter of noticing something we

were already doing. Another time we worked with anger, spending the month noticing and observing our anger, watching it change into something else. I watched my attachment to anger and my wish that it would change. And I saw that it could change in a heartbeat.

Sometimes I found myself angry at Darlene for showing by example that it is possible to both allow the pain and cultivate joy. I was forced to see my “this is too hard,” story for what it was—my heart closing down to the pain—and to move beyond it if I could, and try to be kind when I couldn’t.

Several months after Darlene’s group started, Clay Taylor, another group member who had become a good friend, suggested that the two of us teach a weekly class in meditation for people living with pain and disability. Darlene’s group had motivated me to want to help others despite, or perhaps because of, my pain. Between the group and my vipassana practice, I had learned something about meditating with chronic pain, and I felt a need to share my understanding and experience with others living with pain and disabilities. Clay is a real get-the-job-done kind of guy, and together we planned our class. Wednesday mornings we met on our adjoining mats on my living room floor and discussed our lives, our disabilities, the dharma, and what we might be able to offer. These meetings with Clay became a high point of my week, engendering more energy as we went along—reading, talking, and finding useful material, creating a six-week class that dealt with body, mind, and spirit. Clay was a member of the Berkeley Zen Center, but he was interested in exploring the vipassana tradition. Together we found relevant readings from Buddhist teachers such as Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Pema Chödrön, and

Trungpa Rinpoche. One day when I voiced my concern about not knowing enough, Clay replied, “Whatever we give them will be better than nothing.” I return to that mantra in moments of uncertainty.

We created a flyer and Clay located space for our group at the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley. He interviewed people who were interested, we set a time, and we began our class. On Mondays, the day before the group met, I would experience great anxiety. Given the pain I was in, it simply didn’t seem possible to lead a group the next day. I wanted to lie in bed and read or space out watching television.

But when Tuesday came and I showed up, the resistance somehow melted away in front of the group. The pain was there but no longer in the foreground of my consciousness.

Attendance was low, but that didn’t seem to matter except perhaps to my ego. The class went well. People were visibly pleased to be in a group addressing their issues from the point of view of Buddhist meditation practices rather than the viewpoint of psychology, although at times the distinction got blurred. It was, too, a place where people could discuss what was really going on in their minds and bodies and be heard and supported in facing the challenges of their lives.

J. came to the group with chronic pain and agitation from a hip replacement gone awry. For a long time she was convinced that she wasn’t doing the meditation right; it wasn’t the peaceful, blissed-out experience she wanted or thought she should be having. One day she said to me in amazement, “You’ve been meditating for 20 years and look how anxious you are!” We laughed. It was true. At that moment I think she saw that meditation offered her permission to be just as she was. At the end of the class, she exclaimed, “I’m allowed to have thoughts!”

After the first six-week session, Clay moved to Colorado and it felt too difficult to continue on my own. I had relied on his support, and I felt inadequate to be the leader without him. I wasn’t the person I had been 20 years ago. I felt diminished by the pain. And I could easily slide into my “bad Buddhist” story—how I don’t practice enough, am not loving enough, don’t do right speech very well... It was a challenge to pay attention to the part of me that had a deep appreciation of meditation practice, and to believe that I could use my own experience with chronic pain to be of service to others.

A strong motivation to continue was that the group members felt it was important for us to do so. And it was important to me, too. My career as a photographer was pretty much on hold. I spent a good part of my day trying to get out of pain and watching with despair its persistent reappearance hours or moments later. Routine maintenance chores became the focus of my

### \* WIDENING SANGHA HOSPITALITY \*

Is your sangha truly welcoming to people with disabilities? We would like to draw your attention to an excellent resource that can help your sangha increase its accessibility to everyone.

Barbara Wenger of San Francisco Zen Center has prepared a set of guidelines that she will share with others upon request. She writes, “Among the millions of Americans with disabilities, many have spiritual needs that are not being met.”

Her draft document makes specific suggestions for increasing the sangha’s accessibility to people who are visually or hearing impaired, or who have impaired mobility, chronic illness, mental illness, or developmental disabilities. To request a copy of these guidelines, contact Barbara Wenger at <blwenger@comcast.net>.

Barbara Wenger’s guidelines are based on a public domain document of the National Organization on Disability (NOD) entitled “That All May Worship,” and personalized for Zen Center. You can find this document and other helpful information at NOD’s Web site: [www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org).



days. Many of my favorite entertainments, such as going to the movies or out to dinner with friends, often caused more physical pain than they were worth. If my life was reduced to basics, I wanted to strengthen my connection to Buddhist practice so that I could stop trudging through my days in a miasma of exhaustion and anger. I needed to be doing something in the world again in order to move beyond my own pain and fear. Teaching seemed a perfect way of helping others and challenging myself to go forward.

So I started the group up again. We now have eight members, and we meet at the Berkeley Zen Center, a space which lends a sense of sacredness to our purpose. With the group's approval I invited a good friend and fellow vipassana meditator, Ina Evans, to cofacilitate the group, though she is not disabled. Aside from Clay I knew no disabled meditators, and I figured that Ina had suffered in other ways in her life to make her eligible. Perhaps we all have.

Ina has been a good balance to my melancholic, Eeyore-like tendencies. While I want to dwell on the hindrances, she wants to speak of generosity and compassion. And having been friends for some 25 years, we're comfortable working together.

Ina leads a short lovingkindness meditation at the start and end of each group. At each meeting we discuss a reading and relate it to our practice. Last month we read a short piece called "The Storytelling Mind" by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, a Theravada monk who speaks of how we might learn to relate to our stories in ways that do not cause suffering. People told their stories, some about death and disease and incapacity. Could we confront these very difficult life situations with more compassion? Could we remove the self-contempt from the tales we use to define ourselves? Ina and I work hard to find relevant readings, and it's gratifying to see that people deeply connect to them.

I sometimes give a short talk based on the theme of the week, and Ina comments thoughtfully and humorously. Recently I spoke on "Being with What Is." Knowing I'm going to give a talk makes me more thoughtful during the week, as I relate my experiences to the subject at hand. Often I lead guided meditations—perhaps a body scan, a visualization of some sort, or a meditation on healing the wars inside us—I sometimes feel as though I'm watering a garden of thirsty plants.

At the end of our meetings we hold hands and send messages of well-being to each other and all beings. This and the group experience itself has created a powerful sense of heart-connectedness among us.

I have been moved to see group members awaken to the dharma and apply it to the bodies and minds we were born into. I talked with them in preparation for this article. Here are some of their comments:

L., a woman in a wheelchair with a progressive retrovirus that causes symptoms similar to multiple sclerosis, says:

All of the things meditation teaches me about living are directly counter to what I was brought up to believe. I feel as if, after all those years of therapy, I'm now involved in a substantial challenge to my stories, a real shift in consciousness. Being in a very tolerant community allows and facilitates that shift.

In the past I was so attached to results, and because of my physical condition, results were often meager. Now I can practice giving more credit to what I am able to do, appreciating what's there, whatever feeling or movement I do have in my legs.

M. has been blind since birth and has diabetes and other serious health issues. She says:

I'm an anxiety-ridden, worrying Westerner. So much of what I think of as physical healing has meant going to someone to fix it. The old "fix it for me" attitude is being replaced by a calming sense that on a deep level, I'm in charge of my own healing.

I love the hand-holding lovingkindness we do at the end of each group. It grounds me and helps me feel more connected to myself. Not being able to see others can be very disconnecting, and this is a good antidote. Focusing on my heart has helped me connect to myself. It reduces the pain and fear, which in turn helps my healing.

B. is M.'s partner. He makes it possible for her to get to the group with relative ease, and at present he's our token male. He says:

I always used to think of myself as a compassionate person but I've found, getting older, it's easy to become more bitter. I often see myself as a nonsocial, isolated person and I find the group energy is a way out of that isolation. The Buddhist practice has helped me step back from myself, and not stay attached to my stories. It gives me a different perspective.

We're completing our third six-week series. The pain in my body is intense these days, but my sense of being useful to others has grown. I worry that my pain will be too debilitating for me to continue teaching, or that I'll have nothing to say. There's a long list of reasons why I can't do it. But each week we hold the group, and it works. Right now planning and running the group is the most significant thing I'm doing, and that knowledge is deeply empowering. It's a privilege to be working with people who, in spite of extremely difficult physical circumstances, manage to show up for the group and are touched by our teaching. This work deepens my own connection to myself, to the group, and to the dharma. ❖

*Naomi Weissman is an artist and writer living in Berkeley, California.*

**Routine maintenance chores became the focus of my days.... I needed to be doing something in the world again in order to move beyond my own pain and fear.**

# On Spiritual Activism

by Reverend Deborah Johnson



At the base of activism is action and change. My activism consists not only of my own personal efforts; I also teach activists. In particular, I work with activists on issues of diversity, helping them to build coalitions and to get what they do done. I am an activist's activist. Generally speaking, I find that most activism is either pro-change, trying to change something, or it's anti-change, trying to make sure that something *doesn't* change. I often find that the ones who want the change and the ones who don't want the change end up butting heads.

As activists, we need to be cautious about how we characterize things, particularly when we are trying to hold the line. For instance, with an axiom like "Just Say No to Drugs," most of the activism implied in that statement is about trying to stop a dangerous change in our communities. We're seeing more and more of our people getting hooked on drugs, and basically, we're saying "No, this is not a direction that we want to go in. Let's hold the line and bring them back." The question that we always have to ask ourselves is, "What is the deepest intent of our activism?"

When you take part in an activist cause, I believe that your intent arrives before you do. You can't color it up. You can say that you're here to collaborate with us, but many times your intent to dominate the process shows up before you do. And intent is not just your "goal." A lot of times we set up goals for what we want to accomplish. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about your deepest motivation. What's really underneath why you are doing what you are doing? Is it to show somebody up? Is it to prove that you are right? Is it to stop people in their tracks? Ask yourself what your deepest intent really is, because you are going to meet your intent coming back at you, straight in your face. You've got to be very clear about what that intent is. Is it for the highest and the best?

I find the idea of "spiritual activism" interesting. From my perspective, everything is spiritual. The question is, do we know it? In my ministry, Inner Light, we try to encourage people to make everything in their life a ministry. We define it as "the intent to bless and to be blessed." So, if I have the intent to bless and be blessed by even the things that I don't like, I'm going to approach things differently.

Too much activism is being pushed by pain and rage. Rage pushes you to get the "enemy." And when you can't get the enemy you turn on each other. I've seen people who are so pushed by pain in their activism that they cannibalize each other! I've watched people burn out in their activism, but I have never seen anybody burn out because of the so-called enemy. I have never heard anybody say, "Oh, girl, racism is just too much! Oh, girl, homophobia is just too much. I can't deal with this." This is not what gets to people. They burn out because they are tired of working with each other.

Let me say this again. They burn out because they're tired of working with the people who are supposed to be on the same side. I think this happens when the intent is not really about wholeness. The intent is not pulled out of a vision. So then the question becomes, What is the vision? In the vision there should be truth, not just our own agendas. I believe there are at least two sides to every story, and then there is the truth. We get self-righteous when we get into our activism. But listen to what I am saying: in God's planet there is room for everybody. And if your vision does not include the "opposition," you need a bigger vision. You probably want them to include you, right?

Conflict is really not about our differences of opinion. Conflict is the polarization that we develop around our differences of opinion. Differences, in and of themselves, don't cause conflict. Conflict only arises when we polarize around opinions, when we say "if you're not with me, you're against me." And I don't think this is what we want. When you make everything in your life a ministry, it isn't so much a matter of what you do but how you do it. The particular causes and issues that you get involved in are not what make it spiritual activism. Your activism will be spiritual when you come to it with the intent of oneness, the intent of wholeness. So I ask again, what is your intent?

It is also important that we be *for* something and not always *against* something. Instead of saying, "We're here to end hunger," let's make it, "We're here to feed people!" "We're not here to end war, we're here to be peace!" This is what I want people to see. When they see us, I want them to see what we're about, not what we're against! Because as long as I'm still putting out what it is that I'm against, that's all that's seen. Whether I'm for hunger or against hunger, hunger is still dominating the landscape. Well, what about some *food*? When we start talking about feeding people

David Romtvedt  
"Submission"

I was trying to find the address of *Turning Wheel, the Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism*, to send them an article of my own. This is the problem with being a writer. I looked on the World Wide Web and there in the middle of the listings—*Turning Wheel* on Getting Old, on Medical Ethics, on Money, on Sexual Misconduct, on the Death Penalty, on Gay Buddhism—was the address of *Turning Wheels*, the award-winning magazine of the Studebaker Driver's Club, packed with interesting articles about Studebaker cars, trucks, and people. Before I realized that wheel was not wheels, I read an article on the Commemorative 1950s Sporty Cars postage stamp set, a series that included the 1953 Studebaker Starliner.

It made me think of a childhood friend whose mother drove a Studebaker—a 1956 Golden Hawk—and wore sunglasses and a scarf like a star in a romantic Hollywood film from before the war. She'd take us to school and when we got out of the car, she'd blow her son a kiss, blow me one too. I was 10. I imagined myself her lover, though I couldn't say what a lover would do, and hadn't asked my friend what had happened to his father. I'd often see her driving alone. She'd smile, wave, and shout hello as she drove by.

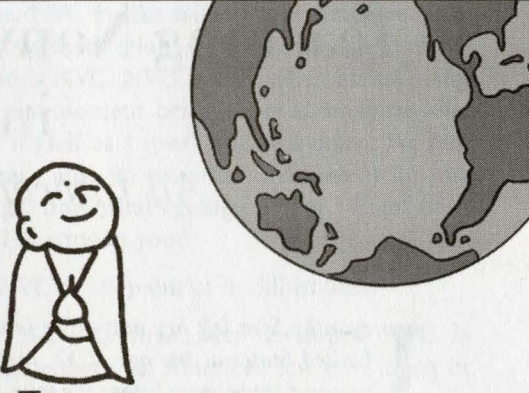
The article explained that the Starliner was designed with the aerodynamic lines and innovative look favored by American GIs returning from World War II. I turned the computer off and sat thinking, amazed by the clarity of my memories—my friend and his mother and how many years had passed, all those GIs who never returned. I imagined each one in his ghostly uniform, taking one hand off the steering wheel of the Studebaker and leaning over to kiss his wife, turning around to wink at one of his dead buddies drinking beer in the tiny back seat, his legs folded up into his chest. Jesus, I thought, so many lives we never know. Then I turned the computer back on to look up the address again. ❖

*David Romtvedt is a writer and musician. His books include Windmill: Essays from Four Mile Ranch and Some Church, a collection of poetry forthcoming from Milkweed Editions in 2005. He is the poet laureate of Wyoming.*

instead of ending hunger, our whole perspective will change. So, I am here to say, check out your intent, my brothers and sisters. ❖

This article is based on a talk given by Rev. Johnson on August 28, 2004, at a forum on spiritual activism held at the East Bay Church of Religious Science in Oakland, California.

*Deborah Johnson is the founder of Inner Light Ministries and The Motivational Institute, and the author of The Sacred Yes: Affirmations for Action.*



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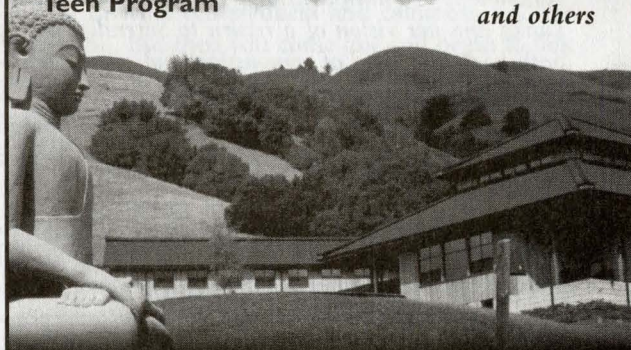
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# Teaching Nonviolent Communication in Sri Lanka

## *An Interview with Jeyanthi Siva*

by Jon Stewart

**J**eyanthi Siva left her native Sri Lanka for the United States at the age of 12, in 1980. That was just three years before the long-simmering ethnic, religious, and class conflicts broke out in that once-idyllic island (known, ironically, in ancient times as Serendip, meaning “happy fortune”), sparking a civil war between the majority Sinhalese (Buddhist) population and Jeyanthi Siva’s own Tamil (Hindu) minority. In 2002, at the age of 36, she and her husband, John Abbe, returned to Sri Lanka to offer the “parallel spiritual practices,” vipassana and Nonviolent Communication, to a people exhausted, grieving, and still seething with bitterness from 20 years of violence. The conflict has so far claimed more than 60,000 lives.



Jeyanthi Siva (left) with Ella Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi’s granddaughter)

Thanks to third-party intervention by Norwegian diplomats, among others, Sri Lanka has settled into a tentative, uneasy ceasefire between the Sinhalese-dominated government forces and the separatist Tamil rebels, led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, popularly known as the Tamil Tigers, since 2001. But the Norwegian-sponsored peace talks have made little progress, and violence and recrimination remain familiar facts of everyday life for both the Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese.

Jeyanthi returned to the Bay Area in August 2004 and spent two months spreading the word about her Nonviolent Communications (NVC) work in Sri Lanka and her vision of a return to Serendip, a long path back to a land of compassion and openheartedness. She believes this can happen through NVC, a practice grounded in the recognition that all human behavior arises from the same basic, deeply shared human needs.

Before returning to Sri Lanka in October 2004, Jeyanthi talked with Jon Stewart of *Turning Wheel* about NVC and its compatibility with her own Hindu roots, with Buddhism, and with her vipassana practice, and about her conviction that this blend of the spiritual and the practical offers a realistic path to peace in her beloved native land.

**Jon Stewart:** How do you characterize the conflict in Sri Lanka?

**Jeyanthi Siva:** It’s easy to see the conflict in Sri Lanka as an ethnic one, because of the way it’s been portrayed, but I don’t think it really is. And it’s only a religious conflict on the Sinhalese (Buddhist) side. On the Hindu (Tamil) side, Buddha is seen as another avatar, another guru, and many people put him on their altar. I think the reason the conflict has a religious aspect for the Buddhists is that the original myth of the Sinhalese people says that Buddha came down to the island and gave the Sinhalese the task of protecting Buddhism. So the Buddhists are not so much against Hinduism as believing that they have the task of protecting Buddhism. As to being an ethnic conflict, it’s made to look like one by the ruling elite in Colombo, but it’s really a class conflict. The Sinhalese peasants in the south who are in the army really have more in common with the Tamils in the north than with the Colombo elite.

**Jon:** What role do the Sinhalese Buddhist monks play today? I’ve heard it’s not a very positive one.

**Jeyanthi:** The monks have become very politicized. Their party, the JHU, won some seats in the last parliamentary elections. They’re quite popular because of their high status in the community as respected spiritual leaders and elders. You hear stories about how they’re almost like gods. Some are very political and oppose the peace talks and Norway’s involvement as the peace brokers, and others oppose making any concessions to the Tamil rebels. I have a lot of confusion about this—spiritual leaders are raising their fists and advocating fighting and violence, and agitating against the peace process.

**Jon:** I’ve read about a survey of the monks in which 75 percent of them say the Tamils have no legitimate grievances. How long has Sri Lanka’s Buddhist leadership been so politicized, and what about the Tamils’ spiritual leadership?

**Jeyanthi:** I really want to understand this. Another survey showed that less than five percent of the monks actually meditate. It’s not part of their practice. I have met a handful of monks who are on a more spiritual path, but they get marginalized

because things are so polarized, and the extreme voices get listened to more in polarized situations.

As far as the Tamil side is concerned, the Hindu priests don't have any political role in Sri Lanka, unlike in India, where the Brahmins have some social and political power. The priests are very much connected to the temple, and they're hired by the local temple committee, which is usually the land-owning caste. The Tigers (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) have become the self-proclaimed representatives of the Tamils, and there isn't a strong tradition of spiritual activism within the Hindu community.

**Jon:** I'm told the suicide rate among Sri Lankans is the highest in the world. How do you break through that degree of despair to spark any kind of hope?

**Jeyanthi:** This is exactly what I've been focusing on, especially in the Tamil areas in the north and east, first of all to legitimize grief and despair by getting people to express it. A lot of the NVC work I'm doing there is with mental health workers and counselors. My concern is that there's a lot of pain, and, while we need to work on political rights and mobilization, if we don't deal with the grief we will become another Israel. It will not be long before we become the oppressors. In fact, already, even while Tamils talk about their oppression by the Sinhalese, they don't recognize the oppression they're inflicting on the small minority of Muslims, not to mention the caste oppression within the Tamil community.

**Jon:** Your work in Sri Lanka is focused on NVC, and you yourself are a vipassana practitioner. Can you tell us how you found yourself on those paths?

**Jeyanthi:** It started when my husband and I were having a lot of difficulty. We didn't know how to talk to each other, and things were falling apart. A friend recommended a woman who is a trainer of NVC in the Bay Area and does private relationship counseling. We went to see her, and after the first day I felt it was worth every penny. So as we worked with her on our relationship, I started taking every NVC class in the area, and within a few months I realized this was much bigger than marriage counseling—that it was going to become my life. I was in graduate school at the time, and I dropped out and started doing NVC training full time.

**Jon:** Were you already doing a vipassana practice?

**Jeyanthi:** No, interestingly. I had been trying to do meditation for a long time, in the Hindu tradition. But I had a really hard time. I think my vipassana meditation came through NVC. As I had long NVC sessions with someone who could really hear me and give me empathy, and as I gained a sense of coming to myself, I found enough spaciousness within to be able to sit with myself.

For me, NVC is like talking meditation. Sitting and walking meditation is vipassana, and talking meditation is NVC. NVC is very much about being in the present moment, being aware and staying connected to myself as I speak and as I listen. We talk about what's alive in us, what's happening in our hearts. Right now, what's going on in me? Right now, what am I hearing in you?

**Jon:** Did NVC develop out of Buddhist ideas?

**Jeyanthi:** No. The man who developed NVC is Marshall Rosenberg, an American Jew now living in Switzerland. He went looking for answers to a couple of questions, like: What is love? And how are some

*If I believe that I have no choice, then I'm setting myself up for misery, because it means I don't have power. I'm just a leaf in the wind.*

people able to remain human, compassionate, and centered in inhuman, violent situations? He wondered what they were doing that was so different, and he found that it was how they think about themselves and about other people. He gives the example of a woman who was in a concentration camp in World War II and who wrote about her compassion for the prison guards who treated her so brutally. She understood that they were acting as they were because of their past and because they were so terrified that they had lost touch with their own humanity. She realized they were not monsters but human beings in pain. That's not to legitimize their behavior, but the world is less scary when it's no longer full of monsters but of human beings screaming in pain.

**Jon:** But NVC doesn't focus on thinking as much as on the use of language. Why is that?

**Jeyanthi:** Two things. The first is in connection with vipassana, and I've experienced this myself. You go away on a 10-day silent meditation retreat and you get all this internal centeredness and calmness, and it's wonderful. But then you come out and begin to talk again, and it's all gone within an hour. Because as soon as we start speaking, we're back to labeling and judging and triggering each other. NVC is very much about how to stay in that place of openheartedness and compassion as we interact with each other through language. You see, what goes on in the heart and how we frame it can be two different things. When I was telling you about Sri Lanka, if I had stuck to NVC language I would have said very different things. Oppression is a real factor in life, but it doesn't help to call it oppression, because just by using that word you make people into oppressors and victims,

and so you have bad guys and good guys. The word creates a whole set of assumptions which disconnect us from each other as human beings, and disconnect me from what's going on in my heart.

**Jon:** Why do you suppose we have learned to use language in such a self-defeating way?

**Jeyanthi:** Language gets used to continue the systems of oppression and domination that we have developed partly because we forget that we actually have a lot of power and choice. For instance, when I say, "I'm not going to do what you're asking because I can't," or "because I have to do something else," I'm saying that I have no choice. And in the long run, if I believe that I have no choice, then I'm setting myself up for misery, because it means I don't have power. I'm just a leaf in the wind. But when I start recognizing that in every moment I'm acting on choice, even when I'm not aware of it, then it's a different world already.

**Jon:** But changing the way we communicate with one another is extremely difficult, isn't it?

**Jeyanthi:** Yes and no. It is difficult because we've been trained to do it differently. But it isn't difficult in the sense that it's our nature to communicate with an open heart. Our nature is remolded by the language and thinking that we've been taught. But that open-hearted nature is still there inside, and it's bursting to come out. Children know this. They do this pretty naturally. They talk about what's going on in their hearts, until their families or schools teach them another way.

**Jon:** The focus of NVC is verbal language, but something like 90 percent of all communication is non-verbal. How does NVC apply to all the rest of that communication?

**Jeyanthi:** It's one of those contradictions. On the one hand NVC is based on language, and on the other hand it's not about language at all. It's really about the spirit. A Buddhist teaching says, "After you cross the river in a boat, you'd be a fool to carry the boat on your back." In a way, NVC is like the boat that gets you across, but after you get there you don't need it anymore.

**Jon:** When did you first go back to Sri Lanka to do NVC work?

**Jeyanthi:** Two and a half years ago. But I had been working on going for years before that, here in the Bay Area. I was trying to heal myself and to overcome the fears I had about going into a war zone. I had to work a lot on the fear of being killed. While I was preparing to go, there was active war, but by the time I actually got there the ceasefire had been declared.

When I got there, the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) did a 10-day residential

intensive training with people from all over the island. And after that intensive, many of the people who had attended invited me to go to their villages and towns and do trainings. So I traveled around, mostly in the Tamil areas, doing two- and three-day introductory trainings. In one week we trained 60 people in Jaffna.

I've thought about moving back to the U.S., but I am so happy doing what I am doing there. Sri Lanka is obviously where I'm meant to be.

**Jon:** How do you support yourself?

**Jeyanthi:** Right now mostly through savings, some paid work, and an annual fundraiser we do in the San Francisco Bay Area to raise money to subsidize the cost of the trainings. My husband and I started a nonprofit organization, the Sandhi Institute ([www.sandhi.org](http://www.sandhi.org)), so that people can donate and get a tax deduction in the U.S. And I send out periodic journal reports about our work to keep our supporters connected to what we're doing. Your readers can get on that list by sending me an e-mail at <[jeyanthi@sandhi.org](mailto:jeyanthi@sandhi.org)>.

**Jon:** How many Sri Lankans have been trained in NVC?

**Jeyanthi:** We have hundreds of people who have come to the introductory trainings, and around 50 who have attended more advanced training. This year we're planning two parallel leadership programs, one in the north in Tamil, and one in English for people from other parts of the island. This will be a train-the-trainer program, because we're getting so many requests for trainings now that we need more skilled trainers to respond to the call. For example, a university professor in Jaffna is writing a proposal for NVC trainings for every entering medical student next year. And we are starting to work with some environmental NGOs that are trying to protect the island's natural resources. We have opportunities to continue working with human rights officers in the north and east. We work in a very grassroots way, building connections and trust organically rather than going in with lots of noise and making a big thing of it.

**Jon:** When you do trainings, do you talk about NVC as a spiritual practice, or do you assume that the spiritual benefits will develop naturally?

**Jeyanthi:** When I used to teach in the States I avoided talking about it as a spiritual practice, because I worked with a lot of activists who were kind of suspicious of spiritual practices. But in Sri Lanka people ask me to make it *more* spiritual, to tie it into Hinduism or into Buddhism.

**Jon:** Do you find that the principles of NVC apply to one's relationship to one's self as well as to interactions among groups and between individuals?

**Jeyanthi:** Yes, this is one of the things that people find the most surprising. They come to the work thinking they are going to learn how to talk to a parent, spouse, co-worker, or "difficult person" in their lives, and then they discover that 80 percent of the work is learning how to talk to yourself. Because if you've done the internal work, the energy with which you approach another person will completely change, and that will take care of half the problem.

**Jon:** What would success look like for your work in Sri Lanka?

**Jeyanthi:** Everything anyone ever does or says, even if it's very destructive, contains some life-affirming or positive motivation. The way they're doing it may not be meeting their needs, and not meeting my needs. But if we look deeply enough we'll find that their strategy is in the service of some shared human need. If I can get this idea to take root in Jaffna, and in the north and east, and throughout the island, then I'm satisfied. Because people there are so resourceful, they know how to start with a little bit, and work hard at it, and take it far. Whatever little I offer, if it takes hold of their hearts, it will manifest a hundredfold.

I'll tell you a story. I did a training for mental health professionals organized by a hospital administrator, and two weeks after the training he told me about being at home and watching his young son interacting with his

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grandmother by irritating her and hitting her. He said normally he would have disciplined the boy and threatened to punish him. But because of the training and the concept of everything being motivated by shared needs, he thought, "Well, if that's true, even this behavior is expressing a need. What could it be?"

To me, this is the revolutionary moment. He took a breath and he thought: What could be the child's need? And he remembered that an hour before, the grandmother had scolded the boy for something, so he asked him if he felt hurt and was trying to get back at her. Of course, "getting back at her" is not really a need, but just one step below that was the human need to be seen and heard and understood for the pain he was feeling. He said his son's face changed completely and he became very calm. And now, after receiving empathy rather than punishment, he is much more likely to want to cooperate with his farther and genuinely treat his grandmother with respect. I want to cry with joy when I imagine that happening everywhere in Sri Lanka. ❖

## Tsunami Journal

*Soon after the interview with Turning Wheel, Jeyanthi Siva returned to Sri Lanka. She was there two months later, at the time of the tsunami. Following is an excerpt from her journal.*

January 2, 2005

It's been a week since the tsunami hit my beloved island of Lanka. I've alternated in these seven days between denial, numbness, despair, and activity (helping with relief coordination). This morning, after spending a restless night in bed, I woke up with a voice in my head shouting, "Shut UP! Do something or shut up." Intense pain and self-judging thoughts like, "I am not being effective. So many people are in need and I am just spinning in circles." But today, unexpectedly, I had an incredible experience of grace, of complete acceptance of everything that happened. No blame, no idea that things ought to be different.

It happened when a friend called this morning and asked the simple question, "How are you?" I started sobbing. And I didn't stop for an hour and a half. My heart broke open and the grief came pouring out: There is no meaning to this. Why did the most vulnerable people, living on the fringes of society, eking out a living—why were they the ones to be hit? Why not those of us with better resources to rebuild our lives? Why this poor, beaten-up island, which was just taking a breath from a 20-year bombardment of war? *Why, why, why?*

Then, at some point in this grieving process, the phrase "there is no meaning to this" evolved from an expression of despair to one of freedom. Just pure

grief for those who died, whose lives have been devastated, and especially for those precious children who witnessed the death of family members or were orphaned. A counselor friend in Jaffna Peninsula told me that one child from the Point Pedro area refuses to go outside the shelter he is in, saying, "The ocean is outside, and it's going to take me, too." Another child just stares, mute except for one sentence: "The ocean swept away Appa (father)." In some places, whole villages have been swept to sea. I imagine what I would feel if everyone I knew and loved, every building that contained my memories, every person who made up the fabric of my life, were washed away...gone in the space of five minutes.

My moment of grace also came with the complete acceptance of the different ways people respond: wonderful hearts offering their resources wholeheartedly, others looting, or siphoning off for their selfish needs from the material relief that came. I felt no judgment about any of it; I was just being with it. My body completely relaxed; the places that habitually carry tension and tightness seemed to melt, soft as butter.

I so want to believe that this can be an opportunity to break us out of the habits of seeing each other as different, as enemies. To see each other as part of the same human/divine energy, all in the same boat together called the Island of Lanka, called Mother Earth. No Sinhalese, no Tamil, no Muslim. No woman, no man, no victim, no oppressor.

I am celebrating all the stories I hear about the common people from the unaffected areas who had been paralyzed and silent during the devastation of war, who are now, after the tsunami, getting involved. All the heroic people who helped others when the waves hit, risking their own lives many times over to save others. At the official and professional levels, there is still suspicion and lack of trust; those hearts haven't (yet?) broken open, I suppose. And in fact, the ruling class in Colombo hasn't been affected much; only the poorest of the poor, the caste of fishermen who live (literally) on the edge. My despairing question is: If this disaster doesn't break open hearts and help the divisions to dissolve, then what will? If not a 10-meter wall of water, then what would it take? A 20-meter wall of water? Being submerged entirely? Then I remind myself that the powers-that-be would, of course, be the last ones to get this. I needn't be discouraged by that. And there *is* something different happening here in this beautiful and tragic island of ours; it's happening at the level where it counts, at the grassroots level, at the level of the hearts and minds of the people. ❖

*For more information about Jeyanthi Siva's work, to read more excerpts from her journal, or to make a contribution to the Sandhi Institute, visit [www.sandhi.org](http://www.sandhi.org).*

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# An Offering at the Door

## Reflections on an Election Sesshin

by Colleen Morton Busch

*The following article describes a Buddhist retreat in which participants both meditated and campaigned before last fall's election. The election is over, but the article is still relevant, because the "election sesshin" it describes is a remarkable model of the weaving together of activism and rigorous Buddhist practice. —Ed.*

When I arrived at Sunbow Farm in Corvallis, Oregon, last October for my four-day shift in an 18-day election sesshin, Melody and Stan were already setting up the zendo, laying down silk and wool rugs they'd brought from home and arranging zafus and zabutons around the wood-burning stove. While the rain pounded away outside, I rolled out my sleeping bag on the floor in one of the rooms whose heavy doors with square, eye-level windows had been salvaged from a defunct mental institution.

I found myself in Corvallis because a group of Berkeley Buddhists—led by Melody Ermachild Chavis, Stan Dewey, Ed Herzog, and Elizabeth Flora—wanted to join the contemplative, communal, and compassionate aspects of Buddhist practice with political action. Our goals were twofold: to help local congresswoman Darlene Hooley hold onto her seat in the face of a well-funded conservative opposition, and to rally support for presidential candidate John Kerry, since Oregon was considered a swing state. We would follow the basic structure of sesshin—periods of zazen, *kinhin* (walking meditation), lecture, and work—but our work period would last most of the day and into the evening as we walked door-to-door getting out the vote for Hooley and Kerry.

Maybe because I was raised in the Midwest, where yards are substantial and privacy is sacred, I knew that knocking on strangers' doors was not going to be easy for me. Still, I was drawn in by the paradoxical promise embodied in the phrase "election sesshin." The word *sesshin* means simply "to touch the mind." A sesshin is saturated in silence. We work, sit, and eat side by side, barely leaving our cushions, with a minimum of words. The goal of a sesshin—if a sesshin can be said to have one—is to practice in a concentrated way for the benefit of all beings. Elections, on the other hand, are about picking and choosing, solidifying preferences, winning. They are noisy affairs, characterized by rivalry and bitter enmity, each side trying to outtalk the other. What, then, is an election

sesshin? This was the koan we gave ourselves.

Our Zen practice was like the robe folded around the body of our election work. We rose each morning at 6:30, and after two periods of zazen and *kinhin*, we recited the extremely pertinent Metta Sutta: "...Let one cultivate an infinite goodwill toward the whole world. Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all one's waking hours, let one practice the way with gratitude. Not holding to fixed views..."

After a couple of free morning hours to shower or walk around the farm or sleep, we went to the shared Kerry/Hooley campaign headquarters, where we decked ourselves out with stickers, clipboards, and maps, and ran through the script again: "Hi, I'm Colleen, and I'm with Congresswoman Darlene Hooley's campaign. As you know, it's a very important election year and every vote is critical. Can Darlene count on your support this year? Do you mind telling me who you will support for president?" Since Oregonians vote by mail, we reminded people to send their ballots in early or told them where they could drop their ballots off.

When we finally got back to the farm at 8:00 at night, it felt like a little piece of paradise—a cozy, warm shelter from the rain, fragrant with quinoa stew or mushroom barley soup. Supper was a laid-back, help-yourself affair after each of us had tallied our data—how many knocks, how many yeses and noes for Hooley and Kerry—and given it to Melody to phone in to Democratic headquarters. Someone there would follow up with phone calls to supportive voters as Election Day approached, to ensure that they actually voted. At the dinner table, we shared lively conversation about the highs and lows of our day. When 9:30 PM rolled around, time for our final period of zazen, the cob house made of dirt from the fields turned into a zendo again. After ensuring that all the food was out of reach of the tiny brown field mice that kept us company, we returned to our cushions. The stillness and silence then, after a day of perpetual motion and repetition, was profoundly nourishing. Taking the refuges, as we did each night before falling into bed, felt elemental, as vital as water to the body.

At the farm, an atmosphere of peace and harmony prevailed. But out on the streets of Corvallis, the stark political divisions characteristic of the country were evident in the dueling yard signs right next door to each other. A friend of mine who lives in Corvallis had

**A friend of mine  
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Corvallis had her  
Kerry sign  
repeatedly stolen,  
until finally she  
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and slicked it up  
with Vaseline.**

her Kerry sign repeatedly stolen, until finally she chained it down and slicked it up with Vaseline. On our first day of canvassing, Hooley's volunteer coordinator, an energetic Oregon State University student, reassured us that most of the doors we were going to knock on would be opened by warm and friendly people, since we were only canvassing registered Democratic, Independent, Green, and unaffiliated voters. "But don't be surprised," she said, "if you get Hooley supporters who tell you they're voting for Bush."

I canvassed with Stan that first afternoon, and the first door we knocked on was opened by an amiable woman in her thirties who apologized for the mess on the porch. "I don't live here!" she said. We were new to this canvassing business, so we decided to practice and ask her anyway who she planned on supporting for Congress and President. When she said Bush, and I asked why, she thought for a moment. "Character," she said finally, and then listened politely while we stumbled through the script about Hooley. *Are you crazy?* I thought. *Is that what it's called when you start an unnecessary war and lie repeatedly to your citizens?* "Character?!" But I kept these polemical thoughts to myself, remembering how I felt when my father insisted that he was right because he said so or mocked some opinion of mine. Still, it was a challenge to listen to people who held views so contrary to my own without attempting vigorously to try to change them—kind of like watching the toast burn but resisting the urge to pull it out because you know someone actually likes burnt toast. It seemed rude to show up at someone's door and then argue with them, so we listened to the woman, congratulated her on her new house, and moved on.

The canvassing got easier once we got the script and the routine down. At dusk that first night, we stood in front of one house, struggling to read the street address. Through a big picture window I saw a man and woman sitting on stools at a counter, munching on ears of corn. As we were walking up the drive, the woman came outside to meet us, napkin in hand, and said she'd already voted for Hooley. "How'd you know what we were here for?" I asked. "I saw your stickers!" she replied. Buoyed by her support, I held the umbrella over Stan while he wrote down a "1" (for strongly Hooley) and scribbled "Kerry" in the margin of the soggy walk sheet next to the woman's name.

Over the next few days, I got more comfortable with canvassing. And the more comfortable I became, the more I could depart from our script to adjust to the moment. Stan and I encountered one guy who was heading out for a swim when we reached his door. "I really don't know who I'm voting for," he said, honestly vexed. He didn't need more information. He just needed to make up his mind, and I felt for him. I've made

plenty of agonizing big and small decisions, but in the case of the 2004 presidential election, there wasn't a doubt in my mind about how to cast my vote. The picking and choosing was easy for me, but clearly it wasn't for him. According to the script, after we told someone a little bit about Hooley, we were supposed to ask again whether they were inclined to support her. I often left this step out. It seemed odd to me to expect someone to make such a personal decision on the spot and then share it with a stranger. I figured we'd have a more beneficial effect if we just let the guy go swimming.

But it didn't all go swimmingly. There were people, decided and undecided, who were not happy to see us on their doorstep—and a spot on the canvass sheets for marking "grouch" so they wouldn't be visited again. One of our colleagues, Ko Blix, who pitched his tent in the tomato hothouse on the farm, was nearly run off a porch by a man who was enraged because the anarchist party he was affiliated with wasn't represented on the Oregon ballot; by his logic, since he couldn't vote for his party, he was disenfranchised. "How do you know my wife lives here? Where'd you get that information? You think we're all so stupid you gotta come here and tell us how to vote?" Although the name on Ko's list was actually the man's wife, and though he wasn't able to talk with her, he did defuse the situation with her husband. "I might have been the first person in a while to stand and listen to him," Ko wrote in a dispatch to supporters in Berkeley, "without (hardly any) argument, to stand and listen just long enough to see him shift a little."

There were nights when it was totally energizing just to make face-to-face contact with so many people. On my last night in Oregon, however, my motivation sagged. Maybe I was just tired from the cold that was slowly creeping into my system, but as Stan and I drove to yet another sprawling apartment complex with a labyrinthine layout, even though the rain had let up, I distinctly didn't want to be out there. We had to draw a little map of all of the units before we set out walking. "Your turn," said Stan at the first door, and I knocked and got ready to do my routine, but the look on the face of the man who answered that door in his socks stopped me right in my tracks. He was staring at my Kerry buttons and shaking his head. "None of Bush's people are coming around, bugging me during dinner with my family!" the man complained irritably. "Maybe I should vote for Bush!"

A good response might have been, "It's just because we're so enthusiastic about Kerry that we're out here talking to you!" But that's not what I said. I didn't even think of it until later. We left the guy with Hooley literature and beat a hasty, apologetic retreat. As we walked down a flight of stairs to the next door, I thought to myself, *What am I doing here? I don't even live in*

*Oregon! I can't even vote for Darlene Hooley!* I wanted to retreat to the warm cave of the cob house and curl up in my down sleeping bag. But I couldn't very well leave my canvassing buddy Stan out there alone. So—just as I would sit through a penetrating ache in my left hip in zazen—I walked to the next door and knocked.

After a while, I simply began to feel better. Was it the fact that we talked to lots of students who were hungry for information and happy to be asked their opinions? Was it Stan's observation that every moderate political seat we safeguarded—no matter what state it was from—mattered? Maybe it was simply all of the playful creative energy put into the doorway Halloween decorations: the plump pumpkins and cottony spider webs that would beckon trick-or-treaters at the end of the month.

At one of the last houses I visited, a woman whispered to me, looking over her shoulder, "I'm voting for Kerry, but *he's* not," indicating her husband, who'd answered the door then shuffled back into the house. It's hard to fathom how the Mary Matalin–James Carville marriages (the famous Republican–Democrat couple, each of them hard-core party activists) of the world work. But looking at that woman's smiling face, I thought, here we are, as a country, in exactly that situation. Half of us can't begin to imagine what the other half is thinking, and yet we're all living under the same roof. What if we really tried to love each other despite what we don't agree with or don't understand?

When November 2 came, I was back in Berkeley. Though Hooley held onto her seat and Oregon voted for Kerry, Ohio tipped toward Bush. I felt a sense of loss as swift and thorough as that brought on by the death of a loved one. It took me more than an hour of being awake to pull myself out of bed and watch Kerry's concession speech, during which I cried like I knew him personally. I thought of Melody and Stan, rolling up their rugs and stuffing the cushions into the cars the day after Election Day for the long caravan home. Melody told me later that they stopped at a restaurant, and she ordered a piece of pie, asking the waitress, "Is this going to make me feel better?" The waitress burst into tears, telling Melody that everyone she worked with voted for Bush but she'd voted for Kerry. And then Melody was cheering the waitress up, writing 55.4 with a felt tip pen on a paper napkin—the number, in millions, of Americans who voted for Kerry.

After I finally got out of bed on November 3, I thought of all of those doors we knocked on, all those people we talked to who said, "Oh yes! Kerry has my vote!" and my despair just wouldn't stick. I knew that like Melody's waitress, they shared my sadness and the belief that America needs hope, not fear. Even though the candidate we'd pinned our hopes on had not won,

our hopes still belonged to us, and we were each other's witnesses. Even now, if I close my eyes, I can feel everyone at the election sesshin sitting beside me in the darkness of the zendo, and draw comfort from the strength and wisdom of our collective practice. When a friend calls and says that I must be devastated because of all the work I did on the election, I say yes, I'm devastated, but not because of the work I did. In the words of David Weinberg, a Zen priest who gave several inspiring dharma talks on the farm, the work we did was an "inoculation against despair." We gave ourselves wholly and selflessly to our efforts. And that shared intention and effort, in the end, seems more important to me—more lasting—than who won.

Even though we have to sit through four more years of policies that will almost certainly create more suffering in the world, I know in my heart that the sangha we made will abide. After I got back from Oregon, I kept running into other sesshin participants. I saw a couple of them three days in a row at a phone bank in Berkeley, where we called voters in Florida and Ohio from cubicles in a donated office building. On the Friday before Election Day, I bumped into Sara, another sesshin participant, as we both stood in line for early voting at Oakland City Hall.

Sara and I made a plan to drive up to Reno the Monday before election day, along with another friend from our election sesshin, to help on the ground with getting out the Democratic vote. The atmosphere in Reno couldn't have been more different from the farm. We stayed in a towering casino called the Golden Phoenix and queued up at the convention center with hundreds of other volunteers at 7:00 AM on Election Day, music blaring from stereo speakers. When we reached the sign-in desk, we were told that there was no more "territory" left—we would have to spend the day phone banking. Had I been by myself, I might have just driven home at that point, thinking, *I can do that from Berkeley. Why did I come all the way up here?* But Sara and the others were looking into canvassing in Latino neighborhoods, so I lingered, even though I don't speak Spanish. As the loudspeaker barked announcements over the music pumping from the speakers, I thought about the Heart Sutra's helpful negations, "no form, no feelings, no perceptions, no formations." *Why rush off?* I thought. *Everyone's here. We'll find something to do together.* And then, as if on cue, a woman from the sign-in desk found us a neighborhood that hadn't been covered, and she sent us out into the bright mountain morning together. ❖

*Colleen Morton Busch lives in Berkeley, California, and is at work on a novel.*

**I wanted to retreat to the warm cave of the cob house and curl up in my down sleeping bag. But I couldn't very well leave my canvassing buddy Stan out there alone. So... I walked to the next door and knocked.**

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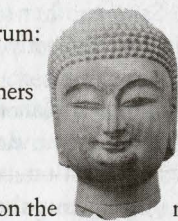
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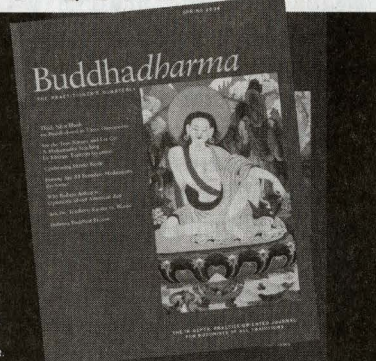
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## Book Reviews

### **At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey from War to Peace**

by Claude Anshin Thomas

Shambhala Publications, 2004, \$19.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Hozan Alan Senauke

Let me start by simply recommending that you buy, read, and think about Claude Anshin Thomas's new book, *At Hell's Gate*. It was a long time coming but worth the wait, especially in this time of war and rampant violence.

Claude Anshin and I share some curious karma. We were born weeks apart on the East Coast, and we finished high school just in time for the Vietnam War. I went to college and managed to avoid the military, while he enlisted in the army. Scared to death, he found himself full-out fighting a war he did not believe in. He was a helicopter machine gunner: "My job in Vietnam was to kill people. By the time I was first injured in combat...I had already been directly responsible for the deaths of several hundred people. And today, each day, I can still see many of their faces."

He came home from Vietnam a lost person, unwelcome in his country, consumed by fear, anger, drugs, and alcohol. On a more privileged path, I was spared the trauma of combat but felt I was wandering in the same American wilderness. We were both opposed to war but not yet opposed to violence. It was our mutual good fortune to be drawn to Zen—in his case, the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and Bernie Glassman. Now, nearly 30 years later, we are Soto priests and good friends who try to walk a path of peace and engagement.

*At Hell's Gate* describes in plain, clear language Claude Anshin's path from a harsh boyhood in rural Pennsylvania through the military's dehumanizing "basic training" to the bloody fog of Vietnam. In 1990, a social worker told him about Thich Nhat Hanh's work with veterans and, soon after, Claude hesitantly signed up for his first Buddhist retreat. At that retreat, he heard Thich Nhat Hanh say, "You veterans are the light at the tip of the candle. You burn hot and bright. You understand deeply the nature of suffering."

After several years of practice in Thich Nhat Hanh's tradition, Claude Anshin began to find his unique pattern of bearing witness. After a long pilgrimage that began in Poland, at Auschwitz, continued through Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, and ended in Vietnam, he was ordained by Roshi Bernie Glassman as a Peacemaker Priest in a Soto Zen Buddhist lineage. Since then, his pilgrimage has simply continued. With only a handful of belongings and the most modest support, Claude Anshin has taken up the life of a wandering mendicant through the world's war zones, beyond the places of privilege and alienation in which many of us live.

His book unpacks the simple practice of mindfulness and the difficult necessity of life without violence—the life that is

our true heritage, though it goes against the grain of mainstream education, media, and upbringing. Claude Anshin's fierce honesty weaves together our lives. He is a person often not at ease, but the gift of dharma enables him to expand to encompass his un-ease—which we might call *dukkha*—as the practice of his life. From his doing, and from his instructive and authentic words, others of us can learn peace:

I do know that peace is not the absence of conflict; it's the absence of violence within conflict. To settle conflicts requires that we touch aggression, touch anger, touch violence, but that we do not surrender to these qualities within us... Conflict will exist; what matters is how we address it. ❖

*Hozan Alan Senauke is a priest at Berkeley Zen Center and senior advisor to BPF.*

### **Nixon Under the Bodhi Tree and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction**

edited by Kate Wheeler

foreword by Charles Johnson

Wisdom Publications, 2004, \$16.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Scott Meredith

The casual browser drawn to Kate Wheeler's Buddhist fiction anthology by the close-up of Richard Nixon on its cover finds this intriguing claim on the back: "You'll want to keep this on the shelf with Kerouac." The blurb hints at the sparseness of the "Buddhist fiction" category, given that Jack Kerouac's classic *On the Road* appeared in 1957.

Of course, Buddhist fiction could be considered as old as the Jataka tales or Lafcadio Hearn's charming 19th-century retellings-with-spin of traditional Japanese Buddhist-flavored legends. But *On the Road* is where the rubber of Buddhist-scented philosophizing really met the pavement of modern, everyday hassles and horrors (somewhat pre-figured in Somerset Maugham's 1944 novel *The Razor's Edge*). The *Nixon* anthology takes readers even deeper down the dharmic rabbit hole, with selections that make far more explicit reference to Buddhist doctrine and portray daily life more realistically.

In any case, Wheeler's collection is best-of-breed not only because it's first-of-breed but also because almost every selection is a gem, thanks to pitch-perfect editing. Each of the 30 original fiction works offers riveting glimpses of the sky through the red dust.

Editor Wheeler's introduction itself is a compelling piece of Buddhist-inspired prose. She briskly acknowledges the innate irony of her endeavor with gorgeous lines like this one: "From the Buddhist point of view, to invent more stories, full of more characters who love and fight and die without ever having truly been, is a redoubled version of the existential mistake that lies at the heart of all suffering." But, she goes on to insinuate, so what? The paradox of this collection of fiction (unreality) is how intimately and grippingly it

seems to confront our actual samsaric experience, compared to most works of Buddhist nonfiction (reality?).

In the title story, a gay actor is dying of AIDS. Other pieces feature hard, cold, painful meditation mornings. Job-hunting against a hundred fellow applicants. Thirty-something loneliness turning to sad sex. The joy of sanghic cooking. Heroin addiction personified (in the astounding “Greyhound Bodhisattva”). The crown jewel is Kira Salak’s “Beheadings.” To read it is to weep for us all.

As a Buddhist-flavored Greek philosopher once wrote, “You can’t step into the same river twice.” That is also the special delight of this anthology: every spot where you dip your toe is different, and there is no one party line. Every time you return to it, you find you’ve overlooked something interesting.

Byron Katie has said, “There is no story that is you or that leads to you. Every story leads away from you.” True? Turn your own light on these stories and see if any of them help you home. ❖

*Scott Meredith, a research technologist in the Pacific Northwest, is a longtime student of Asian martial arts and energy healing systems.*

## Books in Brief

Reviewed by Shane Snowdon

### What’s New & Exciting

Every *Turning Wheel* reader should know about Parallax Press’s groundbreaking new anthology *Dharma, Color and Culture: New Voices in Western Buddhism*, edited by Bay Area Zen priest **Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín**. The new voices of the title are 26 Buddhists of color, including Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mushim Ikeda-Nash, Charles Johnson, Marlene Jones, Earthlyn Manuel, Ralph Steele, Jan Willis, and Larry Yang. Grounded in the truth that “attention to the pain of racism is essential,” the Latina/o, Asian, Asian American, African American, and Native American contributors “connect diversity, racism, and Buddhism at four levels: the personal, the interpersonal, the institutional, and the cultural.” Attention to this book is essential. (Parallax has also just released **Thich Nhat Hanh’s *Peace Begins Here: Palestinians and Israelis Listening to Each Other***, based on a series of retreats he facilitated.)

The world has awaited a new collection from renowned Buddhist poet **Gary Snyder** ever since 1983’s *Axe Handles*. Now, at last, comes *Danger on Peaks* (Shoemaker & Hoard). These 55 poems recount Snyder’s visits to Mount St. Helens (he descended from it in 1945 to learn of the Hiroshima bombings, while his 2000 climb offered a “long view” of its recovery from the 1980 eruption), muse on the demolition of the World Trade Center Towers and the Bamiyan Buddhas, adapt the Japanese *haibun* form, and explore “intimate immediate life, gossip and insight” in ways rather

unusual for Snyder. (The collection’s title arises from his first glimpse of his future wife’s “lithe leg,” “trained by...danger on peaks.”) Now in his seventies, the Pulitzer-winning poet takes up new styles and new topics in this moving collection.

Speaking of new topics, **David Loy**—well known for his prolific writing on history, philosophy, and social theory from a Buddhist perspective—has collaborated with Linda Goodhew (to whom he’s married) on *The Dharma of Dragons and Daemons: Buddhist Themes in Modern Fantasy* (Wisdom Publications, with a foreword by Jane Hirshfield). This delightful short book finds Buddhist wisdom in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, the novel *Momo* by Michael Ende (whose fiction inspired the movie *The Never-Ending Story*), two Japanese animé films, Ursula LeGuin’s *Earthsea* novels, and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Buddhists and others familiar with these fantasy classics will be fascinated by the authors’ take on them: the ring that Frodo bears “highlights the challenge for engaged Buddhism: craving for power,” *Momo* is a “Zen-like critique of our obsession with time,” and the destruction of the wall between living and dead in LeGuin’s work signifies that “birth is no-birth, death is no-death.”

Zen priest **Marc Lesser**, founder of the card and gift company Brush Dance, has just published *ZBA: Zen of Business Administration* (New World Library). Its linkage of Zen to business sounds as unlikely as the pairing of Buddhism and fantasy, but Lesser’s graceful prose makes imaginative, insightful connections between the two. For example, the Zen tale of the buffalo whose head, horns, and legs could pass through a window while its tail could not inspires this commentary:

Immeasurable pain and suffering are caused by business leaders not accepting and dealing with the difficulties of business—covering up losses, not facing emotional shortcomings, hiding environmental dangers. The habit of wanting to look good and successful and not wanting to face difficulty is particularly dangerous for business leaders. The pattern of focusing on one person’s or one group’s interest at the expense of other people and other groups leads to instability and to the creation of additional suffering.

Don’t miss this rare examination of business from a candid Buddhist perspective.

Also rare is an analysis of women’s imprisonment as searching as that offered in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (Routledge). Editor **Julia Sudbury**, the Mills College professor who co-founded Critical Resistance, has gathered more than 20 diverse essays that illuminate disturbing global and racialized patterns in the jailing of women and call for collaboration among the anti-globalization, anti-militarism, and anti-imprisonment movements.

Shambhala Publications calls *Chögyam Trungpa: His Life and Vision* “the definitive biography” of the visionary Tibetan who did so much to bring Buddhism to the West. But **Fabrice Midal**, the University of Paris philosophy professor

who began studying with Trungpa in 1989 and released this book in French four years ago, writes, "I immediately excluded the idea of writing a biography, because such a psychological approach seemed both reductive and inappropriate to the very notion of egolessness." Instead, he decided to "sketch a series of portraits that would serve as a series of entrances into the world of Chögyam Trungpa," and Trungpa's wife, Diana J. Mukpo, writes in her foreword, "To the best of my knowledge, everything written by Midal is completely accurate." Midal fills his book with declarations of Trungpa's greatness, and adds, "His presence often overwhelms me." But Midal also acknowledges, "Certain surprising things he did can seem shocking today, and may also have seemed brutal or crazy at the time. But thanks to these actions, some people were able to open fully. It is thus difficult to judge them now. But any attempt to conceal his more disconcerting side would also water down the character of Trungpa. I have tried to find a happy medium between this and the essential message of his work." The result is a book as unconventional and compelling as its subject.

### Still Great After All These Years

A number of wonderful writings from yesteryear have recently been republished, among them *Woman Awake: Women Practice Buddhism* (Rodmell Press), by longtime vipassana teacher **Christina Feldman**. Her simple, powerful prose, addressed to Buddhist women as "we," is as rewarding today as when it first saw print 15 years ago. Feldman writes candidly of her own experiences, tells the stories of women engaging with external and internalized sexism, describes the ways in which Buddhism can be particularly useful for women, and quotes Judy Chicago, Emily Dickinson, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Iris Murdoch—voices not often found in Buddhist writing. *Woman Awake* is bracing and inspiring, and those who are helped by it may want to track down its splendid out-of-print predecessor *Quest of the Warrior Woman: Women as Mystics, Healers, and Guides*, another Feldman book that richly deserves reprinting.

In *Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West*, **Jeffery Paine** told the tales of Tibetan lamas in exile. In his newly released anthology *Adventures with the Buddha: A Personal Buddhism Reader* (W.W. Norton), he presents previously published first-person writing by nine Westerners who "chanced across Buddhism" in their travels and made it an integral part of their lives. Five of them—Alexandra David-Neel, Lama Govinda, John Blofeld, Peter Goullart, and Janwillem van de Wetering—are from "the era of the heroic and almost magical," while four—Jan Willis, Tsultrim Allione, Sharon Salzberg, and Michael Roach—are from "the era of you and me." All nine accounts are riveting, but Jan Willis's "An African-American Woman's Journey into Buddhism" is a particular standout.

Jesuit priest **John Dear** is sometimes compared to Thomas Merton for his work in the ecumenical peace movement, including leadership of the famed Fellowship of Reconciliation. His reissued *Living Peace: A Spirituality*

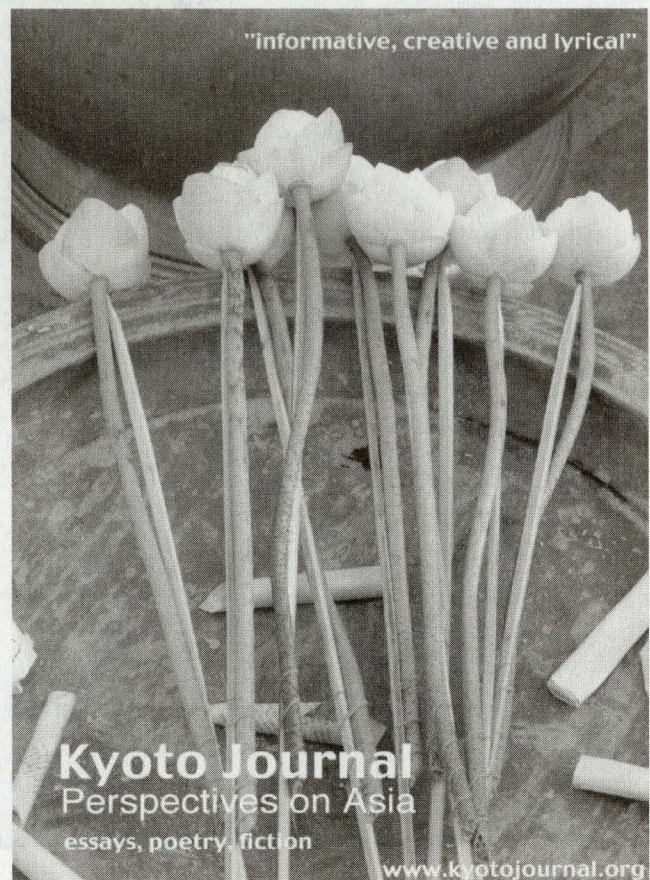
*of Contemplation and Action* (Doubleday) has been praised by Thich Nhat Hanh and Arun Gandhi. A slim volume, it captures Dear's inner and public life as a global peace-builder.

### Also of Note

In *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Soto Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton University Press), U.C. Irvine professor **Duncan Ryuken Williams** examines the explosive growth of Soto Zen in Japan between 1600 and 1867. He attributes its popularity less to its meditation practices and the teachings of Dogen than to its "other side"—the "social benefits" it was believed to convey, including healing, rainmaking, fire protection, salvation, and stable temple membership. This unusual venture into Buddhist social history draws on a multitude of primary sources, including log-books, diaries, and death records.

Professors **Charles Prebish** and **Damien Keown**, the editors of the online *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, have published *Buddhism—the eBook* ([www.jbeonlinebooks.org](http://www.jbeonlinebooks.org)). Because of its format (a PDF that can be downloaded from the Web for \$15.99 and accessed via Acrobat Reader), buyers can move with the click of a mouse between frequently updated Buddhist weblinks and 14 chapters of introductory text, one on socially engaged Buddhism, another on Buddhist ethics. The eBook is proving popular as a college text but is suitable for anyone comfortable with a computer. ❖

Shane Snowdon is book review editor of *Turning Wheel*.



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## From the Executive Director

### An Appropriate Response

by Maia Duerr

The December earthquake and tsunami that devastated much of South Asia and took more than 150,000 lives also spurred an outpouring of generosity among the world's citizens. More than 17 governments have, as of this writing, pledged more than a billion U.S. dollars in assistance.

Here at the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, we received many calls and e-mails from people asking how they could assist. Those contacting BPF felt a special affinity with Buddhist friends in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma, and wanted to know how their donations could help out in Buddhist communities in these countries.

At the same time, we received messages from Dr. Ariyaratne, founder of Sarvodaya and longtime member of BPF's international advisory board, with many details about what was needed in Sri Lanka. Our colleagues at the Foundation for the People of Burma also contacted us with requests for assistance. We did our best to quickly broadcast these requests to the BPF community, via our website and e-mail lists.

Within a few days, the responses from BPF chapters and members around the world was overwhelming. Here are just a few of the ways people reached out: Pioneer Valley BPF in Massachusetts immediately sent \$500; Toronto BPF organized a benefit concert and advocated for Sarvodaya's inclusion on a list of relief agencies compiled by the city of Toronto; Chicago BPF organized radio interviews with Bernie Glassman, who spoke about Dr. Ariyaratne's work with Sarvodaya, and members plan to volunteer at the Sarvodaya-USA office in Madison, Wisconsin; and a New Year's Eve benefit at Marpa House in Boulder, Colorado, raised \$1,500. Thanks to all of you who responded so generously.

The universe so often works in mysterious ways. Earlier in December, I attended a meeting at the Garrison Institute in New York to discuss the development of an International Buddhist Peace Service (IBPS). Many of the questions and ideas we explored during the meeting took on great relevance a few weeks later with the tsunami disaster. In initial conversations about IBPS at a meeting a year earlier, participants had imagined that one possible form the service could take might be as a humanitarian/relief agency to respond to natural disasters, particularly in countries with large Buddhist populations.

At the December meeting, we noted that massive, well-funded, and highly organized disaster relief operations such as the Red Cross are already in place. To attempt to create another one on such a scale would require enormous resources, without adding significantly to what is already available. We all agreed that we should encourage people to support existing relief efforts in times of need rather than attempting to create a separate Buddhist structure to

respond to natural disasters.

The recent international response to the tsunami disaster seemed to support this decision. Major agencies (UNICEF, for example) are sending generous amounts of aid and specialist workers, based on their years of expertise. Local organizations are providing on-the-ground care. And the Buddhist Peace Fellowship is modeling the policy discussed at the IBPS meeting by advising our members about how they can channel aid through existing Buddhist agencies, like Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka, rather than setting up a separate operation.

But there are other disasters to consider: the inhumanity of war, genocide, and extreme cruelty. Their roots lie in the human psyche and in the false belief that people's differences can be resolved through violence. What we can see is the physical horror, the destruction of people's lives and societies, but in their depths, these are catastrophes of the human mind. The International Buddhist Peace Service would aim to prevent these disasters. One goal for the IBPS is to obtain consultative status at the United Nations.

We came away from the meeting with many action steps as well as a mission statement for the IBPS:

*The International Buddhist Peace Service is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian global initiative. Its aims are twofold:*

- *To enact the Buddha's vision of wisdom and compassion during this time of worldwide conflict and fear.*
- *To serve Buddhist communities throughout the world who wish to cooperate in building peace and relieving suffering.*

BPF will play a key role in helping to develop the IBPS and catalyzing support for it, particularly in the North American Buddhist community. We will keep you informed about the IBPS's evolution through *Turning Wheel*, and let you know how you can get involved in this exciting project.

In the meantime, we will stay in touch with our friends at Sarvodaya and the Foundation for the People of Burma to identify long-term needs for assistance, and we'll let you know how you can support redevelopment efforts. The acute crisis period following the tsunami may have passed, but even as media attention and public interest wanes, the need for support will not lessen.

In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease, in all parts of our suffering world. ❖

For Information about how to provide long-term support to those affected by the tsunami, see [www.bpf.org/html/whats\\_now/events/tsunami](http://www.bpf.org/html/whats_now/events/tsunami)

For more information about IBPS, see [www.garrisoninstitute.org/PeaceService.pdf](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/PeaceService.pdf)

# Prison Project Report

## Looking Back from the Future

by Diana Lion

*Widening our perspective leads to more possibilities. As I add the role of BPF Associate Director of Programs to my current responsibilities, I am reflecting on what has shifted in the prison dharma scene since our prison program started in 1998. I'm thinking about a conversation I might have with my imaginary daughter Emilia if we lived 100 years from now.*

**Y**ou see, Emilia, back then people thought that prisons were places to be used for punishment. What do I mean by punishment? Punishment is an outdated idea people believed in for thousands of years, and only gave up in the last 75 years. Punishment meant imposing a penalty on people who did something wrong. This was supposed to teach them to stop behaving that way.

We called the things they did wrong “crimes” and the people who committed crimes were called “criminals.” We used to think that punishing them would help protect everyone else. We thought that if we locked them in small cells, took away their stuff, and kept them separated from their families and friends, they’d see what they’d done wrong and change their ways. Did it work? Usually it didn’t. People who went to these places (we called them prisons), felt lonely, isolated, and often more angry. When they were eventually released, they found that having a prison record made it hard to get a job, so they often committed more crimes in order to get by.

“Criminals” were sometimes people who grew up poor and didn’t go to good schools like you do, where kids can learn in ways that work for them. Sometimes they were kids whose parents used drugs, so they had a painful home life and grew up thinking that they were worthless and that their existence and their actions didn’t matter. Some criminals had fought in wars and returned home scared and traumatized because they had seen and done so many horrible things. Sometimes they would continue to do some of those same “war” things, like killing people, back at home.

Yes, Emilia, punishment does seem like an odd concept to us now. Now we know that whenever people are acting harmfully we must figure out what’s behind their acts to get to the root of the problem. They may need help to understand their feelings and needs behind the “crimes” so they can make different choices.

This way of thinking dates all the way back to the prison dharma and prisoners’ rights projects of the late 20th century. Then, in the middle of this current century, an amazing woman named Lucia Luminosa developed our system of restorative justice, which was very different from the old system of punitive justice based on prisons, prisoners, and executions. What are executions? This might be a little hard to understand, but we used to kill people who had killed

others, to show that killing was wrong. Yes, I agree—it doesn’t make any sense. Eventually everybody realized that, and people started teaching methods of reconciliation such as meditation practice, nonviolent communication, and deep listening.

Do you remember the Singing Maples Community Farming Center we visited last month, where we bought the huge bunches of spinach, carrots, and chard? That used to be one of the prisons I’m talking about. I think it was probably around 2065 when the first prison was completely converted into a community farm to grow vegetables and flowers. Once people realized that it was an effective way to encourage people who had committed crimes to live peacefully with others—and that growing healthy food was a good use of land—they got behind the Prisons-to-Farms movement.

Communities saw that they could heal the fractures crimes cause by including everyone in the restoration process. They started with “victim-offender mediation” way back in the late 1980s. Then they got smarter and started including methods from Maori, indigenous Hawaiian, and First Nations sources. They built the first restorative justice conversion project at San Quentin, in California, 50 years ago. They set up an organic farm there. What’s an organic farm? I know it sounds odd, but farmers used to spray poisonous chemicals on crops to grow more food for people. The government finally banned all those poisons just before you were born. Anyway, when people arrived at this pilot project, a counselor would help them choose their classes, which could include contemplative practice, communication and parenting lessons, job skills, and physical work.

At first taxpayers complained. They said the new system was too expensive and indulgent. But then they saw that participants were leaving the centers with strong community ties and good “life skills.” They noticed the center’s graduates were happier and therefore more likely to be productive citizens, and this, in turn, made their communities safer.

There’s a long and painful history behind what these community farms used to be, and it’s important to remember it. Let’s not forget that our beloved Singing Maples Farm used to be the site of the terrible Sing Sing prison. Without realizing it, those old prison dharma projects ended up providing part of the foundation for a whole new system. Inspiring, eh? It’s a reminder that we never know where our mindful efforts will lead us. ❖

The everyday practice is simply to develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and to all people, experiencing everything totally without mental reservations and blockages, so that one never withdraws or centralizes onto oneself.

—Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

# Youth Program & BASE Report

by Tempel Smith

We had a pleasant surprise last fall as we prepared for the New Year's teen retreat. Expecting between 10 and 15 teens to apply, we ended up with 26! These kids were on a short winter break from school, which meant they could have been sleeping in, hanging out with friends, and enjoying as few responsibilities as possible. Instead, 26 teens, ranging in age from 13 to 19, chose to come to a retreat center where they would meet many new faces, would be challenged by waking up at 6:30 AM every morning, and would practice long periods of silent sitting and walking meditation each day. They came to this new experience with willingness, honesty, and courage. We were expecting it to be one of our smaller retreats and instead it was the largest ever!

Our schedule on this six-day retreat was much like previous retreats—a mixture of silent meditation periods, small discussion groups, afternoon workshops, and free time to talk, hang out, and play music. This time we were visited by Ven. Matthew Frum, a Western Tibetan monk who is also the main attendant to Most Ven. Lama Zopa on his U.S. visits. Ven. Matthew guided three evening sessions of tonglen, a powerful meditation to develop compassion and love for all beings.

We were also visited by Diana Lion, director of the BPF prison project and new associate director of BPF programs. Diana led the teens and staff through a three-hour workshop on Nonviolent Communication, giving us insight into our skillful and not so skillful patterns of communication. Diana fully engaged the young people, and they plied her with tough questions, such as "Is wanting love, food, or even life itself a form of clinging and delusion? Could these wants be considered skillful?" Diana was delighted by the deep questioning she encountered from all the teens on the retreat.

Due to a generous grant from the LEF Foundation, we were able to offer many scholarships to teens from lower-income families, and to teens already dedicated to service and activism. For seven of our participants, this scholarship was the only way they could have come on the retreat, which turned out to be a life-changing experience for each of them. A 16-year-old girl was able to fly across the country from Massachusetts, where she had been working to support same-sex marriage legislation and on the Kerry campaign. During our interview with her, we were impressed at how well she had already integrated her Buddhist spirituality into her activism. She said she had practiced *metta* (lovingkindness meditation) for all the Bush supporters she saw in Massachusetts, reminding herself that everyone was doing the best they could. She told us that she was unwilling to let her activism be fueled by anger or hatred.

Many participants were children of single mothers, and one girl said her family was just barely surviving on their

mother's disability checks. It also turned out that many of the kids were in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. Three members of our staff are also in recovery, so we decided to hold a small AA/NA meeting after breakfast every day. Having so many kids in recovery had a big effect on our retreat. These kids know from firsthand experience the dangers of drug and alcohol use, motivating them to advocate sobriety to their peers. For some it was their first time abstaining from intoxicants for spiritual reasons. They had the experience—unfortunately rare—of being held by a compassionate community of young people dedicated to waking up and caring for each other.

It was particularly moving to spend New Year's Eve with the teens in recovery. For some of them, this was the first sober New Year's Eve in a long time, and one of the most enjoyable ones. One teen told us that this wakeful, compassionate celebration was clearly better than being intoxicated, and this gave him more confidence that he was truly on the right path.

The next teen retreat will again be at Land of Medicine Buddha near Santa Cruz from June 19 to 24. Up-to-date information about the teen retreats can always be found at [www.bpf.org/teen.html](http://www.bpf.org/teen.html), by calling 415-643-8289, or by e-mailing <[teenretreat@bpf.org](mailto:teenretreat@bpf.org)>.

## BASE News

This spring the BASE program will celebrate its 10th year! We have launched two strong BASE programs, one in Berkeley/Oakland and one in San Francisco. We will celebrate the 10th anniversary in the next issue of *Turning Wheel*, but for now I would like to raise a cheer to BASE for being a life-changing program for so many people.

I'll be more than happy to help you develop a BASE program where you live, or I will help connect you to a BASE group forming somewhere else. BASE is open to people of all ages.

To find out more about BASE, please visit [www.bpf.org](http://www.bpf.org), e-mail <[base@bpf.org](mailto:base@bpf.org)>, or call 415-643-8289. You can download a detailed handbook on BASE from the bottom of the BASE Web page. A printed copy of this handbook can also be mailed to you for a \$5 donation. ♦

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In the middle of great battles  
They remain impartial to both sides;  
For bodhisattvas of great strength  
Delight in the reconciliation of conflict.

In order to help the living beings,  
They voluntarily descend into  
The hells which are attached  
To all the inconceivable buddha-fields.

—from the Vimalakirti Sutra

# Announcements & Classifieds

## ANNOUNCEMENTS/ CLASSIFIEDS

**Not Turning Away**, an anthology of 25 years of *Turning Wheel*, contains inspiring voices from the front lines of socially engaged Buddhism. Available at your local bookstore, from Shambhala Publications, or from Buddhist Peace Fellowship. To order from BPF, send a check or money order for \$20 (postage is included) to: BPF, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703.

**Free to Educators:** *Faces of the Enemy* by Sam Keen. The 2004 reprint includes a study guide, a chapter on "The New Enemy," posters, and political cartoons that illustrate how enemies are dehumanized. If you are interested in receiving this book, please e-mail Sam Keen at <samkeen@direcway.com>.

**Tea Circle:** Full line of supplies and arts for Japanese tea ceremony. Visit [www.tea-circle.com](http://www.tea-circle.com) or call 707/792-1946 or 415/499-8431.

**The Conch-Us Times: Journal of the Grateful Buddhists of America** focuses on the Grateful Dead, spiritual, political, and environmental issues, socially engaged Buddhism, music, art, poetry, etc. \$8/year (\$12 foreign), payable to Ken Sun-Downer, P. O. Box 769, Idyllwild CA 92549; <conchustimes@yahoo.com>; [www.conchustimes.org](http://www.conchustimes.org).

**The Faithful Fools Street Ministry presents *The Witness***, directed by Martha Boesing. The play is based on the 10 ox-herding pictures from ancient Zen Buddhist teachings and on the testimonies of street retreatants with the Faithful Fools. The compelling story follows the journey of a young woman onto the streets. The 50-minute presentation can be performed in your home, church, meeting hall, or school. Fees negotiable or by donation. For more information, call Martha Boesing at 510/530-6188.

**New Website:** The Meditation Spot helps Internet searchers find a suitable meditation practice by profiling prominent teachers in every tradition. Visit [www.meditationspot.com](http://www.meditationspot.com).

**New: BPF e-Newsletter!** Want to stay up-to-date about BPF and the world of socially engaged Buddhism between issues of *Turning Wheel*? Subscribe to BPF's new monthly e-newsletter. Sign up at [www.bpf.org](http://www.bpf.org).

### BPF publications:

***Making the Invisible Visible***, writings by people of color and their white allies about healing racism in our Buddhist communities. Available on the Spirit Rock website, [www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org).  
***Safe Harbor***, ethical guidelines, process, and resources for Buddhist communities. \$7 (includes postage), available from BPF, 510/655-6169; [bpf@bpf.org](mailto:bpf@bpf.org).

**Texas Freedom Sangha** publishes a quarterly newsletter for/about Buddhist prisoners in Texas. Texas prisoners can request free subscriptions, info on other services and/or submit articles, sutra quotes, etc., for publication. Contact us at: Texas Freedom Sangha, 519 South Sylvania Ave., Ft. Worth, TX 76111-2241.

## GROUPS

**Green Sangha: Spiritually Based Environmental Activism.** Groups meet in Oakland and Marin County. Form a group in your hometown. Call 415/459-8610; [www.greensangha.org](http://www.greensangha.org).

**Mindfulness, Diversity, and Social Change Sangha**, blending mindfulness practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh with social change work, meets weekly in Oakland. Contact Olga at 510/540-0141; [mindful@rightbox.com](mailto:mindful@rightbox.com).

## VOLUNTEER/DONATIONS/ SPONSORSHIP

**Prison Dharma Network (PDN)** needs your donations of dollars and used dharma books (no magazines please!) to continue making the Dharma available to prisoners. If you are interested in joining PDN, please visit our Web site: [www.PrisonDharmaNetwork.org](http://www.PrisonDharmaNetwork.org). Send donations to PDN, P.O. Box 4623, Boulder, CO 80306-4623. 303/544/5923; <[pdn@indra.com](mailto:pdn@indra.com)>.

**Please lend us a hand!** October 2005 is the 20th Anniversary of the Peace Pagoda in Leverett, MA. To celebrate, we will inaugurate the New Temple! Please help us with cooking, lawn mowing, garden work, construction, painting, computer input, temple cleaning, etc. Contact Leverett Peace Pagoda, 100 Cave Hill Road, Leverett, MA 01054; 413/367-2202.

**From the State Pen to Penn State.** If you believe in second chances, you can help Dirk Van Velzen in his pursuit of a degree in business administration at Penn State, where his GPA. is, thus far, 4.0. Since incarcerated students are precluded from federal financial aid, Dirk has been marketing calendars made with drawings from talented incarcerated artists. The calendars are \$19.99 and the proceeds will help fund his undergraduate tuition in addition to a number of scholarships for other incarcerated students. Visit us online: [www.prison-scholar.com](http://www.prison-scholar.com) or call 800/111-2222.

**BPF volunteers, wanted, needed, loved.** Call us: 510/655-6169.

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All inquiries are confidential.

# Gratitude

*For the past few years, this list has been organized according to the amount of the donation. In this issue, we return to our original practice of listing donors alphabetically, in the recognition that all gifts given in the dharma are precious no matter the size.*

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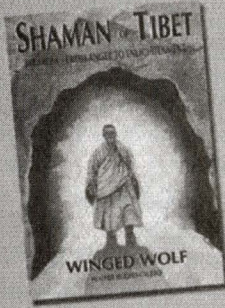


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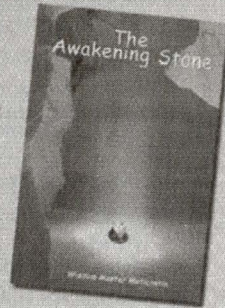


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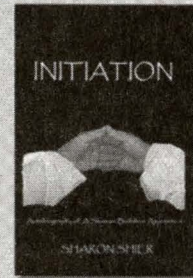
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