

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



• Personal Odysseys •

Facing Loneliness • Receiving a New Liver

Keeping Buddhist Vows in Prison

Grieving an M.I.A. Father



From the Editor

Last week I went to a teach-in on torture and international law. On a cold winter afternoon, a small circle of people stood in weak sunshine outside Boalt Hall Law School at U.C. Berkeley. Inside, Professor John Yoo was giving his weekly lecture. Yoo is the author of the legal justification for the Bush administration's policy allowing torture of "enemy combatants." The teach-in, also a weekly event, was organized by Buddhist activist Taigen Dan Leighton and is sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and other organizations.

I learned a lot from the day's speaker, Naomi Roht-Arriaza, a professor of international law at Hastings School of Law in San Francisco. I learned, for example, that never before has there been such thing as an "enemy combatant." According to international agreements, a prisoner from one country who is held by another country is either a prisoner of war or a civilian, with no wiggle room in between, and protections against torture are clearly spelled out for both categories of prisoners. Prof. Roht-Arriaza stood there in the sunken courtyard, without benefit of lectern, or blackboard, or audio-visual equipment, or even a chair, and spoke clearly, gesturing with her hands for emphasis, about the many international treaties to which the U.S. is a signatory—as well as various laws of the U.S.—that clearly prohibit torture. (Please see page 9 for excerpts from these treaties.)

More photographs of the torture at Abu Ghraib prison have recently been released. Some of them were on display at the teach-in, on a piece of poster-board that leaned against a tree. The U.S. was once a country that at least had a public position against torture. But now my government is telling the world it's necessary to subject nameless prisoners to extreme pain and humiliation in order to protect my security.

It was hard to keep standing there in the cold, listening to the bad news. A few of us sat down on a stone ledge. Toward the end, someone asked, "What can we *do*?" Prof. Roht-Arriaza suggested that we insist on the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate U.S. policy on torture and the situations at Guantanamo and in Iraq, since our attorney general is clearly not doing this. To that end, we can support the various human rights organizations, including the ACLU and Amnesty International, that are working to make this happen, and we can write to our Congresspeople to push for an investigation.

Later that day, I joined the ACLU. And the very next day, I went to a Buddhist retreat in the redwoods, with a group of women, for the weekend. We sat together in silence, we cooked, we ate, we talked, we walked. I was about as far from Abu Ghraib as a person can get. My Buddhist practice has two parts: sitting down on my cushion, and getting up. This was the sitting-down part.

Settled on my zafu, listening to the cozy crackling of the logs in the fireplace and smelling the mushroom risotto that was being prepared for our dinner, I tried to hold in my mind the forgotten prisoners at Guantanamo. I dedicated the merit of my sitting to them. Not that it's going to do them any good directly—I'm not so arrogant as to think so—but it does *me* some good. It connects the sitting down and the getting up.

The more horrible the torture gets, the greater the temptation to turn away from it, and the more likely I am to think there's nothing I can do. That's why I tried to bring those prisoners with me into the redwoods, as if I could share the risotto with them. Their world is my world. I don't want to shut them from my mind. I practice (and I do mean *practice*) being alive to the agony in my world, and at the same time, I practice taking delight in eating mushroom risotto with sangha friends at a silent dinner in the redwoods. ❖ —Susan Moon

Coming deadline for *Turning Wheel*:

► Fall '06: **Special Issue on finding a socially engaged Buddhist response to our current crisis in government.** Deadline: June 12, 2006

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>.

TURNING WHEEL

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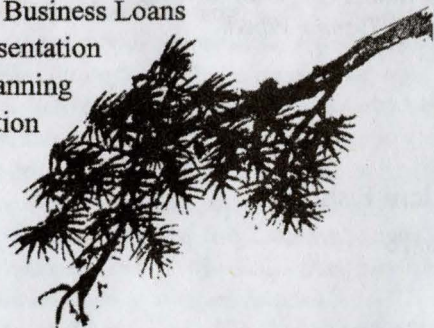
Jan Eldridge, *Prayer Wheel*, watercolor

Jan Eldridge is a professor of art and a student of Vajrayana Buddhism.

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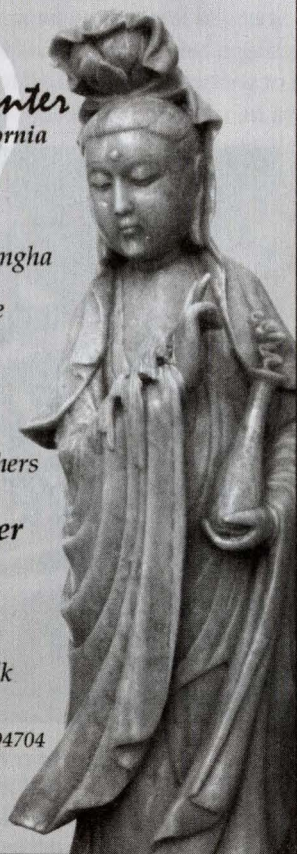
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Letters

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.

Diversity in Sanghas

I would like to thank *Turning Wheel* for continuing to address the issue of diversity in Western Buddhism, and I would like to praise work being done by people of color (POC) and whites at institutions such as SFZC and Spirit Rock to address the homogeneity found in their sanghas. Diversity committees, scholarships, and retreats meant specifically for POC have given me and many POC an opportunity to take greater ownership of our practice. There is, however, a common ground that has been overlooked.

I would like to encourage many of the teachers and senior students to draw upon an existing bridge that has seldom been traveled by those engaged in the diversity discourse; this is the bridge between the suffering of POC and that of the Jewish people. After reading essays, having discussions, and participating to a limited extent in the issue of diversifying our sanghas, I have heard and read little with respect to the apparent and natural relationship between Jewish people and POC.

While there is a growing population of POC in traditionally white sanghas, there is a firmly established group of ethnic Jews—many of whom are the guiding teachers of these institutions. As these leaders and teachers address diversity, I suggest that in addition to investigating racial oppression in the United States they should also reveal their own experiences as an oppressed minority. I never hear the emotional experiences of Jewish people in dharma talks and essays; a heartfelt expression of being oppressed—and being liberated through practice—would be a great opportunity for many people, including POC, to see how the Buddha's teachings directly relate to the lives of their teachers and to their/our own lives. With this suggestion, I would like to heap praise upon those who have accepted and addressed the diversity issue at their practice centers. Thank you, thank you, thank you, and peace. ❖

—Blake T., Oakland, California

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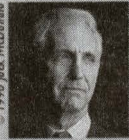


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Moment of Choice

Reflections on Abortion and the First Precept

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

I've been pregnant only once in my life, I have one child, and I've never had an abortion or a miscarriage, unlike many women I know. At the time I began Zen Buddhist practice in 1982, I was the office manager of MARAL (Michigan Abortion Rights Action League), an all-woman organization. Around that time I saw a black-and-white photograph of a naked woman lying dead in a pool of blood in a cheap hotel room, after an illegal or self-induced abortion. I've never forgotten seeing that image and thinking, "She must have been so desperate, and so alone."

I've been more fortunate in being able to choose whether or not to have a legal and safe abortion, and my choice was made some years later, in 1988. I was pregnant, penniless, homeless, and had just returned to California after finishing a stint in a Korean Buddhist nuns' temple. I was in severe culture shock. I did have a credit card, and the logical choice seemed pretty clear: I should get an abortion and then try to get a job, find a place to live, and put my life back together. But I'd just spent eight months meditating on a mountain in South Korea, an experience that completely changed my life in ways I still don't understand fully. I did get as far as opening the San Francisco Yellow Pages and finding the number of a women's clinic. But every time I tried to phone the number, I found myself paralyzed. It was almost funny to me: I'd stand by my friend's phone, staring at it and willing my arm to move. Nothing would happen. I felt like a large stone or a sack of wet sand. After some days of this, I accepted that no longer was "my" life solely my own. Embryo Joshua, although small, was now my co-pilot, so to speak, and together we seemed set to barrel right over Niagara Falls.

There are many explanations for my inability to make that call, of course. Pregnancy sets off a cascade of hormones designed by evolution to ensure the continuation of the species. Or, as the pro-salmon T-shirt says: "Spawn till you die." At bottom, reproduction is a raw and urgent matter. An equally potent dimension that I felt I had entered in a new way was the realm of the First Buddhist Precept, "Not to kill, but to cherish all life." Even though continuing this pregnancy made no sense whatsoever, and I had no idea how I would support myself and raise a child by myself, somehow when I put all the pieces of the puzzle together, I kept coming to the same illogical conclusion: I needed to gratefully receive the path that had opened to me, and find out who this new being was who was expressing his life through mine.

I've been humbled by what this experience has taught me about the complexity of political stances. I remember that at one point a "pro-life" or "anti-choice" organization

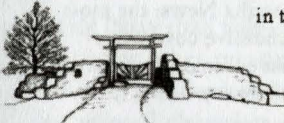
was offering a gold lapel pin called "Little Feet" to its members. The pin depicted a fetus's tiny feet, perfectly formed, as a reminder of the preciousness of human life. When I was in my twenties I scornfully dismissed that pin. I could only view it as propaganda designed to arouse sentimental reactions that would block out the realities of desperate women, some of them living in poverty, who had to seek back-alley abortions. And I'm still aware, maybe more than ever, of those grim realities. But now that I've gone through nine months of pregnancy, I see that lapel pin image with new eyes. My son, now a teenager and taller than me, once had feet as small as those on the pin. I did as well, when my mother carried me inside her. To my surprise, I now can empathize deeply with the feelings of "pro-life" activists and voters, at the same time that I write my senators to protect *Roe v. Wade*.

Every day on this planet, women give birth to babies, and many raise their children in incredibly arduous living conditions. Actually, my first decision to proceed with my pregnancy, no matter how hard it would be, was made the moment I learned I was pregnant. The test was performed in a Seventh Day Adventist hospital in Seoul, and the American doctor stationed there was a stranger to me. Yet when he entered the examination room and cheerfully announced, "Yes indeed, we're pregnant!" I immediately felt that I had a kind friend.

"Do you plan on keeping this baby?" the doctor then asked. As a Zen student, I had done koan work, and when the question was asked my mouth opened and I immediately said: "Yes!" I didn't think about it at all. In the years following, I've never been quite sure who came up with that surprising answer. It was a "yes" that catapulted me into a world of joyful love I'd never known existed, all doubt forever vanished. ❖

When I started my meditation practice I believed if I meditated hard enough I'd be finished with all pain. That turned out to be a big mistake.... The Buddha said, "Everything dear to us causes pain."

— Sylvia Boorstein



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Ajahn Chah on Working with Attachment
 In the Spring issue of *Buddhadharma*, Ajahn Chah explains how to practice with a mind of giving up and letting go. ALSO IN THE ISSUE: TRALEG RINPOCHE COMMENTS ON THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA. CHARLES PREBISH LOOKS AT THE GROWING COMMUNITY OF SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONERS. AND ONE MONK'S INTIMATE REFLECTIONS ON THE CHALLENGING PRACTICE OF BEGGING FOR ALMS.

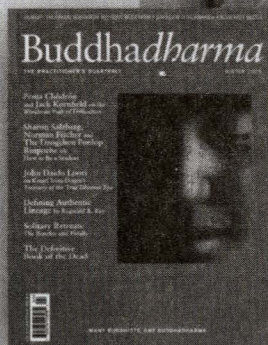
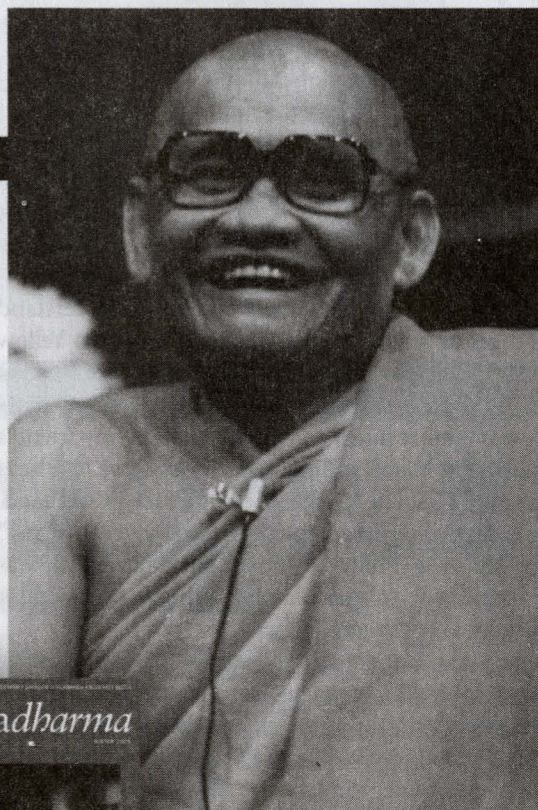
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History

Khunying Kanitha

by Diane Ames

Khunying Kanitha (1922–2002), described by her sister as “a completely engaged Buddhist, social activist, and legal scholar throughout her life,” was born into a lawyer’s family in Bangkok in 1922. She soon decided to study law herself, a most unusual choice for a Thai woman at the time. She earned a law degree from Thammasat University and went on to study international law in the United States and Switzerland. When she returned home, she went to work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, married, and had three children.

Impressed by the shelters for battered and deserted women that she had seen in other countries, Khunying decided that Thailand needed such institutions. In 1979, she established the Emergency Home and Relief Fund for Women and Children in Distress in a house in Bangkok. So many victims of domestic violence, forced prostitution, and incestuous abuse sought refuge there that the place proved to be too small. When a former classmate donated a piece of land near the Bangkok Airport, Khunying immediately began construction on a new shelter, helping to dig dirt herself. However, her reputation soon attracted the necessary funds. In addition to the women’s shelter, she was

eventually able to construct an orphanage, a childcare center, an AIDS hospice, and a clinic for homeless pregnant women and their babies.

Khunying did not stop there. She also organized the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women (APSW), of which she served as president from 1982 until 2000. In her spare time, she founded Mahapajapati Theri College, the first Buddhist college for women in Thailand, partly to provide educational opportunities for Thailand’s neglected *mae chiis*, or novice nuns.

Denied full ordination as bhikkhunis because the order of nuns had long since been allowed to die out, *mae chiis* had no access to the education and government benefits lavished on monks. Most lived by doing servant work in monasteries. Khunying, who tried for years to gain legal recognition for the *mae chiis*, hoped that the order of fully ordained nuns would ultimately be restored. In 1993, she herself was ordained in Sri Lanka, in a historic ceremony presided over by five bhikkus and five bhikkhunis from all over the Buddhist world. However, she decided that the time was not propitious to take the controversial step of wearing the orange or brown robes of a fully ordained nun. Instead, she put on the humble white robes of a *mae chii*.

By the time she died in 2002, Khunying Kanitha was known throughout Thailand as a model for engaged Buddhists. ❖

TREATIES AGAINST TORTURE

The United States has signed many international treaties prohibiting torture of state prisoners. Some excerpts follow.

The Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1950)

Article 13

Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention. In particular, no prisoner of war may be subjected to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are not justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the prisoner concerned and carried out in his interest.

Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.

Measures of reprisal against prisoners are prohibited.

Article 17

No physical or mental torture, nor any other form of coercion, may be inflicted on prisoners of war to secure from them information of any kind whatever. Prisoners of war who refuse to answer may not be threatened, insulted, or exposed to any unpleasant or disadvantageous treatment of any kind.

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987)

Article 1

The term “torture” means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the acquiescence of a public official.

Article 2

1. Each State Party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction.

2. **No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.**

► Please support the organizations that are speaking out against U.S. torture. Some relevant websites are:

- Amnesty International/USA: www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/
- American Civil Liberties Union: www.aclu.org
- Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org
- University of Minnesota Human Rights Library: www.umn.edu/humanrts. ❖

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Aging Is Not a Problem

by Stephanie Kaza

As a tree grows older, it sooner or later faces the limits of size and capacity. At some point it cannot afford to grow any taller because of the challenge of bringing water up from the roots. And similarly, its side branches cannot grow any longer because they are too expensive to support. The number of leaves on a tree becomes relatively fixed and thus the ability to produce food also levels off. Even so, a tree will continue to add a new layer of wood each year, the newer layers thinner than the older ones. Sooner or later the top branches become water-deprived and eventually break off, leaving a gap in the tree's crown. An aging tree can make up for these losses by sprouting new branches off the trunk, though these may be short-lived. An old saying goes, "Oaks take 300 years to grow, 300 years to stay, and 300 years to decline." Many of us are drawn to such trees as models of dignity under the duress of loss.

How will I approach my own aging process? I too, sooner or later, like all animals, will run into the limits of damaged tissue, inflammation, and various reduced capacities. Over time I will experience the loss of physical and mental functions that I once took for granted. The stress of aging will take its inevitable toll; it is not possible to eliminate all stress. In truth, the evolution of our remarkable animal capacities has been determined in large measure by the core stresses involved in finding food, shelter, and mates.

What exactly is stress? And how does it affect the aging process? Whether we are worried about meeting deadlines, caring for family, or wringing our hands about the state of the world, our sympathetic nervous system obliges with its fight-or-flight response to danger. Sympathetic nerve stimulation causes the heart to beat faster, blood sugar to rise, digestion to slow, and cortisol levels to go up. Overstimulation at chronic rates can cause cardiac arrhythmia, immune dysfunction, and digestive tract ailments. Recent studies demonstrate a direct impact of stress on cellular aging, indicated by the length and health of chromosomes and the level of oxidative capacity in the cells.

Health guru Andrew Weil, in his new book *Healthy Aging*, makes a case for "stress protection" as a way to protect your body from the cumulative impacts of stress. How does a tree take up stress protection to extend its life? It adds leaves on the new branches to increase its food stores. It invests in outer layers to guard against infection and insects. And it seals off damaged areas, allowing parts of the tree to die while others continue to live. Dealing with aging is part of dealing with life. How can human beings be good animals and deal with aging effectively? Weil extols the virtues of cultivating the "relaxation response" and notes the common methods most people choose: alcohol, television, vacations, exercise. He points out, however, that these

methods either don't deal with the source of the stress or just add to the overstimulation load of the sympathetic nervous system. Instead, he recommends breath work and meditation as effective ways to moderate stress through inviting the parasympathetic system to engage. This then slows the heart, drops blood pressure, and supports the internal organs.

The difference between trees and people is that we think about aging and have a lot of ideas about what it means. We say we're "failing," or feel "used up, worn out." Our habits of thought can actually promote stress and anxiety and contribute to the aging process. Weil suggests cultivating detachment and flexibility instead, and finding a way to use humor for gaining perspective on the inevitable losses of aging. He encourages the use of thought to develop the brain and build more nerve pathways (like extra branches) through learning. This neural redundancy provides extra backup and therefore stress protection, a proactive preparation for aging. Studying the mind and studying the texts can both have cellular benefits.

Most meditation instruction does not tend to focus on the positive benefits in terms of aging gracefully. But the Buddhist literature is full of stories about famous teachers whose meditation kept them alert and responsive right through to death. This is how I'd like to be, like a tree engaged with life all the way. Though we are not trees, we do have good animal and Buddhist knowledge that can be applied to embrace the suffering of aging. We can meditate to support our brain cells and fully accept each stage of decline. The graceful oak is a work in progress, succumbing to gravity. Accepting our natural mind, we too can find our way gracefully to the ground. ❖

Buddha, sovereign of truth, extends clouds of great compassion in all directions, raining differently for each practitioner, without discriminating among them.

—from *The Flower Ornament Scripture*
translated by Thomas Cleary

Green Sangha

Spiritually-Based Environmental Activism

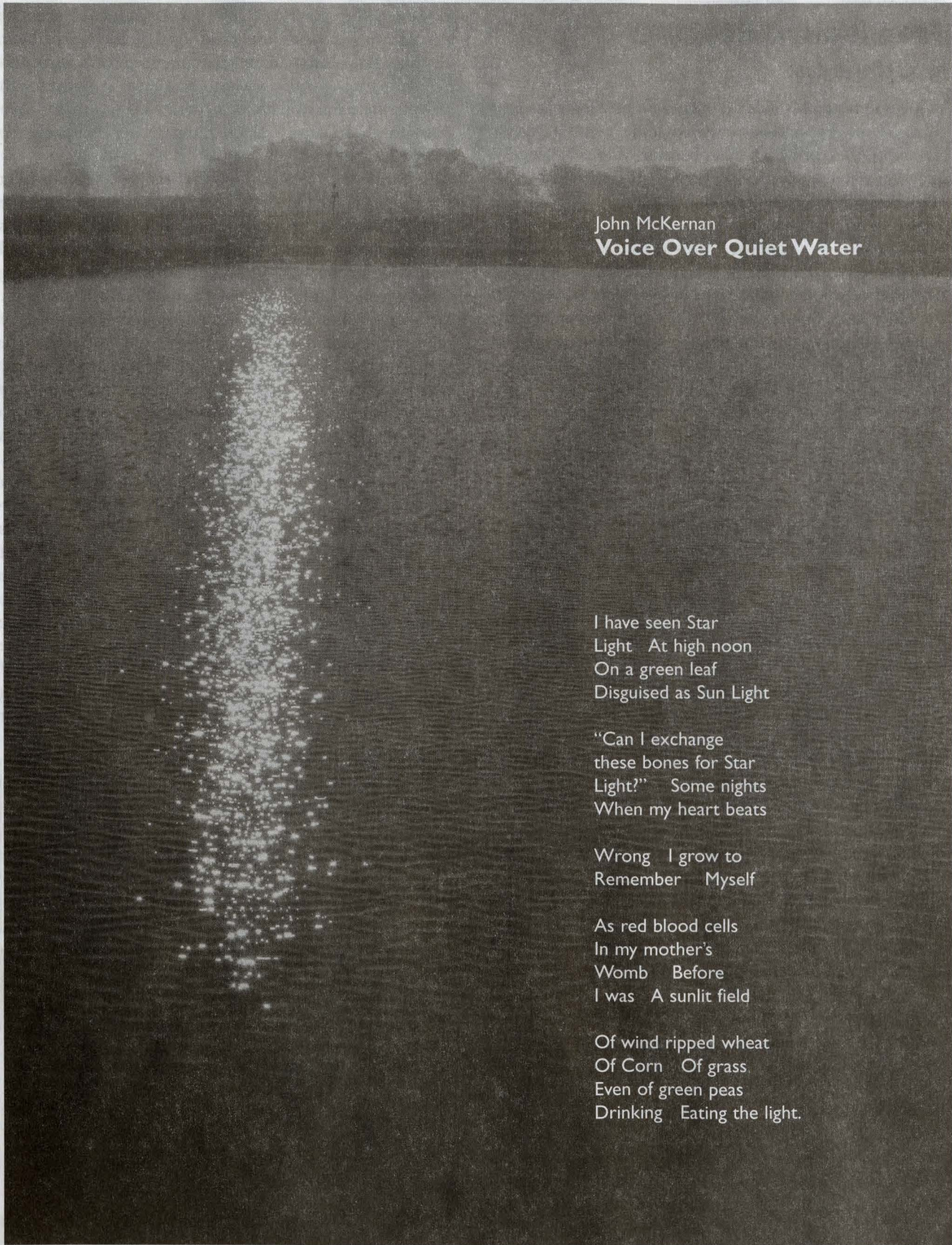
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www.greensangha.org



John McKernan
Voice Over Quiet Water

I have seen Star
Light At high noon
On a green leaf
Disguised as Sun Light

"Can I exchange
these bones for Star
Light?" Some nights
When my heart beats

Wrong I grow to
Remember Myself

As red blood cells
In my mother's
Womb Before
I was A sunlit field

Of wind ripped wheat
Of Corn Of grass
Even of green peas
Drinking Eating the light.

Lawrence Watson
Kunde Vineyards Pond 2006

John McKernan grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, and teaches at Marshall University in West Virginia. He edits the poetry magazine ABZ.

In Memoriam

Fred Pfeil, 1949–2005

by Seth Segall

Fred Pfeil had many sides but only one face. The many sides: college professor, literary and social critic, prize-winning novelist and short-story writer, film and jazz buff, social activist, trickster, husband, Quaker, and Buddhist. The one face: good-natured, warm, generous, humorous, boyishly charming, enthusiastic, utterly unpretentious, and completely attentive to whomever he was with in the moment. When Fred walked into a room, people couldn't help smiling. He lifted our hearts.

Fred helped cofound the Connecticut Buddhist Peace Fellowship chapter. He was an ardent social activist who was willing to go to jail for his beliefs. He had been active in the movement for social justice in Central America, in the movement to humanize globalization, in the movement to end the death penalty, in the peace movement, and in the movement against the wars in Iraq. In June 2005, he was an honoree of the Connecticut chapter of the American Friends Service Committee for his work in the Alternatives to Violence program at the Enfield Correctional Facility and the Help Increase the Peace program at the Quirk Middle School. In the last year of his life, Fred also began to teach meditation and nonviolence at the state women's prison in Niantic.

In 2002, Fred married his faculty colleague and soul mate, Buddhist scholar Ellison Findly, on Human Rights Day. The ceremony took place during a brief hiatus from an antiwar demonstration; the groom's placard read "No Blood for Oil," the bride's, "Not in Our Name."

Fred was a long-term dharma student of Larry Rosenberg's at the Cambridge Center for Insight Meditation. He also studied Buddhism at Sharpham College under the tutelage of Stephen Batchelor, and published an essay that emerged from his studies there.* He was a member of the Greater Hartford Insight Meditation Sitting Group, and he and Elli also opened their home, Green Wheel Dharma House, to the Hartford community every Sunday evening for meditation and a potluck dinner.

Memories of Fred

According to Bill Cosgrove, a reporter for the *Trinity Tripod*, in 1991 Fred attended a large protest against the first Gulf War that was held in front of a federal building in Seattle. "Fred, who detested having to dress up, wore a suit and tie. He stood at the entrance of the building, and whenever an employee tried to enter, he would calmly tell them that due to the protests, the building was closed for

the day. After Fred had sent home numerous federal employees, somebody finally asked to see his credentials. Needless to say, he didn't have any and was promptly arrested. Later, when he was waiting to be booked and wearing shackles around his wrists and legs, Fred led others in singing chain-gang songs."

Melissa Kotulski remembers Fred's participation at a "die-in" against the war in Iraq at Trinity College in 2003. "Fred lay down in the icy rain, with nothing between his face and the brick.... He lay there for three hours; I stuck it out for only thirty minutes. Lying there in the freezing cold, I heard comments about the war and reactions to the protests. When I asked Fred what he heard, he said he saw and heard the people who would suffer in Iraq."

When he was wracked by the metastatic melanoma that would eventually take his life, Fred had friends take him from his sick bed in Hartford Hospital, where he was scheduled for neurosurgery the next day, and drive him across the state to a BPF chapter meeting in New Haven. He didn't want to miss a single meeting; not even his advancing cancer would stop him from attending.

Fred sent this e-mail to a friend who was also struggling with cancer: "We're certainly getting our lessons and extra problem sets in dukkha, anicca, and anatta these days, aren't we? And I'm stunned at both what a blessing the Dhamma is, and how terrifyingly, relentlessly, remorselessly true it is as well."

His dharma teacher, Larry Rosenberg, remembered their private interviews together: "There was lots of serious talk and loud laughing. He had a great sense of the absurd. Film was a mutual love, and we would talk over films with overt dharma content, or see it there anyway. We exchanged gifts towards the end. He gave me a wonderful Japanese film on death; I gave him a sculpture. We chatted on the phone until it was no longer possible. He got word to me just before his death that I shouldn't be concerned; he was at peace and he was grateful for our friendship. So was I.

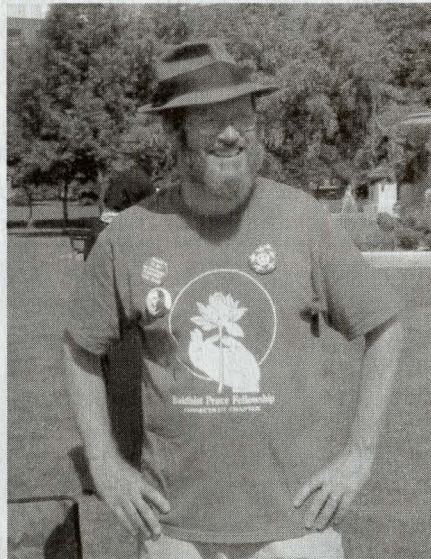
I bring both palms together and bow deeply to Fred."

Sometimes we are blessed in life to walk alongside mahasattvas—great beings—who inspire us to be more than we are. All who knew Fred were so blessed. ❖

*"Subjects without Selves," in Watson, Batchelor & Claxton (Eds.), *The Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Science, and Our Day-to-Day Lives* (pp. 40–54), Samuel Weiser, Inc. 2000.

Seth Segall is the spokesperson for the Connecticut Chapter of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

[The above is a condensed version of a full obituary that can be found on our website, www.bpf.org.]



A School for Orphans in Sikkim

Transforming the World and Preserving a Threatened Culture

by Nathaniel H. Taylor, Sarah Evershed, and Adam Fish

On a dusty playground in West Sikkim, the northeastern-most state in India, the school day has not yet begun. Wearing a purple robe and gold belt, the school's principal, Captain Yapo S. Yongda, leads us around the Denjong Padma Choeling Academy (DPCA), a Buddhist primary school for orphans indigenous to this Himalayan region. As he walks through the throngs of uniformed children, keeping a stern watch on the scene around him, he shoos a group of small kids playing in the dirt: "Up! Your school clothes are getting filthy! Go get your things for school and come back here for morning assembly!" The children immediately rise and dust themselves off as they run towards their dormitory. "Most of them are orphans," Yapo tells us. "This is the first school for many of them. I want them to understand the importance of education. Without the school, many of these kids would be homeless and receiving no proper training." We listen closely to what he tells us because we know how close this school is to his heart. He is the founder and its most ardent supporter.

As a young man in the 1960s, Yapo worked as a royal guard to the 12th Chogyal, the religious leader and king of Sikkim. He traveled tirelessly with the royal family all over Sikkim. In North Sikkim, near the foothills of the Tibetan plateau and close to the Chinese-controlled border, Yapo saw the most deprived Sikkimese children and families he had seen in his life. These scenes propelled him to open the Denjong Padma Choeling Academy. Yapo believes that only through education can children truly rise from their squalid living conditions. He felt that if the kids were to be educated in the peaceful ways of the Buddha, he needed to create a community dedicated to changing the course of humanity.

Yapo dreamed of a school for underprivileged and orphaned children that would include a curriculum based on secular education (including mathematics, history, geography, English, and science) and Tibetan Buddhist teachings (from books found hidden in caves of West Sikkim in the 16th century), with an emphasis on Sikkimese culture, including the native Bhutia language. The king, who doubted such a school could ever come into being, did, however, advance Yapo some money to take in several orphaned local children and begin teaching them. It was through this seed of inspiration that the academy was born.

As we stand in the dirt playground of the academy, we watch the children return to their classrooms. The main school building includes the infirmary, the dormitory, the library, and about ten classrooms.

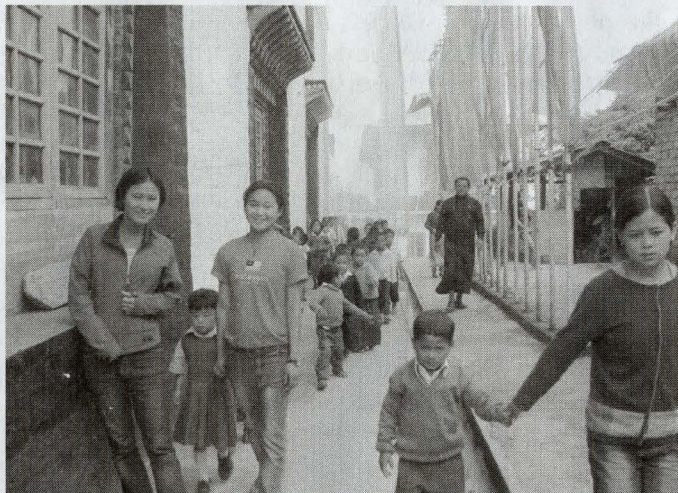
Yapo continues, "This dirt yard is the reason we are having a breakout of scabies. I want to put cement over it so the kids' school clothes will remain clean and disease will be lessened."

The school now houses 237 students between the ages of five and sixteen,

kindergarteners to tenth graders. "Many of these children's parents have died. Others have parents who heard about the school and sent their children to us," Yapo says. He adjusts his square bifocals before continuing. He interrupts himself to speak to a small girl with a shaved head. "Have you finished your duties?" he asks her sternly.

"Yes, sir. Sir? Can I please return to my classes now that I have finished?"

"Yes," he answers, "you can return. But please, wash your hands first." Yapo turns back to us. "She is from North Sikkim. She and her brother were orphaned two years ago and have been at DPCA ever since that time. I knew their parents. They were good Buddhists from North Sikkim."



Sikkimese children lining up at the academy • photo by Sarah Evershed

Background

Sikkim was renowned as a Buddhist kingdom from the 14th century until today. Throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world, Sikkim is known as the Bayul De Me Dzung, or the Sacred Land of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambava). According to legend and sacred Buddhist texts, Guru Rinpoche, one of the founders of Tibetan Buddhism, came to Sikkim in the eighth century, hid treasures in its rugged, verdant mountains, and blessed the land with fruits, flowers, and medicinal plants. For centuries, Sikkim blossomed as a great Buddhist kingdom, where the monarchs were advanced Buddhist practitioners and the only conflict arose from intermittent invasions by Gurkha armies from Nepal.

In 1975, Sikkim became the 22nd state of India. At that time, the monarchy was dissolved and the borders were opened. Prior to this major event, the Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim influenced the king's decision-making. But as Sikkim became part of the Indian Union, several important changes took place. First, an increase of Indian and Nepalese settlers diluted the traditions of the Bhutia-Lepchas (B-L), the indigenous people who today make up approximately 30 percent of the population of Sikkim. Second, Buddhist practitioners, though historically in the majority, became a minority, largely due to the immigration of many Hindus into Sikkim.

The B-L religious traditions and political strengths continue to vanish under the weight of immigration and the changes associated with it: heavily encouraged tourism, ecologically unsound developments, and constitutionally imposed government policies. As Nepali has become the common language, much of the Bhutia-Lepcha vernacular is lost to today's Sikkimese children whose schools are taught solely in Nepali or English. It is this politico-cultural shift away from tradition that Yapo is working to rectify. Through instruction in Bhutia, Lepcha, and Tibetan languages, the sutras of Buddhism, and traditional B-L dance and music, the students of DPCA are forming a new foundation for the revitalization of indigenous Buddhism and Sikkimese culture.

The Founder

Captain Yapo S. Yongda was born Sonam Yongda in West Sikkim in the late 1930s, the son and grandson of Vajrayana Buddhist monks from Pemayangste Monastery. Designed by Lhatsun Chempo, one of the pioneers of Sikkimese Vajrayana Buddhism, Pemayangste Monastery stands as the premier monastery of Sikkim. It remains the core of the Buddhist sangha in Sikkim and a repository of some of the state's most important sutra texts, thangka paintings, archaeological sites, and sculpture. Within its traditionally decorated walls lie ancient sacred arti-

facts, numerous hand-painted sculptures, and the famously ecstatic paintings of Tibetan Buddhism.

It was to this monastery that Yapo was sent at the age of four. By the age of eight he was memorizing Buddhist texts with prodigy-like dexterity. It was clear he had inherited his father's prowess. The elders of Pemayangste saw his monastic potential, and he was given a throne reserved for high lamas within the main shrine. Yapo lived a peaceful monastic life until his mid-twenties, when he was assigned to create a series of gates to welcome the king and queen of Sikkim, who were invited to Pemayangste for a ceremony. Using the eight precious symbols of the Buddha's teachings, Yapo constructed a banner that hung over the road. The king was so impressed with his welcome that he asked Yapo to join him for dinner, during which he interviewed Yapo about his background and his understanding of Buddhism.

That night Yapo was asked to become one of the king's royal guardsmen. He was appointed captain and remained in the king's service until 1977, two years after the monarchy was overthrown. Remorseful and distraught at the plight of his culture and people,



he moved back to the safe environs of Pemayangste Monastery, in the town of Pelling, to attend to his family and Buddhist practice.

photo by Sarah Evershed

Yapo was arrested several times for speaking out about the unfair underrepresentation of Bhutia-Lepchas in the new government of Sikkim. Amnesty

International was involved in freeing him from incarceration.

In 1980 his dream became a reality—the Denjong Padma Choeling Academy was started, built on land owned by Pemayangste. Sadly, the 12th Chogyal of Sikkim, a major governmental supporter for the DPCA, died in 1982.

The School

The DPCA employs both local and foreign teachers. Most, however, are volunteers who are committed to DPCA's mission. The volunteers come from far corners of the world, including Nepal, France, Italy, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. They are rewarded with the joys of knowing the students and helping to preserve an ancient, well-respected culture that is in danger of vanishing. The volunteers are also given the unique opportunity to live at Pemayangste Monastery, where they engage in nightly Buddhist ceremonies. They can participate in all of the most respected ceremonies at this ancient monastery, which houses the world-famous Zonga Palri (the celestial being of Guru Rinpoche) and the sacred texts discovered by His Holiness Lhasun Chempo in 1643. The volunteer teachers stay at this monastery while they help to carry out Yapo's dream of preserving culture, promoting world peace, and teaching spiritually influenced ecological respect. In 1989 the president of India gave the coveted national award to Yapo for his outstanding work in the field of child welfare at DPCA.

The school has a working farm and garden, and the students learn to grow their own vegetables. There are pigs, cows, and hens, and eggs and milk are gathered daily. Due to an increasing water problem, the school is building a rainwater collection tank. Two botanical projects keep the students busy: a tea plantation whose yields benefit the academy and the cultivation of seedlings of a rare endemic magnolia. Yapo's goal is to teach the students the benefits of subsistence farming, and to

keep the children in touch with the source of their food. These farm and garden programs also give the children an opportunity to help generate income for their school.

Because fresh bread has been difficult to obtain—the closest bakeries are in Gangtok, a six-hour drive away—Yapo plans to start a bakery on the premises to provide fresh-baked goods to the children and to the town of Pelling. Profits will be used to benefit the school. Plans are afoot to complete the existing school buildings, and to construct a three-story dormitory, a meditation center, and a Buddhist hostel. Yapo hopes to make this a nationally subsidized and internationally competitive school. However, in order to receive economic support from the Indian government, it will be necessary to establish 11th and 12th grades. To achieve this, teachers and services must be expanded and upgraded. By 2020 Yapo would like to have 500 students through grade 12, a larger teaching staff composed of both full-time workers and volunteers, and the funds to continue the education of the underprivileged Bhutia-Lepcha children.

"I think we must look to the rest of the world for help to preserve our culture," proclaims Yapo. "Without international support we cannot grow any bigger. We have much to do if we are to succeed in spreading the dharma. We need to provide children with an education that includes not just Buddhism but also engineering, science, technology, commerce, and the humanities. Students need the opportunity to study the Buddha's teaching in a deeper way, so that they can become peaceful people or monks who will not harm anybody and who will become good citizens of their respective countries. This is how the world achieves peace."

As Yapo finishes, we stand watching the strong Himalayan sun gild his purple robes and inimitable spirit. It is clear that the DPCA is Yapo's lifelong commitment—to his country, to his culture, and to himself.



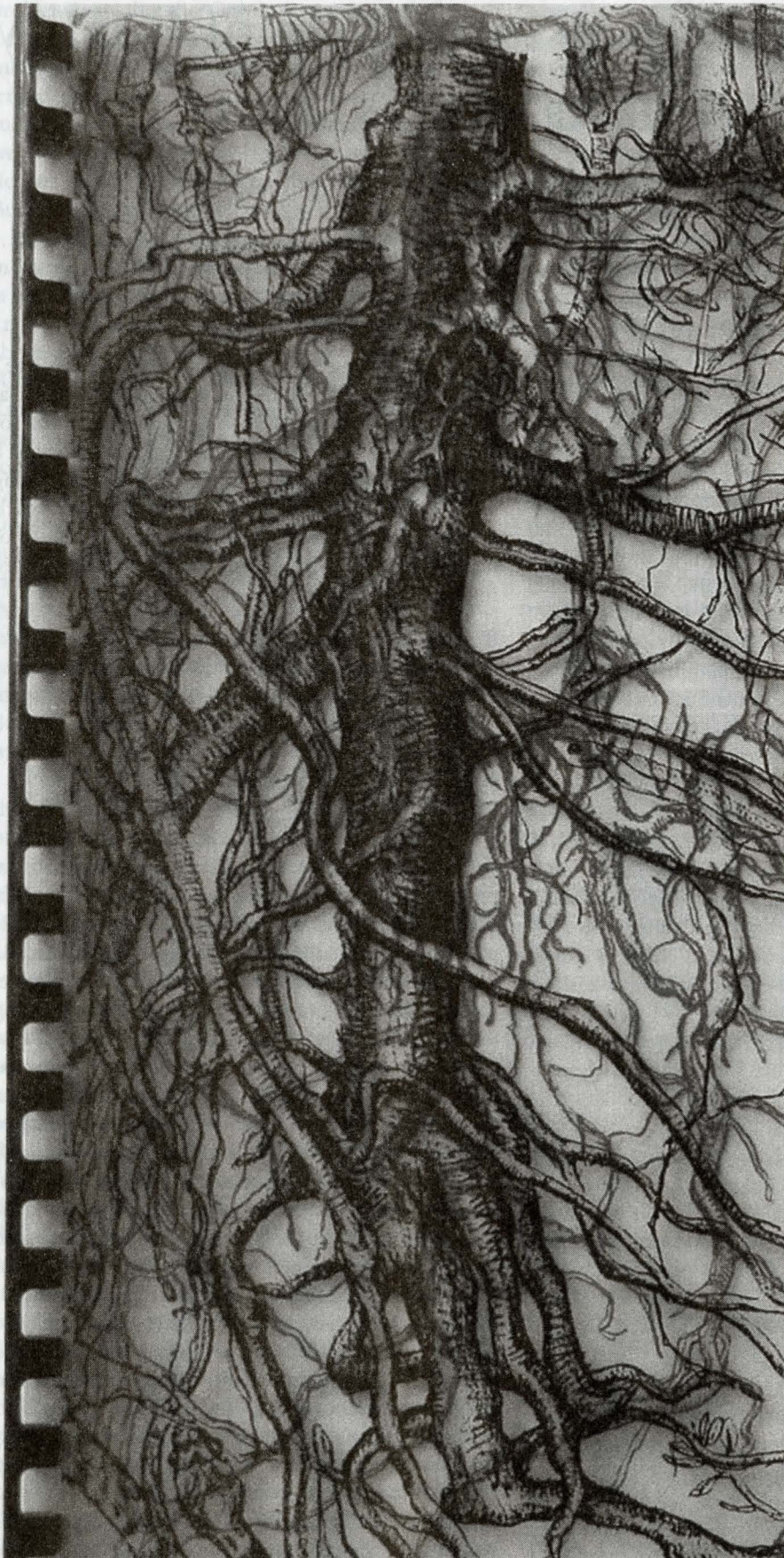
Denjong Padma Choeling Academy is in dire need of teachers or skilled volunteers (such as bakers!). No formal teacher training is required. Housing, food, Tibetan-language training, and Buddhist study are all provided. Medical and school supplies and financial aid are needed to make all things possible. To help the DPCA, please visit the Center for Landscape & Artefact website at www.landarte.org (coming in April) for a teacher application and information.

Nathaniel H. Taylor is an actor, writer, and filmmaker living in Venice, CA, who received his B.S. from Cornell University in agricultural and life sciences. Sarah Evershed is a senior at Pitzer College in Claremont, CA, majoring in world literature and anthropology, with a focus on Vajrayana Buddhism and the politics of the sacred lands of Sikkim. Adam Fish is an archaeologist and a graduate student in film, television, and digital media at UCLA and the executive director of the Center of Landscape & Artefact.

The rural Sikkimese,

like many other small, traditional, and balanced societies around the world, are particularly vulnerable to propaganda aimed at making them feel inferior and ashamed of their traditional ways of life. Such consumerism-oriented propaganda, generally originating from wasteful industrial societies in search of new markets, unfortunately results in the loss of unique traditions and knowledge that have evolved over many centuries. Old traditional masters are now passing away without transmitting their knowledge and skills. Unfortunately, today's youths are greatly influenced by Western cultures and do not realize the value of their own cultural heritage. These traditions may be lost forever unless something is done at a grassroots level to preserve and teach their values and benefits along with the general education.

—from an official document from Moyal Liang Trust, 2001.



Hatsume's Mountain

(for Hatsume Sato, founder of the Ischia Retreat in Japan)

by Laura Localio

sakura soften the trail
whitest blossoms
the children came
buried dragonflies
at the foot of the mountain

lead them to the cedars
to unravel the knots
follow them
with flowers
and cold spring

"my religion is everyday action"
the Omusubi,
gratitude's lines
livens the drying plums
with palms
pressed to sleep

stones prepare
vegetables in the night
for wings of rice to heal
"there were seven hundred"

like the boy from Napoli
finding his island,
finding Ischia, his own

in the whole of her palm

Laura Localio is a recent graduate of San Francisco State University. She is currently at work on her second collection of poetry.

Pamela Zwehl-Burke, *Down Under*

Pamela Zwehl-Burke divides her time between Buddhist study, teaching art at Santa Barbara City College, and making art in Santa Ynez, where she lives with her engineer husband and seven cats.

Evading the Transformation of Reality

Engaged Buddhism at an Impasse

by Ken Knabb

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship's stated purpose is "to bring a Buddhist perspective to contemporary peace, environmental, and social action movements" and "to raise peace, environmental, feminist, and social justice concerns among Western Buddhists." In the most narrow sense, I suppose the BPF has indeed been "raising" such "concerns" over the last two decades. But I doubt if either its founders or most of its subsequent participants intended to limit themselves to such a meager goal as merely making Buddhists passively aware that people are socially oppressed in various ways—something that practically everyone in the world is already only too well aware of, even if they have little idea of what to do about it. I think it is fair to say that the spirit of the BPF's aim could be summed up as:

(1) Buddhism has some contributions to make to radical social movements.

(2) Buddhists also have some things to learn from such movements.

I agree with the first (if I didn't, I wouldn't even bother to make these critiques), but the point I wish to make here is that engaged Buddhists have largely evaded the second. While they constantly imply that social activists would do well to adopt meditation, mindfulness, compassion, nonviolence, and other Buddhist qualities, they rarely acknowledge that they themselves might have anything to learn from non-Buddhists—except for predictable nods to kindred spiritual figures like Gandhi or Martin Luther King, who merely confirm their own preconceptions. If they occasionally venture into the secular realm, it is only to echo a few left-liberal platitudes from trendy commentators like Ralph Nader, Jerry Brown, Jeremy Rifkin, or E.F. Schumacher, none of whom represent any radical challenge to the dominant social order, however cogently they may denounce a few of its more glaring absurdities.

For example, in a collection of engaged Buddhist writings, *Entering the Realm of Reality: Towards Dhammic Societies* (eds. Jonathan Watts, Alan Senauke & Santikaro Bhikkhu), the editors call for new visions, then slip into a myopic pretension:

We urgently need visions and maps. Some of us are on the front lines of social change, working with refugees, prisoners, the homeless, and AIDS victims. Some are campaigning for the abolition of nuclear weapons, land mines, and handguns, issues that dif-

fer in payload but stem from the same source of fear and hatred. Some are protecting our fragile environment, standing up for the trees, the waters, for the wide circle of all beings.

Far from being "on the front lines of social change," most of these activities have nothing to do with social change. Those listed at the beginning are forms of social service. The rest are defensive reactions against a few of the more glaring symptoms of the prevailing social system. This does not necessarily mean that such activities are not worthwhile. It's simply a matter of being clear about what you are doing and what you are not doing. Again, from the editors' foreword:

When people are sick, hungry, or filled with bitterness and hatred, it is not enough to suggest that they let go of attachment to self or to show them how to meditate.... Our difficult task is first to understand our complex relationship to their suffering, then help us together to grasp the underlying conditions for collective identity and liberation. And maybe then it is time to teach meditation.

That is well put, except that I would question the priority given to "our complex relationship to their suffering." In practice, such existential, "we-are-all-partly-to-blame" moralizing usually serves as a means to evade real possibilities. Like many other people, engaged Buddhists waste a lot of time guiltily berating themselves for their vague "complicity" in social-systemic evils they can do little about while paying no attention to specific faults that, with a little initiative, they could overcome—such as their passive reliance on leaders or their ignorance of radical history.

The editors flatly declare that "our violent self-centeredness and, by extension, society's self-centered ills are the root problem." While it is true that a narrow, "unenlightened" self-centeredness can create or exacerbate many problems, the editors' unmindful Buddhist dogmatism leads them here to overlook the fact that people have also remained oppressed because they have been conditioned into accepting hierarchical conditions without being "self-centered" enough to insist on getting a fair shake. The notion that we must "lower our expectations" and be more self-sacrificing and altruistic is just buying into the system's con, transferring the blame from an absurd exploitative system onto the victims of that exploitation, as if the

problem were that the victims were too greedy.

In the entire book there is scarcely so much as a mention of the movements that have actually challenged the system. The presumption seems to be that such movements are of no relevance because they were too “violent” or too “angry” or too “materialistic,” or simply because so far they have failed. (Has Buddhism succeeded?)

Buddhism sees our problems as ultimately rooted in “ignorance.” The first step in overcoming ignorance is to be aware of it, to be aware of what we do not know. How much do engaged Buddhists really know about Karl Marx (as opposed to pseudo-Marxist “Communism”)? Or about anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman? Or utopian visionaries such as Charles Fourier and William Morris? Or social-psychological critics such as Wilhelm Reich and Paul Goodman? Or situationists such as Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem? Or popular, non-authoritarian revolutions such as Spain–1936, Hungary–1956, France–1968, Czechoslovakia–1968, Portugal–1974, Poland–1980? Or more recent events such as the Tiananmen Square occupation or the 1998 jobless revolt in France? (“We don’t want full employment, we want full lives!”) How many engaged Buddhists have seriously explored any of these movements? How many are even aware of their existence?

It’s not enough to respond, “OK, so tell me about them—I’ve got five minutes.” Buddhists often carry out their spiritual studies and practices with an exemplary diligence, yet when it comes to social issues, they often seem to expect a *Reader’s Digest* level of knowledge to suffice. Millions of people have been trying in a variety of ways to bring about a radical, truly liberating transformation of society for hundreds of years. It’s a vast and complex process that has included many disasters and dead ends, but also a certain number of still-promising discoveries. It takes careful investigation to discern which tactics were mistaken (e.g., those that led to the totalitarian regimes in Russia, China, etc.) and which remain potentially useful (the anarchist experiments in social organization during the 1936 Spanish revolution, for example, or the situationist tactics that provoked the May 1968 revolt in France). Just as you don’t expect to understand Buddhism or Zen by reading one article, you can’t expect to get a real grasp of the range of radical possibilities without a fair amount of exploration—and personal experimentation.

It’s not just a matter of finding out what has happened to other people in other times or places, but of taking a clear look at your own situation. The uncritical adoration and consumption of Buddhist stars like Thich Nhat Hanh or “His Holiness” the Dalai Lama is silly enough when confined to a “spiritual” level; but

when this sort of hierarchical fixation carries over into people’s political organizations, it becomes downright reactionary. Even if overt hierarchical manipulation is not a major problem among the more independent-minded engaged Buddhists, and even if many of their groups are participatory and democratic, a more subtle problem remains. Those who find themselves in positions of responsibility or “leadership” may be relatively free from the desire to cling to those positions, but they generally remain very “attached” to the idea of protecting their “sanghas”—the communities and organizations they have built up over the years. There is a natural tendency to avoid rocking the boat. Divergent tendencies are discouraged from developing into healthy rivalries. Instead, conflicts are dealt with by trying to bring about “reconciliation” (which, as Saul Alinsky noted, usually means that the people on top remain in power and the people on the bottom are reconciled to it). Critics are mollified and neutralized. (“That’s a very interesting viewpoint! Thank you for sharing your feelings with us. Please join with us in working on these issues.”)

Criticisms such as mine are often evaded by complaining about their “arrogant” or “contemptuous” tone. I admit that I don’t have a very high opinion of many of the engaged Buddhists’ tactics and ideas. But I have enough respect for the persons themselves to feel that they deserve to be leveled with. It seems to me that the people who are really being contemptuous are those in positions of influence who avoid publicly discussing important issues on the grounds that their audiences are not capable of understanding them, or are not ready for them and might be upset and scared off. As for arrogance, is there any better term to describe those who claim to be bringing wonderful new perspectives to radical movements while disdainfully ignoring virtually the entire history of such movements? ❖

This is an abridged version of an article published in 1999. The complete text is online at www.bopsecrets.org/recent/buddhists.htm. An earlier article by the same writer, “Strong Lessons for Engaged Buddhists,” appeared in the Summer 1994 issue of *Turning Wheel*. French-speakers might want to know that a French Zen teacher Eric Rommeluère has posted French translations of “Strong Lessons for Engaged Buddhists” and “Evading the Transformation of Reality” on his website, along with a few of his own comments: www.zen-occidental.net/articles1/knabb1.html.

Ken Knabb has lived in Berkeley since 1965. In 1969 he discovered the Situationist International (the avant-garde group that helped trigger the May 1968 revolt in France), and he has been engaged in the situationist project ever since. Rather untypically (since situationists are generally very antireligion) he has also taken part in formal Zen practice over the last 20 years. His writings and translations can be found at the Bureau of Public Secrets website—www.bopsecrets.org.

Buddhists often carry out their spiritual studies and practices with an exemplary diligence, yet when it comes to social issues, they often seem to expect a *Reader’s Digest* level of knowledge to suffice.

Impermanence Rocks!

by Daniel Dancer

“Okay, boys and girls. Please say the word *im-per-man-nence*.” Without hesitating (they know the drill) 50 bright-eyed first-grade faces repeat back in unison, “im-per-ma-nence!”

“Okay, once more, louder this time,” I ask them.

“IM-PER-MA-NENCE!” they echo back with enthusiasm.

I wonder if such a concept can really be taught at this early age. I still struggle with it at age 54. And yet, I didn’t even think about it until I began reading

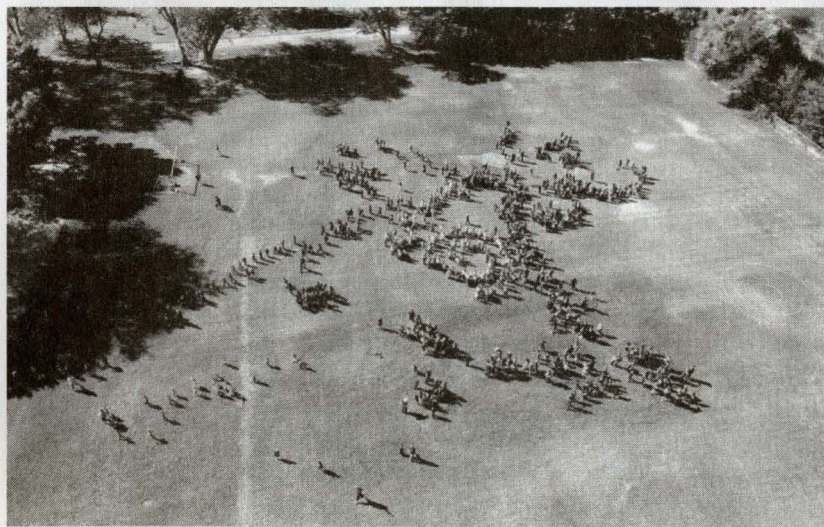
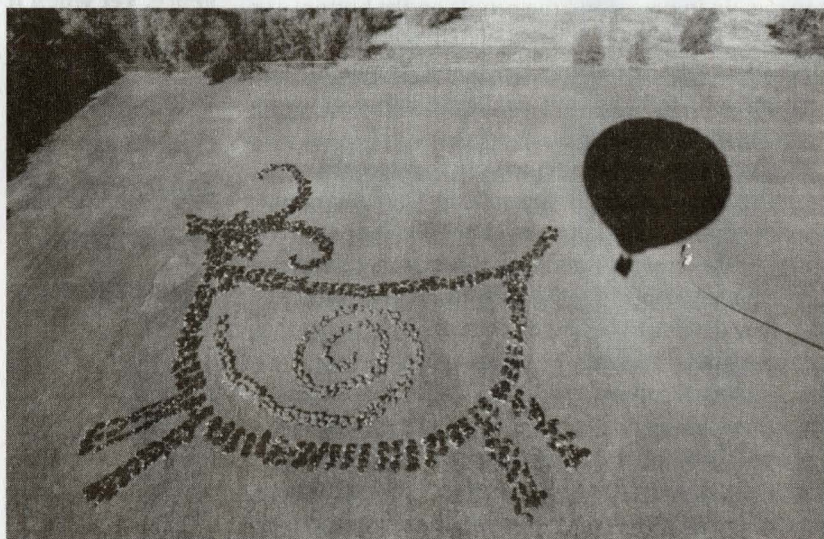
Buddhist texts in my late twenties. What if we started coming to terms with our temporary existence and the fleeting nature of all things when we were five?

Physically experiencing the concept of impermanence in the body is one of the core teachings of Art for the Sky, a weeklong artist-in-residency program that I offer to elementary schools across the country. Each residency culminates with the entire school taking the form of a giant living painting by becoming human paint drops on their playing field: a 200-foot-wide salmon, bear, or bighorn sheep. The huge images only make sense when seen from above, at a distance, and this is a central point. Immanuel Kant said that “for peace to reign on Earth, humans must evolve into new beings who have learned to see the whole first.” We can best make sense of our world by using our imaginations to rise above it, by employing our “sky sight” to see how everything is connected, to indeed *see the whole first*.

“IM-PER-MA-NENCE!” the children repeat back a third time. This is the first day of my residency, the first day they begin to learn about an art form that dates back 4,000 years to the Nazca Desert in Peru. This desert is the driest place on Earth, and the ancients who lived there left hundreds of miles of lines, shapes, and figures on the earth that only make sense from the sky. I talk with the children about flying dreams, the power of collaboration, and the beauty of making art that is not a material product but simply a gift for the Sky, the Creator, the Great Mystery—a gift that leaves no trace.

On the morning of our event day, the flat lifeless lined image of a bighorn sheep is painted on grass with nontoxic latex paint. And then suddenly, as children and teachers pour out onto the field, the entire student body is overflowing with joy and excitement. There is a moment, an almost still point, when everyone achieves just the right position and the bighorn comes alive. Looking at it from high above in a bucket truck, I can tweak the design and talk to everyone with a megaphone, and there truly is an “aha” moment when “IT” happens. And then, just as quickly, the form dissolves back into chaos, then into silence...coming from nowhere, returning to nowhere.

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. I don’t know when I first tripped over this slippery koan at the heart of Buddhism. Ever since, deciphering it has been like trying to spin around fast enough to catch a



Top: Bighorn Sky, created in September 2005 at the Bishop Elementary School in Bishop, California. Bottom: Dispersal of the Bighorn.

glimpse of my backside.

Sometimes when we do Art for the Sky in mid-afternoon, shadows can be a big problem, as if we spilled black paint all over the picture. Then I ask everyone to squat down low with their hands upon the earth. But sometimes the extra blackness adds depth to the image. When a cloud passes overhead and the shadows disappear, suddenly form slips into emptiness. Shadows coming and going have helped me understand the koan.

This art form is a metaphor for how change happens, how life begins. When all the participants align in the shape of a salmon, a bear, or a bighorn, suddenly the image comes to life. Each individual is vital to the whole. It's just the way an atom becomes an atom. A certain number of electrons have to arise out of chaos and align with each other, and when that critical mass occurs, an atom is formed. One electron less and there would be no "birth" of an atom. Physicists call this moment "phase transition." The Buddha might call it simply "becoming." Everyone kneeling on the earth in the shape of a bighorn has created a field of energy that all could sense. That energy is called *love*.

As our version of the endangered Sierra bighorn sheep dissolves suddenly into joyous children dashing to the four directions, I trust that a deep teaching has been felt in the soul of each participant.

After photographs are taken, with everyone still in position, kneeling down with hands upon the earth, I speak to them through a megaphone from the top of a high bucket truck or, if I am lucky, from a hot-air balloon. "On the count of three, everyone say, 'Impermanence rocks! Thank you, Great Mystery!'" Like good elementary school students everywhere, well practiced in recital, they do so in unison, hundreds of voices rising to the sky in thankfulness.

The next morning the entire school gathers for the final assembly. After giving thanks for their wonderful performance, I come back again to the subject of impermanence: "Impermanence is a natural phenomenon, at the very heart of life. Extinction of a species is something entirely different, however. To erase an entire lineage of fellow beings, who have been traveling with us for four billion years of evolution is not acceptable. When you and all your schoolmates were part of the bighorn, in that moment you saw through the eyes of bighorns everywhere. I bet you wanted to live and evolve, didn't you?"

"Yes!" the students roar.

"You craved habitat and wildness, didn't you?"

"Yes!" they roar again.

"To protect bighorns and all species, we must take good care of the mountains, the rivers, the forest, and the sky. When we learn to see through the eyes of all beings, we understand how important this is. We

understand that Wild is the Way and we must dedicate ourselves to protect that way."

Next, I invite everyone to sing the chorus to "Wings to Fly," a song I wrote that contains many of these lessons. They have learned this song during the

There is a moment, an almost still point, when everyone achieves just the right position and the bighorn comes alive.

week. This final singing is a powerful part of each residency. Everyone in the entire school raises their voices loudly and with heart, before they see what they have made. When the song is over, the energy is supercharged as everyone anticipates the view from the sky of their giant living creation. When the first image of



The children imagine growing wings and rising above difficulties, part of the training in developing their "sky sight."

the bighorn is projected, large, on the wall, showing the living, breathing work of art made with their very bodies, a joyous cacophony rises up and threatens to lift the roof off the auditorium. Children laugh. Teachers cry.

What seemed like chaos on the ground was beauty after all. ❖

Art for the Sky is a project of the Charitable Partnership Fund, a nonprofit based in Portland, Oregon. To learn more about this residency and how it can come to a school or community near you, please visit: www.artforthesky.com.

Daniel Dancer lives in an earth-sheltered home in a model eco-community he founded near Hood River, Oregon, called Rowena Wilds. He is the author of Shards and Circles: Artistic Adventures in Spirit and Ecology.

Dead or Alive?

by Anna Brown Griswold

I remember sitting in the bright red shrine room, looking out over the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the horizon, my maroon robes folded over my crossed legs. It was like sitting in a warm box in the middle of the sky. Although it was a Tibetan

B u d d h i s t Monastery, we had a visiting Zen teacher who was surprisingly un-dour. We had become friends. She knew I had been diagnosed with an incurable degenerative liver disease the year before, at the ripe old age of 24. We sat in a circle around her black robes, I and the other students, talking the usual buddhisms: loving-kindness, suffering, surrender.

She was kind but sharp. She stopped suddenly, mid-sentence, looked right at me with her hands still gently folded in her lap, and said:

“There is a koan we have in Zen. The student points to the corpse with a stick, and demands of the master, “Is it alive or is it dead?”

I couldn't stop myself from crying. Not only because I saw my own body lying there on the floor in front of me, but because I truly did not know the answer. There seemed to be no answer at all—except to stare at the crisp wood floor and silently weep. Where does being alive end?

Six years later I wake up at 5:30 AM in a stark white hospital room, San Francisco fog banked up against the window. Rising off her visitor's cot, my sister Belinda strikes the little gong we brought for meditation. Settling into meditation posture on my gurney, I prepare for my liver transplant surgery in an hour. I am about to enter a realm between being alive and being dead, with no guarantee I will arrive on the alive

side. To say I have a pit in my stomach would be the understatement of the century. But there really is no choice. I will die without this transplant.

Belinda and I sit in silence for an hour before my best friend and liver donor Dan comes in. His head is

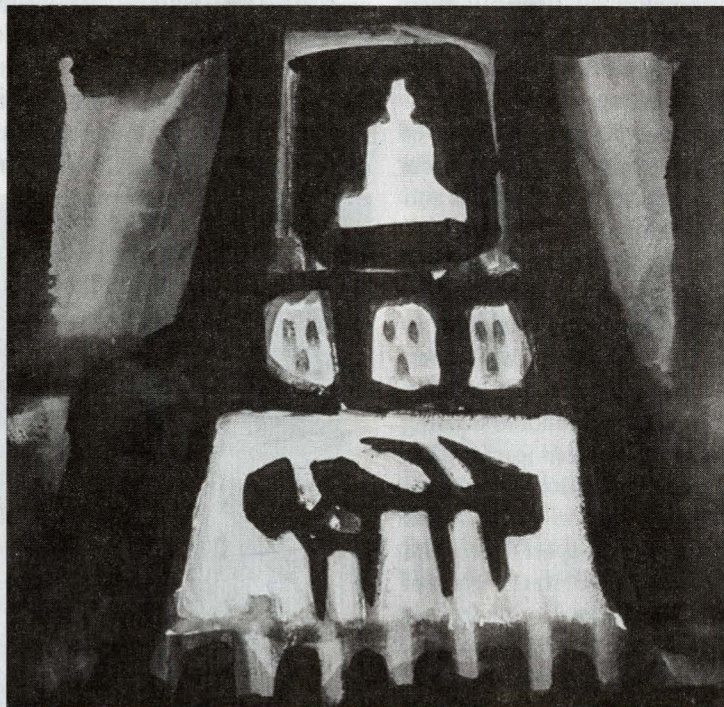
shaved smooth, his thin frame looks awkward under the hospital gown, his green eyes are brilliant and clear. “Mornin' Brownie,” he says, kissing the top of my head. Belinda takes a picture of the two of us in our matching gowns, his bright face shining next to my yellowish one—the flash bursting out at us. We are going to do a living donor transplant—a procedure where they take out the old diseased liver from the recipient,

cut out half of the donor's liver, and put it in the recipient. Astoundingly, both pieces grow back to full size. Somehow our bodies will be fused, a piece of him inside of me. I wonder where my body will begin and his end.

Our bodies will be flayed open and kept under general anesthesia; our breathing, blood pressure, and circulation will all be tightly controlled, in a kind of stasis just this side of death. If some poor Zen student pointed at our bodies with a stick and demanded to know if we were alive or dead, it might be hard to tell.

Dan's odds of staying on the “alive” side are much better than mine. My mind does not quite know what to do with that. I am afraid of dying. But something also seems ordinary. Just the gurney's steel rail and the rough hospital sheets and Dan's warm hand in mine. Snapshots even. I hope I will get to see them someday.

A knock at the door interrupts us—a transport person to retrieve Dan. They have to open up his body first. As they wheel him down the hall, he raises his arms in



Jan Eldridge,
108/22, watercolor

the air and shouts, "Let's go donate some organs!"

I follow an hour later. The elevator creaks on the way down to pre-op, and Belinda squeezes herself between my gurney and the metallic wall. Once I lie among the vast rows of gurneys, the anesthesiologist comes to brief me. His thin white face is nearly translucent under the fluorescent lights. He starts casually chatting about his vacation. It turns out he was in Nepal, and as he talks about his trek—the mountains, the altitude, how nice the porters were, how they must be strong to carry all that—I try not to get annoyed. I push from my mind the impulse to grab him by that little white coat and yell, "Don't you realize I'm about to get a freaking liver transplant, with the chance of dying?" Instead, I remember sitting on the worn stone wall surrounding the big Swayambunath Stupa that teeters on a small hill on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley, looking at the snow-covered Himalayas in the distance. As the memories wrap themselves around my mind, the sound of the man's voice becomes fainter, and the words blend together. I see the vast space and the ancient stones.

I look up at Belinda. They're going to take me to the OR soon. My stomach leaps up into my chest. "Do you have the dharma song?" I ask. She was supposed to bring it. She scrambles through her bag and hands me a crumpled piece of paper. "This isn't the one I wanted." My throat grips—the beginning of the end of the world. "Can you look again? It's the one with the title at the top." Something threatens to unhinge inside. The song is my only hope. She shuffles again, pulling out another disheveled piece, the right one this time. The title of the song is "The Six Ways I Have the Confidence to Die," by Milarepa. The words pop off the page at me: "With this confidence, when I die I'll be filled with joy."

I begin to hum under my breath, but then I suddenly realize I have to pee, and that it'll be a hell of a long time before I'll be able to do so again. I set out for the bathroom with my IV pole in tow, threading my way through the forest of beds and machines, gripping my shred of paper. Plunking myself down on the toilet, I take a deep breath, stare at the wall, and sing my little heart out.

*I am the lion of the great freedom from extremes.
See—my sharp white fangs of fearlessness are bare—
I sleep in the snow, free of anxiety and arrogance—
That is the way this yogi has the confidence of view.
Since I have this view, when I die I'll be filled with joy!
And after death I'll head straight down the path
to freedom.*

By the time I walk back down the hall, I feel my fangs growing. Climbing back onto my gurney, I glance up at Belinda. What does one say? "I hope I live...?"

"Okay, lady, here I go." The moment is silent, even with all the beeping and slushing of the machines in the background. We can hear the silence, just the silence.

The anesthesiologist picks up a syringe from the metal tray at my bedside. I want to stay awake as long as I can. When they cut my body wide open, I'm glad I won't be conscious, but in the meantime, there is a trace of longing or curiosity that wants to know. That wants to know the whole experience, from first cut to last stitch.

I hear the rustle of every moment, the syringe screwing into my IV line, the whispered scrape of scratchy sheets as my leg shifts to the right. This will be it. Who knows where it comes from, but the heart is joyful, awake. I may eventually get better from this surgery, but that isn't the reason. Maybe there is no reason. Maybe I'm letting go. The sides of my mouth turn upward and salty water rolls down my face. May whatever happens happen.

My teacher always told me that the true nature of being is indestructible. Beingness has no boundary. It cannot be destroyed, not even by a syringe full of Verset, or scalpels in the chest gone awry. Not even by death.

The quick burn of the drug hits my vein. I look at Belinda's face, letting it etch itself into me, waiting for the Verset to take me, waiting millisecond by millisecond. I want to feel the exact moment I disappear. Going, going, gone. *Om gate gate paragate parasamgate....*

The surgery begins, the scalpel slicing into my skin just below my sternum. The betadyne outlines the incision, making my already yellow skin even yellower. They must cut upwards first, just the layer of skin to begin. The scalpel rides its way upward at least six inches, the thin sheet of metal separating cell from cell. A line of blood appears. Not spraying or dripping even, more like lights being raised on a dimmer. My face is covered in plastic wrap to keep my eyes shut and to keep the breathing tubes in place. I wouldn't want to see my body turned inside out. I don't think there's any way the mind or heart or psyche or whatever is inside of us animating us could handle that sudden view of the belly splayed open, layers of skin and flesh pulled back by steel retractors to reveal the stone-white bones of the ribs, and the intestines like sea snakes below. If I looked down and saw that, I'd probably have a heart attack on top of a liver transplant, so I guess plastic wrap is a very good thing.

Now that I'm wide open on the cold steel table, they clamp the veins: the portal and vena cava that funnel all the blood from the lower body through the liver. The blood stops flowing, my body is suspended somewhere in no-man's-land. My heart rate is brought down, my blood pressure regulated by injections into the IV neckline. All things come and go through tubes

I push from my mind the impulse to grab him by that little white coat and yell, "Don't you realize I'm about to get a freaking liver transplant, with the chance of dying?"

• **Help needed** •

A beloved member of the greater BPF community is in need of a liver donor. Candidates must be under 55, in good health, and type O blood (either positive or negative). Anyone who might be willing to be a donor or who would like to find out more information can contact Andrea Jacoby at 415/753-6566.

taped into my veins and orifices. With the clamps on, the blood has nowhere to go.

They finely sever the connective tissue around my liver, like cutting thin slices of cheese. My liver knows it's being cut out, and gives up its struggle, as if letting out one last breath. They cut around its edges, delicately avoiding puncturing anything else. Gloved hands delve into the cavity, feeling around and under, getting a good enough grip to begin the lifting. But they still have to cut through the veins and arteries that tie this liver to my body. A quick snip severs the enormous portal vein. And the lifting begins. The liver is blackened in places, scarred, and bulbous. The gloved hands put it into an enormous steel pan, not like where it used to live. The last remnants of

blood slowly drain out, pooling in the pan.

Then they call to the OR next door, where Dan lies opened up. "We're ready. Bring it in."

Just a hop, skip, and jump to the next room, the next body. Who carries it? I know they put that piece of Dan's liver into a cooler for the transport. After all, what if someone tripped and fell, and the organ slid across the floor—what would they do then? I imagine one of those blue mini-coolers where the top snaps open and slides to the side. Who opens it up, takes the jewel in his hands, and with care beyond comprehension gently places it into my raw, exposed flesh? There is a hole, just ready and waiting to be filled up. The liver lets its weight sink into me. It is here, in its new home.

Then fingers fly, sewing rapidly, precisely. Hands take the stumped veins and join them stitch by stitch. First the portal vein, the ends of each tube suddenly touching for the first time. It's like falling in love. As the thin vein walls are sewn together, Dan's cells and mine, once foreign, connect. They lose track of whose side is whose. My cells ask: *Who is this? What is this new thing?* Everything is so minute, changing drastically every second.

They unclamp the vein. My blood rushes into this unknown territory, finding its way for the first time. And I call it "me," but it's not me, not yet. It isn't Dan, either, anymore. Everything is in between names, as this first surge of blood fills the new liver.

My blood flows into hidden canals and chambers where toxins are filtered out. Then *whoosh*, out the other side, all nice and clean, back to the familiar flesh, riding up towards my heart, back in my own skin.

There's not even a reference point for...what even? How does my blood, with its different DNA, make friends with this new liver? The meeting happens over and over as all the tiny veins and ducts are sewn together, edge to edge. Unfathomably, they merge until there is no his side/my side left.

There is no going back. It's a one-shot deal. It's not like they can take my old blackened liver out of the bucket on the floor if this one doesn't work. But how does this new liver know what to do? In its mercy it takes my dwindling body and returns life to it, linking itself to me selflessly, and stays. These new cells don't discriminate, aren't picky or prejudiced. They're willing to be alive anywhere. The liver nestles in behind my bones and muscle and skin and makes itself at home.

The gloved hands pull the sheets of my connective tissue and muscles back together, unhook the steel retractors from the skin and abdominal wall they had been holding back. The belly is sewn up layer by layer till this new liver is snug inside. Snug as a bug in a rug. Then they stud my skin with silver staples. There is not a note out of place. I am saved.

Sometimes it happens differently. They put the new liver in and nothing happens. They may as well have sewn a rock in there. There's no cleaning, no making of platelet or bile. Just a dead liver. And then the person lying on the table is going to be dead soon too.

A woman in the liver transplant group once told me how only a few hours after her husband's transplant she could see the life come back into him. She watched his skin become less yellow by the hour in a kind of cosmic jump-start. Life confers life. I know this is happening to me too.

Coming out of the surgery netherworld, I feel like Persephone rising out of Hades. Belinda's face is fuzzy, undulating. She must see my eyes flutter, because she speaks. Her voice sounds like it's coming from the bottom of a well. "Lady, it went so well. For both of you. They said it started working as soon as they sewed it in." My eyes close again. I knew it. "We still have to wait and see, you know, but it went so well," she trails off, her tears rolling onto my blankets.

It's a quiet knowing. Not just because of the drugs or the trauma or the not-used-to-it-ness of a new body. It's a still-lake kind of thing, an early-morning dark-and-moist kind of thing. Alive, floating, silent. There's no movement, not even a turn of the head. Nothing to disturb or interrupt or provoke. The whole body just knows: don't move, not even a twitch. But I don't feel trapped or frozen, just this deep black pool of relief. It has happened.

My eyes open. I can see light. Belinda's hand strokes my forehead, smoothing my sweat-soaked hair. Everything is bright—the crisp whiteness of the ceiling, the cool pale blue of my blankets—even with the morphine haze, even with the searing pain. Vivid and soft. Arising out of the hinterland between alive and dead, I come out living. ❖

Anna Brown Griswold practices Tibetan Buddhism and is currently a graduate student at Mills College in Oakland, California. She is working on a memoir about her transplant.

Missing in Action

by Bonnie O'Brien Jonsson

I grew up not knowing whether my father was dead or alive. When I was two, he was reported missing in action (MIA) in North Korea. Forty-five years later, I traveled to San Diego with my sister to attend a meeting for families of MIA/POW military. There, we finally received confirmation of our father's death.

Another year went by and a letter came from the Air Force. It said:

We have received information associated with the case of your loved one, Capt. Warren O'Brien. In keeping with our government's policy of full disclosure with family members, we want to provide you a copy of this document; however, a part of this document may contain what some may consider graphic information. Before we send this information to you, we felt the need to advise you of this fact.

I called the phone number listed for the Air Force person in charge. My stomach felt tight as I asked for Kevin T. O'Meara, Capt., USAF, Chief, Korea/War Section. He told me the report contained copies of documents from the Russian Department of Archival Research. Capt. O'Meara stuttered as he told me they mentioned finding a body part, a body part of my father's.

A week later the documents arrived. There were so many pages of words, really a volume. Much was written in Russian and illustrated with blurry black-and-white photos from microfilm archives. I saw a photo of a man. I wondered: "Who is he?" Thirty-five pages later the translation began; the report said the man in the photo was the pilot who had shot down my father's plane.

A translated statement from the head of the Russian search team said:

The team confirmed that an F-86 enemy aircraft was smashed in the right section. Parts, such as a Colt/Browning Gun No. 23235, a

part of a radio and part of the cabin were found at the crash site; scraps of a parachute and the foot of the enemy pilot, and, separately, parts of the aircraft were found 800 m. away.

The words rang through me and clutched my heart: "the enemy's foot." I didn't know which word hurt more, the word *enemy* or the word *foot*. I thought I might throw up. I remembered the first report I had read that described my father's physical characteristics. He had small, wide feet—his shoe size was 7E.

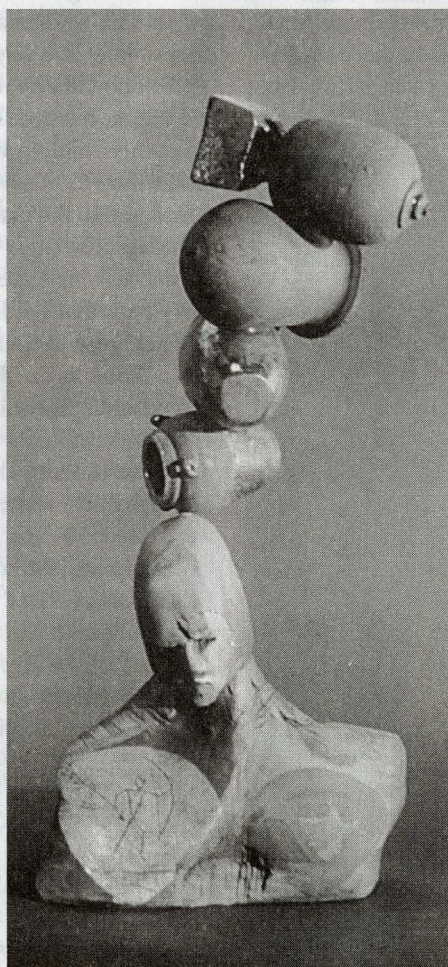
I looked at the face of the man who had killed my father. How was I supposed to feel about him? Wasn't *he* the enemy? I wondered what this enemy thought at the moment of my father's death, and what my father's last thoughts were. Did he think of me?

During the Vietnam War I wondered: Who is the enemy? I knew that if my father had been alive he would have fought in that war, too. He was a fighter pilot, a daredevil, a star, the one who protected the bombers and engaged in plane-to-plane combat. When he was shot down he had just completed a mission to bomb a Korean military base and was swinging wide from the hit, on his way back to home ground. His plane carried six 50-caliber machine guns—enough ammunition to destroy several planes.

For the past five years the U.S. government has paid for my sister and me to fly to Washington, D.C., for the annual POW/MIA meeting. We families of Korean War military used to meet with the surviving spouses and children of POW/MIA from the Vietnam War, but now we have our own meeting; the combined group got too big. Every year I wonder whether our meetings will continue, since our country's war-making is creating so many new survivor families. When will *their* meetings begin?

For many years I thought I

I looked at the face of the man who had killed my father. How was I supposed to feel about him? Wasn't *he* the enemy?



Marc Lancet, *History of a Vessel*

Marc Lancet is a professor of fine art at Solano College in California, and coauthor of Japanese Wood-Fired Ceramics.

hadn't really missed anything by growing up without a father. One time I actually told my husband I thought fathers were redundant and that my mother had been both father and mother to me. Only twice in

I witness tears as fresh as when they first were shed 50-plus years ago.

my childhood do I remember times when I missed my father—not really my father *himself*, because I hardly knew him, but *having* a father. In third grade I sat at my desk crying when we were given a Father's Day assignment to write a poem for our fathers. No one talked to me that day, not my teacher and not my friends. My tears found their home on the desktop. The other time was at a father-daughter dance in high school, which I went to alone. I still feel sad every time I look at my high school yearbook and see the photo of me in a circle with the other girls in my class and their fathers.

I was shocked when the first memory arose during a meditation retreat. It had already been a hard retreat. My bench had broken and I was sitting on a back-jack chair that forced me to crunch my belly.

The position squeezed my chest and made it hard to breathe. This difficulty continued beyond our sitting periods. During the nights I woke up short of breath, engulfed in fear. One night I felt blind terror, not just about my breathing; I imagined what fish felt when they were caught, and I promised myself not to eat them anymore. Ever since I was four or five years old I had had trouble taking a deep breath, but tests showed I didn't have asthma. Since this retreat I've needed to keep an inhaler handy.

A close friend had died one year before the retreat. As I walked slowly across the terraced hill behind the retreat center, remembering her and missing her, the older, unrecognized pain of having no father seized me. I placed one foot in front of the other while the wound opened. The hole in my chest felt as big as a cave. I felt so much pain at having used the word *redundant* in describing fathers, and I felt so much sorrow for not knowing that I hurt.

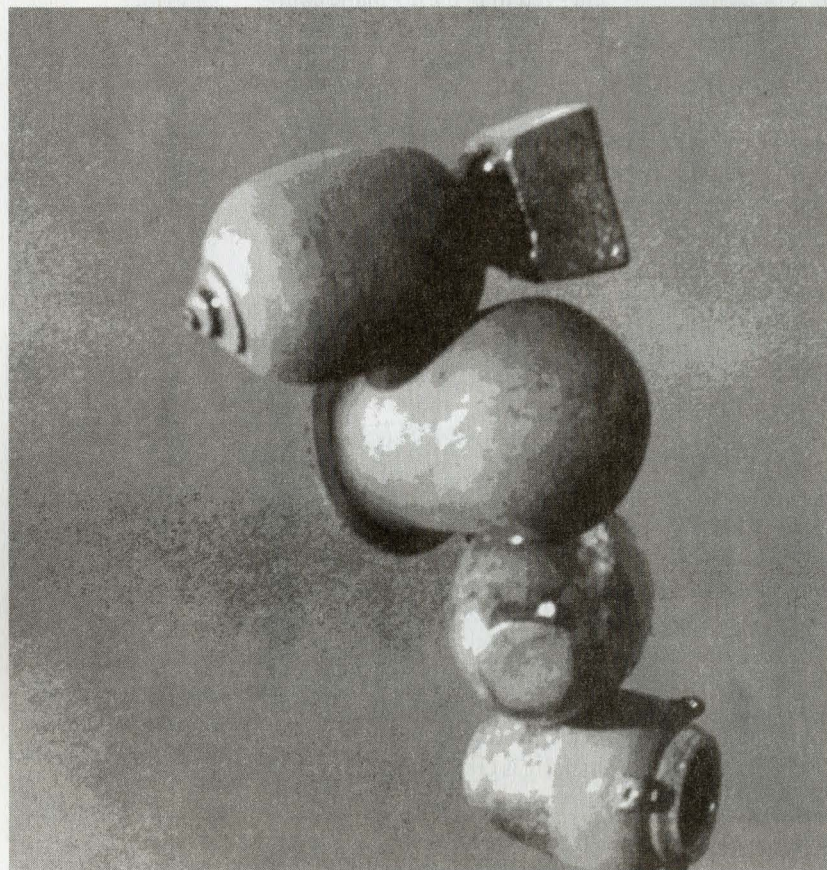
My heart broke for my own loss and eventually opened to the pain of everyone else, as I saw through our illusion of separateness. I saw how we *all* suffer from holding on to this effervescent, impermanent world. This understanding came after my own experience of loss. In a way, I think my father paved the way.

No one can give me back my father. My resistance to the war in Iraq and all other wars comes from a wish that other children won't have to experience this same loss. I long to make amends to my father, and for my father, and to the man who shot down his plane, and to all beings who wage war and are affected by war. I wish I could tell my father how much I love him and how sorry I am that I didn't even know what I was missing.

Each year as I sit with my sister in Washington, D.C., I look at the 80-year-old widows, brothers, and sisters, and at the middle-aged daughters and sons. All of us have waited many years to hear any news from our government. These meetings open the doors to our loss, and I witness tears as fresh as when they first were shed 50-plus years ago. I once heard Joseph Goldstein say, "Memory doesn't know time."

My loss goes out in ever-widening circles. All those whom I have touched have felt that loss and have been affected, touching others. I see now that all during the years when I was not connected with my own suffering, I, too, was missing in action. ❖

Bonnie O'Brien Jonsson, M.S., has led many yearlong A Year to Live groups since 1998 and teaches workshop/retreats on living and dying mindfully. She teaches vipassana meditation in prison and in community groups and is the lead facilitator of the kalyana mitta (spiritual friends) network at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. She is currently writing a book on living life fully with death as a guide.



My Cellmate, My Self

by Billy Tyler

I remain confined in a 6' x 10' concrete cell while the prison completes a five-month lockdown for a riot between inmates and correctional officers. I don't go out of my cell except to shower a few times a week. I rarely receive letters and can't use the phone during lockdown.

My cell door is a perforated sheet of steel a quarter of an inch thick. It allows me to hear sounds—TVs, radios, voices, and toilets—emanating from the other 99 cells in my block. Keys jangle and carts roll noisily by as I sit and listen. I hear names called for visits intermittently over the P.A. system. I don't receive visitors; my entire family lives out of state.

But I'm not alone. My cellmate is a 28-year-old named Jay, a talented rapper and an avid jailhouse lawyer. Neither of us can afford a TV or radio right now. We talk to each other a lot to help pass the time. The other night he told me that his neighborhood was the toughest on Earth. He claimed to have been in two shootouts a day for an entire year straight, which by my calculations would total 730 gunfights. There are entire platoons that have seen less action during the war in Iraq! Maybe it was his homemade wine talking, a potent concoction of fermented apple mash, sugar, and fruit juices. He definitely didn't have to make up any stories to convince me that he's been through a lot. He's spent eight years in prison, which is a traumatic experience in itself. I should know. At 31, I have put in more than a decade of time.

I'm no psychologist, but I think that Jay suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. However many gunfights he's been in, he speaks of little else when the lights go out and we reminisce quietly about our formerly free lives. In the dark he raps about his love for violence, money, sex, and other themes common to the street life. Throughout the day he lives on the edge of frustration, ranting about our disregarded rights, as he sips antacid for his bleeding ulcer. He's filed over 200 staff complaints and several lawsuits against the State of California for prisoner-rights abuses. I feel his pain.

I used to busy myself cataloging and challenging the apparent injustices of our prison system, such as too little food and too much cell time. But I've come to accept that much of what appears unjust to me may be justice in the larger karmic sense. Nothing happens by chance. I try to allow the days to unfold without grasping at ideas of justice, even though I disagree with being hungry and locked down—karma or not. But that doesn't make sense to Jay.

Instead of arguing my beliefs, I look for ways to practice them. For instance, last week another convict challenged Jay to a fight to settle a petty dispute between them. Though the fight cannot take place until we come off lockdown, Jay had to accept to avoid appearing weak or afraid. When he started to make a knife, I convinced him that he really didn't need one. I told him that I would help him if anyone tried to stab him, jump him, or do anything beyond the one-on-one fist fight he had agreed to. I promised to be at his side until everything was said and done. He told me that he'd never been shown love like that in prison. I used that moment to share the Four Bodhisattva Vows with him:

Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to save them.

Deluding passions are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy them.

Dharma gates are immeasurable, I vow to enter them.

Buddha's way is supreme, I vow to attain it.

His response was immediate and sincere: "You really don't believe in that shit, do you?" But if my commitment to help him wasn't enough to convince him, neither would further explanation. So I laughed at his comment and he laughed with me. After all, we've only known each other for two weeks.

Who knows whether or not the fight will even take place? Hopefully the other guy will have calmed down by the time the lockdown ends. I'm pretty sure that Jay will happily let it rest if he can. But if it doesn't blow over, it may provide an opportunity for service, a vehicle for practicing the vows I so readily recite when sitting zazen in the safety of my cell.

I struggle with the vows each day. At mealtime the portions always seem less than enough. I hold my tongue to keep from yelling at the correctional officers who deliver the skimpy trays to our cell. Jay, on the other hand, yells complaints out of our door at almost every meal. I think such uprisings are futile because the portions remain small no matter who yells what. But he doesn't interfere when I sit zazen, so I leave him to his tantrums. It's an unspoken agreement we have.

We've had to learn to tolerate each other quickly. We spend 24 hours a day together and share nearly everything—from light and air to toilet paper and food. If there was a way out of here I'm sure both of us would have already left. I doubt that we have enough

I told him that I would help him if anyone tried to stab him or jump him. He told me that he'd never been shown love like that in prison.

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Alone with Everyone

by Susan Moon

*To study the Buddha way is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self.
To forget the self is to become one with the myriad things.*
—Eihei Dogen, "Genjokoan"

Throughout my life I've struggled with loneliness and the fear of loneliness. Through my Buddhist practice I've gradually come to understand that I'm *not* alone, even when I'm alone, at least in theory.

Last fall, when a sabbatical from BPF gave me the opportunity, I finally felt ready to turn theory into practice. I decided to spend a month alone in the woods—in a small hippie-style hand-built cabin on a piece of land I own with two other families in Mendocino County. I've been going up there for 25 years. It's a great place to go with someone you love, but I've never liked going there alone because it's so isolated, and I've been afraid to get out on that lonesome limb. But now I felt ready. I wanted to find out who was there when there was nobody there but me.

The cabin is two miles up a steep dirt road on a ridge. There's no electricity, no phone, no cell phone access, no refrigeration. There's a wood stove for heat and a propane stove for cooking. The outhouse boasts an excellent view. The nearest neighbor lives half a mile up the road and works in the town of Willits, a half hour's drive away.

It was my intention not to see or speak to anyone for a whole month. How often do you go even a day without seeing or speaking to another person? It practically never happens. Some people in my life couldn't understand what I was up to. My mother's initial response was, "What would you want to do *that* for?" And even in Soto Zen practice, we don't have a tradition of solitary retreat, as there is in Tibetan Buddhism.

I planned the experience carefully. I arranged with the neighbor up the road to drop off some fresh produce twice during the month, but mostly I ate oatmeal, rice and beans, beets and potatoes. I also arranged with Norman Fischer, my dharma teacher, to have once-a-week phone calls. I would use my car only to drive 20 minutes down the road to a pay phone at a rest stop on Highway 101. That was to be the only time I would talk to another human being.

I've spent a lot of my life making sure that people love me—to convince myself I'm really here. And I had started to think, "Enough! Enough already! There's plenty of love. It's OK!" I wanted to know that I was all right even without anybody else around.

My anxiety is not just about being loved, it's about

knowing that I exist at all. How *do* you really know you're alive, that you're a person, if there's nobody there to say, "Yeah! I heard what you said!" Or even, "Hey! You stepped on my toe!" So this was the core question I had. When there's nobody there but me, is there somebody there?

My sister let me borrow her gentle long-legged dog, Satchmo, to keep me company. He looks like a deer, especially when he leaps up the hillside through the manzanita bushes. I wanted him with me because a bear had been hanging around the cabin for a year or so; it had broken into my cabin several times and trashed all the food, and various visitors had encountered it on their way to the outhouse in the middle of the night. I was a little scared of this bear, even though it's not the kind of bear that eats people. I thought Satchmo would make me feel more secure—and he did. But more importantly, he provided tender, limbic companionship. We were in constant communication. But I still had to grapple with being the only English-speaking creature around.

I didn't take a watch, because I wanted to explore time in a new way. I wanted to be in the present moment as much as possible. My life is ordinarily ruled by my Week-at-a-Glance calendar, and I rush from one appointment to the next, worrying about being late. I wanted to have the experience of getting up when I woke up, eating when I was hungry, and going to bed when I was sleepy. I didn't want to know or care what time it was.

I developed a routine. I would get up and take Satchmo for a walk. Then I'd meditate for the length of a stick of incense. I'd have breakfast, write all morning, and when it seemed like it was lunchtime I would have lunch. In the afternoons I did some kind of work project. I found myself surprisingly excited about sawing boards, building a bookcase, clearing trails, fixing benches, stacking firewood. After tiring myself out, I would sit down and drink a cup of black tea with honey and powdered milk in it. Yum! Then Satchmo and I would go for our afternoon walk.

The cabin porch is like the prow of a ship, and it looks across a valley to distant mountains on the other side. I spent a lot of time on this porch, and the weather was perfect in September. It was warm in the day but not too hot, and it was cool at night but not cold. In the late afternoon, after our walk, I'd sit on the porch and read until it got too dark to see, and then I would go inside and meditate for the length of another stick of incense. And then I would have supper. But

after supper I didn't know what to do. Sometimes I read, or I crocheted, or I tried to teach myself the ukulele. I had various projects lined up. But actually, I found that the kerosene lanterns just didn't have the vigor to get me up to anything very challenging. I faded in the evening. It was dark, and there were strange sounds—scratching on the roof, or Satchmo growling at something. And so I would go to bed.

I was taking care of myself. I was collecting kindling and cutting firewood to make sure I had a wood fire when it was cold. I had to fix the water line one time when there was a leak from the water tank. I was proud of myself for figuring out how to do that. And cooking! I was cooking three meals a day for myself, because I was eating the kind of food you have to prepare, so when I would make a delicious potato salad for myself I would figure, "There must be somebody here, otherwise why would I be making all this potato salad for her?" *I'm a person. I need to stay warm. I need to get water. I need to eat.* I'm accustomed to doing this kind of thing for family and friends, but just to do it for yourself is a wonderful experience. It's a privilege to take care of yourself as if you were a worthy person, a person who deserves to be taken care of. Doing that for a whole month really convinced me.



The hardest times for me were each day at twilight. Ever since I was a child, I've gotten lonesome at twilight. There's something about that in-between time when it's not day anymore but it's not yet night. What is it? The day is dying. It seems unbearably sad. And up there, alone, what I would call twilight sickness came over me. I cried and cried. *Why am I all alone?* It was out of my control; it just came, like a visitation. It varied in intensity, but there was always a taste of grief at the end of the day.

One morning, after a really hard night, I wrote:

Last night when the sun set, the twilight sickness came. There was no one with me in the sad time between light and dark. The day was on its deathbed—I watched it lie down on the brown hills.

The insects sang out—katydids? crickets?—farewell, day; hello, night. I tried to catch the moment when they started their klezmer song, but I missed it. I always do. When I first hear them, they're already singing, like the first star, always already shining. I had no one to be at my side "at the end of the day," as they say.

I could have tried to distract myself from the twilight sickness, could have cranked up my wind-up radio and listened to KMUD in Garberville, where countercultural country folk are always bashing Bush and so providing a certain amount of company. But the wind-up radio runs down—it's only a stopgap measure.

So I sat down on my round black cushion in the loft

to face the twilight. I vowed to sit there until it was night. Through the tall window, I watched the day give up the ghost. Where the sky met the line of the Yolla Bolly Mountains, I saw a color with no name, between green and pink. I slipped down in the loss of light, and my own life seemed to fade with the day—all I loved was gone; all I'd done was wrong. The dark ate the trees, leaf by leaf.

And still I sat there, staring down my mind. After all, I had come by choice to be alone on Shimmins Ridge, like a monk in a Chinese scroll. "What is it?" I shouted. "What is it?"

At last, twilight was gone. I went down the steep stairs and lit the lamps and ate my rice and beans in a time that was called night.



View from the cabin porch

Evening after evening, I sat there with my demons, asking: *What is it?* Finally, I saw that it was nothing. It was OK. I began to believe that I was sitting in the lap of Buddha.

As the quiet days went by and I opened to my surroundings, nature helped me understand that I was not alone. Bats, quail, woodpeckers, deer. When the crickets are singing and the leaves are whispering, you feel the vibrations of all the life that's passing through you. Even the rattlesnake curled up on the outdoor shower platform in the sun provided a certain amount of company as it rattled at me before slithering away into the woodpile.



One afternoon I was on the porch doing some yoga. I was feeling good and strong and enjoying myself, but noisy planes kept roaring overhead. I love the silence of that place, and I was annoyed by the unusual disturbance. Then I finally looked up and paid attention, and I saw that there were huge billows of smoke wafting up toward me from the valley. There was a forest fire nearby, and these were forestry planes. I couldn't tell where

the fire was because of the trees, but it looked like the smoke could be coming from the little valley right at the bottom of our dirt road. I got anxious. If the fire was down on the Covelo Road, it could tear its way up through the dry trees on the ridge in a flash, and Satchmo and I would be done for. So we got into the car to drive down the hill and check it out.

But the car wouldn't start—the battery was dead! And guess why? Because I'd brought my laptop on my retreat, and I had bought a special little gizmo that plugs into the car's cigarette lighter and charges it up. I'd been doing that every day, and I'd been starting up the car periodically to make sure the battery was still good, but I hadn't started it for a couple of days.

I had a bad moment then. I thought about the Oakland fire, and the people who died because they couldn't get down from the Oakland Hills. I thought: My family and friends will be so annoyed with me if I burn to death because I drained my car battery with my laptop!

Satchmo and I walked to the neighbor's house a mile down the road, but he wasn't there. I was probably the only living person on Shimmins Ridge. We

walked another mile down to the bottom of our dirt road, and by that time I could see that the fire was on the other side of another ridge, so that was a relief. Down at the bottom, on the paved road, I found some neighbors at home, and the other neighbors who hadn't been home were there, too, and they were all sitting around drinking beer on a weekday afternoon.

They told me not to worry about the fire—they had gone online and found out it was over on 101. I said I had a dead battery, and one of the guys said he'd drive me up the hill in his truck and give me a jump start. Then they gave me a glass of water, and we chatted for about half an hour, and nobody did anything about giving me a ride. I didn't say, "Hurry up and give me a jump start!" I wasn't in any hurry. It seemed that nobody was. More hummingbirds than I have ever seen at once were buzzing around a dozen feeders, and I just watched them. I hadn't talked to anybody for two weeks, so I was in some kind of altered state anyway. I was content to wait. But I was struck by the fact that if somebody in Berkeley said they'd give you a jump start, they wouldn't just keep sitting there for another half an hour as if they hadn't said it. Finally the guy said, "OK, let's go," and he drove me and Satchmo up the road in his pickup truck, and started my car.

It was a humbling experience. I had been feeling so proud of myself for being a pioneer woman taking care of herself in the wilderness. I had been annoyed with the planes—those manifestations of technological pol-

lution. Then suddenly everything flipped, and I realized that even there, on retreat in the woods, I was completely woven into the tapestry of human society. I was grateful that the Forestry Department had planes to put out forest fires and that there were friendly people at the bottom of the road who could give me a jumpstart, and I saw that my whole retreat was resting on a foundation of human goodwill and human society.

▲

Near the end of my sojourn, I had a severe relapse of loneliness. As it happened, I left the cabin for a day and a half to go to the memorial service of a dear family friend. I took Satchmo back to my sister's in Berkeley and joined with people I love to celebrate the long life of a man who had devoted himself to art and family. Afterwards, I drove north again, dogless, for the final week of my retreat.

When I got back to the cabin that evening, I fell apart in a fit of loneliness. I was by myself again, without even Satchmo to keep me company. It was twilight, and I'd forgotten what I was doing there. I compared my life to my deceased friend's—he had always made art, always loved and lived with family. All my worst fears about loneliness got recharged, and I thought I might not be able to last the week. I sat in meditation, and I cried.

The next morning I cried some more. I walked, I meditated, I made lentil soup, and I cleared some brush. As I sat in the twilight that evening, looking out at the oak tree shining in the last light, I reminded myself of what Norman had said in our last phone conversation. It's natural to feel sadness at the ending of the day, and it's natural to feel sadness on parting from loved ones. Impermanence is sad, but when I add on my own regrets, I'm robbing myself of the life I'm living right now: the Spanish moss on the oak branch, the crickets' chant, the smell of lentil soup on the stove. I felt...a shift, a lift, a clicking into place.

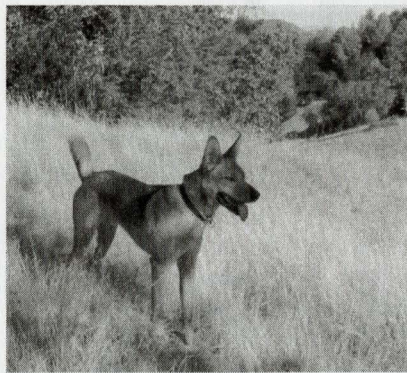
In the next couple of days, my loneliness fever broke, and I returned to myself again.

▲

One morning as I was returning from a long walk, I looked up and there was the gibbous moon—just past full and nibbled along one side by the passage of time, floating in the bright blue sky above some digger pines. It was suddenly the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I burst into tears of joy. How lucky I was that the moon had invited me to the celebration.

During the course of my retreat, I feel I became a person less in need of reassurance. I believe now that I'm OK in a way I didn't believe it before. Now, when the twilight sickness comes again, as it surely will, I'll know, even in that sadness, that I'm still being held by the universe. ❖

Susan Moon is the editor of Turning Wheel.



Satchmo

Pitbull

by Jarvis Jay Masters

There are times when I look forward to being out in the open air, to have a chance to take a slow, thoughtful walk around the prison yard, and then to play a game of basketball or handball, or just chat with other prisoners before returning back to our cells. At other times, I want to remain locked in my cell, cushioned on the floor by my folded blankets beneath me, sitting in the stillness of meditation. Those are the times when it feels as though my very existence depends on sitting and meditating.

It was the beginning of the day. The morning light of the sun shone through the bars of my cell from the window opposite, and I calmly sat on the floor, not wanting to move. A guard appeared at my cell door, blocking the ray of light on my face, to ask if I was going outside or staying in. It wasn't until I said I wanted to go that I knew it was what I wanted to do. I sprang up from my cross-legged position and hustled to gather my clothing together. I could now almost taste the fresh spring air awaiting me. I desperately wanted out. The faster the better.

When the back door of the Adjustment Center building finally opened to let me out, someone I'd never seen before stood on the yard by the electric entrance gate. "Who is he?" I thought. I had been hoping to walk quietly around the yard before the other 50-plus prisoners got outside to join me for exercise.

I make it a point to familiarize myself with everyone on the yard, and this stranger's presence made me nervous. As the yard gate locked behind me, his hooded eyes stared me up and down, and his mean prison-mug look attempted to catch my eye. I tried to pay him no serious mind. Once upon a time, many years before, I had been a new prisoner myself, with a furious mask like his. Yet I felt uncomfortable. I walked past him, holding on to my Buddhist vows of nonviolence like an elderly woman clutching her purse.

"Man, where is you from?" he asked in a voice that matched the hooded black cap he had pulled down to his eyelids. "Where is you from, man?"

"Huh?" I said, trying to take very deep breaths without detection. "What do you mean, where am I from? Where are *you* from?"

His voice rose. "What set you from, dude? Where you stay at out there?"

I realized he wanted to know what street gang I belonged to. "Hey, shit! I've been in San Quentin for the past 17 years or so. That's *your* world out there.

Mine's been in here—you know?"

"Is that right?" he said, his eyes widening. "You been down that long?"

"I been down a long while," I said. "Too damn long."

"Uh-huh," he mumbled. "So what else is out here?" he then asked, wanting to know who and from what towns would be coming out to the yard. "Hey, man," I

If only I had stayed locked in my cell, sitting right there on my ass, with all the comforts of meditation! But no! I just had to come out here to shake hands with a real-life maniac!

said. "Just guys who wants to do their own thing, their own time, with anybody who wants to get along with them, you know? Why do you ask?"

"Cause, man," he said with rage in his voice. "I've been gettin' 'em up, stabbin' and fightin' all these punk mothafuckas talkin' that beaucoup-ass shit all up in this here joint, you know? 'Cause I don't get along with none of 'em. It's to the death with them and me. 'Cause I don't give—"

"Man, like who?" I interrupted. "Who you talkin' about?"

"Dudes from all over," he said. "I hate 'em all. All the ones from Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Fresno, and the whole damn Bay Area, you know? Man, all these punkass bitches who thinks I'm some punk. In every unit I been in, dudes been thinkin' I'm a punk, callin' me a bunch of cowards, and I'm no punk or coward! You hear me? Huh? Huh? Hey, dude, I'm a pit-mothafuckin'-bull! Straight that, okay? You hear me? And I don't give a mad fuck, either. Them polices knows what time it is, 'cause I be spittin' in their damn faces each and every chance I get! 'Cause I am the O.G., the Original Pitbull."

"Oh, is that right, is that right?" I kept repeating, as this new prisoner, Pitbull, went on raging. Now I wished I had not come out to the yard. I had been enjoying all the comforts of meditation. If only I had stayed locked in my cell, sitting right there on my ass! But no! Hell, no! I just had to come out here to shake hands with a maniac, a real-life maniac! And why? To say: Hello there. *My name is Jarvis. I am a Buddhist!* No, this can't be real. This just can't be fuckin' real.

"So, hey, dude," said Pitbull. "You see where I'm comin' from, huh? I'm no punk, I'm no coward. I stay ready. You feel me, you hear, me, dude?"

"Yeah, yeah, I hear you, Pitbull," I said. "But man, you have to slow down. It ain't that kind of party out here. The folks that will be coming out to this yard don't want no problem with you. They don't even know you, let alone want problems. You can see that I don't want no problems, right?"

"I hear what you're saying," he said. "But still, I've been tricked before. The police don't like me 'cause I been spittin' in all their faces—and they always tryin' to send other inmates to do their dirty work."

"Well, man," I said, "if that's the case, I advise you to wait until someone moves on you, attacks you first, because out here, if you attack first, the gun towers are goin' to shoot to kill you."

I was responsible for why this person was lying flat on the prison asphalt. I could have held back. But what for? To keep to my vows of nonviolence, even at the cost of watching this human being get stabbed, or killed?

"Yeah, I know," he said. "So I'm just going to stand right here, right like I am now. And let it be known where I'm comin' from."

"No, not right there in front of the yard gate," I said to him. "No, you want to wait in the back of the yard, with your back against the fence—way over there," I pointed. "Man, way over there to where you can see everybody and can't anyone get you from behind, you know?"

"You right," he said. "You right about that! I'm goin' right over there and just wait for someone to run up on me. And boy, when they do, I'm a show them fools a thing or two. Man! I'm goin' to show them fools! *Bam! Bam!*" He was suddenly swinging his fists, shadowboxing his way to the far corner of the yard.

As I watched Pitbull fighting his own demons, I didn't know what to think. At least he was over in the far corner and not standing at the entrance gate, where others coming out to the yard would not have been able to avoid a physical confrontation. For this I felt relieved, but I feared I had only postponed the inevitable. I wondered if this guy would get off the yard without being stabbed. I wondered if he would even get off the yard alive.

I paced up and down along the fence, greeting all my friends being let onto the yard with only a look of warning, as I saw them observe Pitbull in the corner. The situation intensified, as everybody on the yard

grouped up in lion packs. The camera of my eyes zoomed in with a split focus. One lens showed my friends gathering in groups, some of them encircling and positioning to block off escape routes. The strongest of them—Malcolm, Jambo, and Insane—were poised not more than a few feet from where I was. The other lens showed Pitbull over in the corner shadowboxing with the devil. This was real prison.

"Say, Jambo." I walked over to where Jambo, Malcolm, and Insane were standing. "Man, what are you guys getting ready to do? Because you know I spoke with that dude before everybody was out today, and I think he is more bark than anything else and—"

"Check this out, Jarvis," Jambo interrupted me. I was glad he did. I didn't know what else I planned to say. "This dude cannot stay out here. No way! And man, you know I love you like a brotha. But all that Buddhist shit you gettin' ready to run on us is not workin' this time, not today."

"He's right, Jarvis," Malcolm joined in. "'Cause, man, look at that dude. Just look at him. He's over there fist-fighting the damn air, man! He's over there talkin' to himself like he is killin' somebody."

"And just look at us," added Insane. "We're standin' here on this side of the yard while that nut case, that jackass fool, is over there trying to pump fear into us so we don't run over there and put a cold piece of penitentiary steel in his ass. We'll just have to see about all this, 'cause, man, I'm about ready to bum-rush over there and rip a hole in his guts. I'm goin' to push this shank I have right into his heart and leave it for the pigs to pull out! 'Cause they had no damn business puttin' him out here with us."

"Man, hold on. Hold the fuck on, Insane!" I said in total anger, as I saw the blade peeking out of the sleeve of his coat. "Man! That nut don't need to be killed. He only needs to be let off this yard. That's all. We all know that if he wasn't on this yard, all this other stuff about killing wouldn't even be on our minds. Hey, I'd be takin' your ass through the hoop on this basketball court, while Jambo and Malcolm, you guys would be working out over there on the pull-up bars. And everybody would just be glad to be out those damn cells."

"But that's not the case," said Jambo.

"Yeah, I know," I said. "But the problem is gettin' that nut off the yard, and not standing over here waiting for the perfect time to kill someone. Man, you guys going to have to do a Judge Ito, you know. Like he says, take three long, deep breaths. And this is not my Buddhist shit, either! It's called *thinking*. But, man, you know, if none of you guys brought your thinking caps out today," I said, becoming frustrated, "and if you just want to go over there and kill just to kill, go right ahead! 'Cause it's none of my business. I'll let the chips fall, you know? But even so," I was almost talk-

ing out loud to myself now, “this guy still should not be stabbed.”

“Well, I tell you what then,” said Jambo. “The three of us are going to go over there. But not as planned, not to just kill that fool. No! We’re going over there to ask this dude to leave the yard. And man, I swear, if he so much as swings at a fly, man, Jarvis, we’re going to break him off another asshole!”

“Yeah, I hear what you’re saying, Jambo,” I said. “But still, man, it doesn’t sound like you guys are going to give him a real chance to leave the yard. Hey, let me go over there with—”

“No! Hell, no!” said Insane. “Cause you just goin’ to be in the way in case this nut tries somethin’. Seriously, Jarvis, you be talkin’ too damn much.”

“OK, OK!” I said. “But you guys have to give this dude—his name is Pitbull—a chance to leave the yard.”

“Man, Jarvis! Trip off this, check this out,” Malcolm said angrily. “Man, if we weren’t goin’ to give this Pitbull a chance...shit, man, we’d jus’ tell you we goin’ to blast holes in his ass. It’s that simple. Man, it’s that simple!”

“OK, you’re right. I hear what you’re sayin’,” I said, empty of words. All my Buddhist convincing had suddenly run its course. My friends’ minds had been pulled back only a little. Was it enough? I feared not. I watched them walk straight to Pitbull’s corner.

As the whole yard fell deep into silence, I glanced up at the gunman standing in the doorway of the tower shack. He, too, saw the jaws of this lion pack slowly opening as Jambo, Insane, and Malcolm headed directly toward the corner of the yard. The gunman quickly lit a cigarette, took two deep inhaleds, and flicked the butt to the ground from the tower. Then, calmly, as my three friends approached Pitbull, he went inside the tower shack and closed the door. I knew what that meant: “Do what you want to do. I’m not watching.”

There was nothing in the way now. I remembered Pitbull’s voice bragging about spitting in all the

guards’ faces, and how the guards “send inmates to do their dirty work.” I realized how Pitbull’s paranoia played into this whole thing.

In seconds, my three friends were in front of Pitbull, face to face. He was no longer shadowboxing. I didn’t know what I was witnessing. I held my breath, praying that this “nut” had the sense to leave the yard. It was too late for me to go over there—by now I would’ve had to run, and that probably would have incited the guys to attack. I started mumbling to myself: “Man, you jackass, leave the yard...come on man, you can do it...just leave, man, just leave, I beg you, just leave the yard.” I felt the pounding of my heart.

Then slowly a miracle happened. I watched Jambo point to the yard gate, in a fan motion, telling Pitbull to keep walking. Pitbull slowly walked toward the gate. As he did, he raised his hands over his shoulders and shouted loudly, getting the attention of the tower gunman, that he was “the greatest, the champion of the world,” and wanted off the yard. This brought a sigh of relief to my heart.

Through the tower window I could see the gunman get on the phone to call the

Adjustment Center for someone to come and escort Pitbull back into the housing unit. I had known and seen a lot of mental cases over the years in San Quentin, but this was the worst case I had ever seen on an exercise yard. In most cases, the prison authorities place severe mental cases on “walk-alone” yards. I began to suspect that everything Pitbull had said was true.

The whole yard watched Pitbull leave. We all saw how the two guards who escorted him away were roughing him up and mocking him and calling him names under their breath. I didn’t know if they wanted to see him simply beaten up, or worse, stabbed and killed. This question lingers in my mind to this very day.

After the tension subsided and everyone went about their business—playing cards, basketball, and



Marc Lancet, *Shadhawk, Mehawk, and a Hawk to Go*, pit-fired ceramic

handball—I went over to the pull-up bar area to talk to Jambo and the others. I wanted to thank Jambo for taking a chance in asking this person to leave the yard instead of resorting to violence as the only way. But I didn't use this particular language—it would have sounded too flat and awkward in speaking to my longtime friend, who had been born into violence just as I had. I just thanked him for using his head instead of the sword. Jambo appreciated this. We spent the rest of our yard time talking about Jambo's Vietnam experiences and working out together on the pull-up bars.

Several days later, I again traded in my meditation cushion for the exercise yard.

When the Adjustment Center door opened, letting me outside into the sky-blue air, I felt suddenly choked by it, nearly hyperventilating at the sight of Pitbull again. He was enraged, pacing up and down on the yard. My legs weakened. I wanted to stop and say to the smirking guard escorting me, "You ass! What in the hell is *he* doing back out here again?" But I did not. I kept walking toward the yard gate. With each step, I took a deep breath, trying to control my steaming anger. I had never hated San Quentin more.

I walked straight up to Pitbull and said, "Why, man, why? Why did you come out here again? Don't you know how lucky you were the last time you was out here?"

"Man, dude," he said, shouting in my face. "Them police been callin' me a bunch of cowards and shit. They said I was scared of you all, said, 'If you a man you go back out there and prove it!'"

"And *that's* why you're back out here?" I asked angrily. "Because they told you some bum shit like this?"

"Yeah, man," Pitbull said. "They came to my cell this morning callin' me all kinds of bitches and cowards. And, man, I'm no mothafuckin' coward. And I'm not scared of any-mothafuckin'-body out here."

"So what are you goin' to do, huh? You goin' to wait 'til everybody come back out here to prove to the guards you ain't a coward?"

"You fuckin' right!" Pitbull answered. "That one guard said, 'A real man with real nuts is goin' to do what he have to do.'"

"Damn that!" I said, my adrenaline boiling. "I can't let you do this, Pitbull. I can't let you stay out here, just so you can prove your manhood to everybody."

"Dude! I don't give a husky fuck about what you not goin' to do," he blurted, inching up to my face with rage in his eyes. "Dude, I do what the fuck I wanna do, and who said *everybody*? Dude, we don't even need everybody."

"Hmmm," I mumbled, clenching my fist tightly. "You right! We don't need everybody." *Bam!* My fist

landed squarely on his chin. I cold-cocked Pitbull flat on the prison asphalt. With my adrenaline still pumping I could only stare down at him. He was knocked out.

The tower gunman saw me standing over Pitbull and began blowing his alarm whistle. The scream of the whistle made me realize what I had just done. I tensed up waiting for a shot. I looked up, expecting to see a gun on me. The officer just looked at me, gave a slight smile, and walked into his shack. I had just done something that over the years I had worked hard to convince others not to do. I stared down at Pitbull. "Man, I just punched the lights out of someone. Oh, man, what is Chagdud, my teacher, going to think or say now? And what about my court appeals?" My mind overfilled with shame and guilt at myself and anger at San Quentin.

I felt as if I were bending something inside my heart trying to explain all this to myself. But on a deeper level, something felt good about what I'd just done.

I was responsible for why this person was lying flat on the prison asphalt. I could not take back what I had just done, nor did I want to. I could have held back. But why? What for? To prove to everyone outside myself that I am a true Buddhist? To strictly keep to my vows of nonviolence, even at the cost of watching this human being get stabbed, or killed? To be a witness to this guy lying dead on the prison exercise yard? "No way," I resolved. "Not today. Buddhist or not, Buddhist or not! And I am *not* returning my vows, either. I am not. *I am not.*" I said the last part out loud.

I noticed Pitbull finally coming to, barely lifting himself to a clumsy sitting position on the asphalt. We stared at each other.

"Ah, man. Dude!" he mumbled, holding his chin in pain. "Shit! Man, what did you hit me with?"

"A straight left, I think."

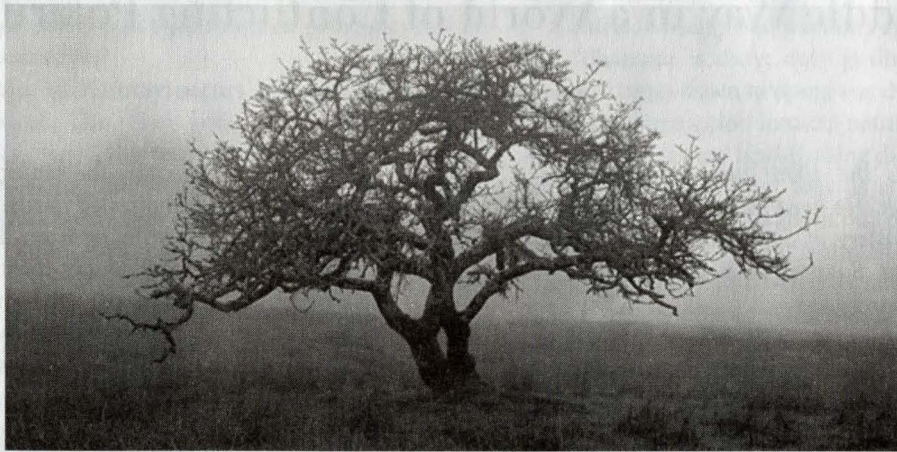
"Oh, so you's a southpaw, huh?" he said, with a broken half smile. "OK. That's the way, that's how you got me. OK! But man, *now* don't you see that I am a man? I am a man, not a coward. You tell them fools that, huh, will you? That I am a man, a real fuckin' man!"

Seeing Pitbull sitting there wanting me to see him as a man, I didn't know what I was anymore. Was I a man? Was I a Buddhist? We were both escorted off the yard.

Later, to further prove his manhood, Pitbull insisted that both he and I get disciplinary write-ups for this fight. I was given a mixed blessing. I was confined to my cell for 10 days, with no choice but to sit inside these awakening days of meditation. ♦

Jarvis Jay Masters is an African American on San Quentin's death row. His book, Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row (Padma), can be ordered from the BPF office for \$15. He is currently at work on a second autobiographical book.

Why I Hate the Lotus Sutra
by Everett Wilson



Why all those mandarava flowers
raining down, golden rays of light
emanating from tufts of white hair
between eyebrows?

Come on. Get real.

Why can't the Buddha be an ordinary man,
an English teacher, say, who earns his living
teaching twenty-somethings
how to write the college essay
because he enjoys teaching young minds
how to uncover what they really think and feel
by following the tenuous thread of their
thought across the page?

A rather ordinary man whose wife is dying
of kidney failure, slowly at first—
the way we all are dying—
but faster now, in an unstoppable
downward spiral.

An ordinary man who spends his life
grading papers or driving her to dialysis,
or to doctor after doctor who can do nothing
but deliver more bad news,
send her to the receptionist
for a follow-up appointment.

An ordinary man
who used to get some pleasure
sipping whiskey while he walked the dog
through the autumn woods,
but now the whiskey only numbs
the joy he once knew. This man can

no longer read his students' work
because he can't bear to see the promise
buried beneath the clumsy prose.

Then one night this ordinary man
wakes up beside the woman he once loved
(have they really been married 14 years?),
the TV blaring a Tae Bo infomercial,
an empty glass in his hand.

He gently slides the TV remote
out from under her wrist,
clicks off the babble,
and lets the deafening silence
sink into the lamplight
pooled in the shadows of her sleep.

She sighs softly, and smiles,
a dream trembling beneath her eyelids,
and he feels a great tenderness,
like whiskey melting the ice in his chest,
or the softening darkness
that floats the morning star
above a shadowed figure
sitting cross-legged beneath a gnarled tree,

and suddenly it dawns on this ordinary man
that he can never really know his wife
or the why of her secret dreaming smile,
and knowing this fills him with such joy
like stepping into a shaft of sunlight
that explodes inside his brain
and burns away every last trace of self.

What need is there for mandarava flowers?

Lawrence Watson
Bennett Valley Road Tree

Everett Wilson is a Zen student who has been living, practicing, and writing at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center for the past three and a half years.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

The Middle Way in a World of Conflicting Polarities

by Santikaro

May 27, 2006, is the 100th anniversary of Ajahn Buddhadasa's birth. He lived from 1906 to 1993, and founded the monastery of Suan Mokkh in Thailand. Santikaro lived at Suan Mokkh and studied with Buddhadasa for many years.

We human beings have long acquired the habit of creating dichotomies, starting with the identification of our “selves” in opposition to the “other.” This has played out globally in the West’s attitudes and reactions toward Asia, and toward Buddhism in particular. We frequently find oppositions and dichotomies imposed in scriptural texts: tradition versus reform, meditator versus scholar, etc. Some Buddhist teachers may fall into such dichotomies. Ajahn Buddhadasa is one who does not. For him, the middle way is about finding the right course between extremes, such as tradition versus modernization.

Ajahn Buddhadasa grew up during a time of great change in Thai society, as aggressive Western “civilization” and imperialism made deep inroads. This change brought about many benefits, such as roads,

Ajahn Buddhadasa felt there was much to learn from the West. Like the Dalai Lama, he was fascinated by science.

schools, and advances in healthcare, but much destruction resulted from it, too: the forests of Thailand diminished by about 90 percent, prostitution became rampant, and traditional modes of life disappeared. Many in Thailand responded to the pressure to westernize by embracing and profiting from westernization. Others took the opposite approach, resisting and refusing what the West had to offer. Ajahn Buddhadasa sought the middle way between these opposing alternatives.

The organizing element in Ajahn Buddhadasa’s response to Western imperialism and modernization was the dhamma. This may seem self-evident, but it wasn’t true of the political-economic elite or even the

majority of the monks, especially the senior monks, who were often much more interested in maintaining tradition and privilege than in living from dhammic principles. One of Ajahn Buddhadasa’s most notable qualities was his ability to hold the dhamma at the center—not a bookish, memorized dhamma, but a living, creative expression of it. He and others, such as Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, represent some of the healthiest Asian responses to the tremendous economic, political, and military pressure coming out of the violent capitalist-driven ideology of the West.

Faced with the dichotomy between slavishly following and stubbornly refusing the progress of westernization, Ajahn Buddhadasa felt there was much to learn from the West. Like the Dalai Lama, he was fascinated by science. When he was a young monk, he cherished the typewriter given to him by an early benefactor. He experimented with radios and early recording equipment and was an excellent photographer. He read Freud and other psychologists, and philosophers like Hegel and Marx. He believed there was a way to use some Western developments constructively. Instead of blindly refusing them, he thought that one should learn how to adapt to them, understanding them while being mindful of their potential dangers.

He thought that Asian peoples could learn from from what those in the West were thinking and doing without surrendering their own wisdom. But Thai students in Europe and in Western-style educational systems were being told by their European teachers that they came from an “inferior civilization,” and there were some who believed what they were told. Fortunately, others did not. Ajahn Buddhadasa emerged as the main Thai voice admitting the economic and military advancements of the West but acknowledging that Europe had created nothing comparable to Buddhism. He presented the view that Asian Buddhism had an attitude much more fitting with science than Christianity, and a kind of wisdom that was largely missing in the West.

Ajahn Buddhadasa taught that in order to wisely absorb what is coming from the West and to filter out what is unhealthy, we need to stay grounded in an understanding of Buddha-Dhamma. This had a great influence on Thai society, especially among the progressive elite. Though the meaning is a bit different

for those of us born in the West, the dilemma remains: Our culture is very powerful and has some healthy, creative aspects, but there is also a tremendous amount of violence and destruction. How are we going to sort through this? In which principles can we ground ourselves?

Another dichotomy occurs between conservative and radical. The Thai activist and scholar Sulak Sivaraksa coined the term “radical conservatism” to describe Ajahn Buddhadasa. In some ways Ajahn Buddhadasa was conservative. He thought that southern Thai culture was healthy, balanced, and wise, and he wanted to help conserve it. He was also conservative, in certain respects, regarding Buddhism, believing that Buddhism needed to stay grounded in its past without being stuck there.

At the same time he was radical. He honored the Buddhist tradition that had developed over 2,500 years, but he also recognized that some of the changes it had been through were not in keeping with its core. In trying to understand and preserve the tradition, he endeavored to find the original and essential aspects of Buddhism through careful reading and studying of the Pali suttas. He insisted on reviving core threads of Buddha-Dhamma that were in danger of being obliterated by certain elements of traditional Theravada Buddhism—teachings such as *suññat* (emptiness) and *tathat* (thusness). Although this could be considered a conservative activity, it seemed very radical to the monastic hierarchy. Rather than end up on one side or the other of this conservative-progressive dichotomy, he was able to be progressively conservative and conservatively progressive, avoiding any ideological lockdown.

Another key dichotomy he addressed was that of lay versus monastic. Senior monks discouraged him from teaching *anatta* (not-self) and *paticcasamuppada* (dependent co-origination) to laypeople because it would “confuse them.” But in good conscience Ajahn Buddhadasa could not stop. He argued that these dhammas were core to Buddhism and that people wanted to end suffering so they had a right to learn them. Ending suffering was not just a monastic issue, or even a Buddhist issue, but a human issue. Ajahn Buddhadasa took on the work of making the dhamma available to anyone who might be interested, whether they were lay or ordained, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Sikh (and he had students from all of these traditions).

Ajahn Buddhadasa also challenged the meditation versus daily-life-practice dichotomy. The term “dhamma practice” is used as a euphemism for meditation both in the West and in Asia. When people say “practice” they are referring to the practice of sitting on a cushion or doing walking meditation, and sometimes specifically on

retreat or in a formal setting. This has raised questions and created confusion about how to practice in daily life and how to respond to the demands, complexities, and needs of the world we live in.

Central to Ajahn Buddhadasa’s approach is the idea that “dhamma is duty; duty is dhamma.” Dhamma practice comes down to doing our duty, which inspires a further investigation into the nature of that duty. For some of us our duty is something dictated to us by our family. The government tells us about our patriotic duty. Capitalism tells us about our duty to consume to keep the economy strong. Ajahn Buddhadasa believed that duty must be discovered by and for ourselves. We should be mindful of what our family, government, culture, and economic system tell us is our duty, but in the end it is our own responsibility to decide what our duty is. Sometimes it’s about taking care of the body, sometimes it’s about one’s profession, and sometimes it’s about social action. Ultimately the core duty is to let go of self and to be free of suffering.

Finally, there is the spiritual versus worldly dichotomy. There are teachers of Theravada who believe in a clear duality between *samsara* and *nibbana*, the worldly and the transcendent. And there is much in the West that dichotomizes these as well, including leftist political traditions that want to abolish religion and be simply materialistic. There are others with the opposite bias: “Forget politics and forget social issues, all you have to do is practice, practice, practice and escape to nibbana.”

While Ajahn Buddhadasa didn’t believe that *samsara* and *nibbana* are one and the same, he did insist that *nibbana* is found only in the midst of the world. For him the only way to the end of suffering was *through* suffering. He described *nibbana* as “the coolest point in the furnace.”

The dhamma perspective that made all this bridging possible is an understanding, both intellectual and experiential, of *idappaccayat*—the law of nature, or that all things happen because of causes and conditions. Nothing is static, absolute, or fixed. Seeing this, we avoid becoming trapped in ideology, positions, and dichotomies. Ajahn Buddhadasa believed that an approach which worked for a while might finally reach its limit. The more we understand that everything depends on causes and conditions, that nothing is absolute or fixed, the easier it will be to navigate the intellectual and ideological dichotomies of our world, and to follow the middle way of non-suffering in this lifetime. ❖

Santikaro lives, practices, and teaches at Liberation Park outside Chicago. He lived with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu during the last eight years of his life and was his primary translator.

Book Reviews

All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated

by Nell Bernstein

The New Press, 2005

Reviewed by Bill Williams

Debate about criminal justice too often overlooks a stark reality: the devastating impact on children when parents are arrested and sent away to prison.

Journalist Nell Bernstein has written extensively on criminal justice. In her new book, she offers an eye-opening account of the unacknowledged toll of get-tough-on-crime laws that have swelled America's prison population and left millions of children in the care of grandparents or foster care, often cut off from contact with their incarcerated parents. The numbers are sobering: 2.4 million children now have a parent behind bars. Worse, government effectively conspires to break up families by restricting visitation and phone calls, terminating parental rights, and placing obstacles in the way of family reunion when the sentence is completed.

Bernstein takes the reader inside the system in a logical series of chapters that begin with an arrest. Most police departments have no written policies about what to do with children when officers enter a dwelling and arrest the parents. Children sometimes are left to fend for themselves. The trauma is compounded when a parent is given a life-without-parole sentence, effectively breaking up the family forever.

In harrowing portraits based on extensive interviews with children and their parents, Bernstein convincingly demonstrates the negative consequences of incarceration on families.

Bernstein does not excuse criminal behavior, nor does she say that lawbreakers should not be punished. Rather, she argues that sentences and terms of confinement ought to take into account their impact on families. Parents often are shipped to prisons hundreds of miles from home, making visits difficult. Yet family contact is a crucial factor in determining whether inmates will successfully make the transition back to society.

Tougher drug sentences are a chief factor in the swelling prison population. Since 1980, the number of inmates convicted of such violations has shot up twelvefold. Young mothers have been sent away for decades for a first conviction. Bernstein exposes the myth that tough drug sentencing laws primarily punish drug kingpins. In fact, only 11 percent of those in federal prison for drug convictions are high-level traffickers.

High incarceration rates can actually make neighborhoods more crime-ridden by breaking up families and destabilizing communities. Of boys whose dads go to prison, half later end up behind bars themselves.

Bernstein notes the argument that children sometimes are better off separated from their lawbreaking parents, but

points out that the foster care alternative has been a failure. All 50 states failed a federal review designed to measure their ability to protect children from abuse and neglect in foster care. Courts often are too hasty to terminate parental rights. In most cases, children in foster care have no contact with their imprisoned parents, with serious negative consequences for both prisoners and their offspring.

Bernstein offers many practical suggestions for reforming the system without endangering public safety, such as the creation of a child-centered visitation policy that includes contact visits instead of window visits (during which children cannot touch their parents who are behind plastic or glass barriers); consideration of the needs of a convict's children when imposing a sentence; and capping the unconscionably high collect charges on phone calls placed by inmates to their families. She also recommends removing numerous legal barriers for released prisoners, who often are effectively barred from jobs, college loans, and public housing—barriers that can lead to frustration, anger, and recidivism.

Everyone with an interest in criminal justice ought to read this sobering book. Even law-and-order conservatives would do well to ponder the reality that most prisoners will one day come back to their communities. As Bernstein makes abundantly clear, society is far better off if ex-prisoners return home with strong family connections and commitments, thus reducing the likelihood they will return to crime. ❖

Bill Williams is a former editorial writer and book reviewer for The Hartford Courant in Connecticut.

My Cellmate, My Self, continued from p. 27

in common to have become friends otherwise, but we're stuck together as cellmates, sharing a space the size of a small bathroom. In just two weeks I've gotten to know him better than I currently know anyone.

We've both had numerous cellmates over the years, and we'll probably move on and forget about each other long before we parole, which will come in 2011 for us both. In the meantime, I believe that he'll help me in any way he can. If I'm hungry, upset, or afraid, he'll be the first I talk to. And if I'm in real trouble, I believe he'll respond without my asking him to.

But ours is still merely a friendship of convenience. After all, we are only friends because we share a cell, no special attraction there. And I'm not trying to convert him to Buddhism. I'm just trying to be there for him during this difficult time, which is probably the worst time of his life, too. ❖

Billy Tyler is a Zen student and a prisoner at Calipatria State Prison in California.

Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter

by Steven Johnson
Riverhead Books, 2005

Reviewed by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

If your mind is made up that commercial television and video and computer games with violent content are totally evil, don't read this book. It will only aggravate you. But if you're intrigued by the author's premise—that pop media culture isn't dumbing us down, it's making us sharper—Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad Is Good for You* makes a case for the benefits of crossing the digital divide. Along the way, he continually reinforces his central point: electronic gaming and some (not all) television boosts our intelligence not because the content of those forms of media is uplifting or intellectual—in fact, some of the content is admittedly morally repulsive or repetitively silly and violent. Instead, Johnson analyzes the lived experience, the perceptual process of electronic gaming or viewing a television series such as *Seinfeld*. He shows how these activities tap into existing capacities in our neural systems that allow for the development of new skills valuable to 21st-century work, play, and human relationships.

Parents concerned about children (usually boys) whose preferred free time is spent in the worlds of electronic gaming may find this book helpful in understanding what their kids are doing—and why cajoling or lecturing about “wholesome” activities such as reading, exercising, and making s'mores over campfires is likely to be just too old school. However, *Everything Bad*, despite its provocative title, does support literature (the author points out that he chose the book form as the most powerful way to communicate his thinking), community, and physical fitness. Johnson wouldn't argue that pop media is a substitute for caring home environments, empathy, social justice awareness, and ethics.

Using new terms such as “probing,” “telescoping” and “multi-threading,” Johnson attempts to show how the brain's reward mechanisms are tied in to electronic game design and the increased complexity of scripts for television series. Repetition and replay value are built into successful pop media these days, Johnson says, with economic incentives thus supporting increased complexity and sophistication of pop media culture. Why invest in DVDs and games, for instance, unless you can enjoy watching or playing them over and over, finding new dimensions and details?

This isn't a Buddhist analysis, nor is it a convincing argument for me to see all the trashy reality shows I've missed. *Everything Bad* doesn't comment on spiritual development, but it does address human consciousness,

and how concentration, curiosity, calmly coping with frustration and ambiguity, interpersonal skills, and intuitive learning are qualities that popular media at its best promotes rather than destroys. Johnson leaves “the dark side” for others to research and comment on: a possible critique of *Everything Bad* is that it could more fully acknowledge that we don't yet know the potential long-term relationship between playing games with violent content and violent behaviors, or how humans will develop if some have almost unlimited access to Internet pornography and other media formerly more taboo, expensive, and difficult to obtain.

The burning question (for some adults and educators, at least), “Will pop media cause widespread sociopathic behavior through blurring the boundary between reality and fantasy?”, will continue to be rancorously argued in the coming year. I advocate a hands-on approach: if you're going to discuss something, take some time to see how it's working in reality rather than judging it in the abstract. And if you want to know what the famous Duct Tape Mod from Doom 3 is, ask a teenage boy, ask me, or Google it. ❖

Four Reviews by Jan Eldridge

Buffalo Boy and Geronimo

by James Janko
Curbstone Press, 2006

James Janko was a platoon medic in the Vietnam War, which the Vietnamese called “the American War.” This is a novel about a young Vietnamese boy, Mong, and a medic named Conchola who are transformed by the destruction of the Vietnamese countryside and its inhabitants.

All wars leave an inherent trail of destruction. Few authors share their firsthand experience with the degree of sensitivity and reverence that Janko shows for the humans and animals, even the plants, that become victims of the war. He has bonded so closely with them that he moves easily from being one with buffalo or elephant into the psyche of the boy or the soldier. From page one to the end of the book, we are held captive by his vivid descriptions of sights, smells, tastes—intimate details of every aspect of each character and scene involved.

Both Mong and Antonio Lucio Conchola have learned the lesson of impermanence early in life. Mong's father was a Viet Cong soldier killed by the Americans; Conchola never knew his father, who was killed in the Korean War. Owning a buffalo is a number-one priority for a young Vietnamese male. Mong's love for his buffalo, Great Joy, is cut short when the animal is lost to enemy fire. Although he yearns for revenge, Mong also knows that the local Viet Cong are stupid and cruel and just as out of touch with natural life rhythms as the Americans.

Conchola imagines himself as the invincible Apache warrior Geronimo, and, in bravado fashion, he is initially

convinced that he will end up a highly decorated soldier. His best friend's death from a trip-wire bomb becomes the catalyst for drastic changes in Conchola. His affinity for a wounded tiger is all-encompassing as he becomes more remote from his unit.

Yes, this is an antiwar novel, a story of the exploitation and destruction of environment and living beings. The intensity of its focus also brings to mind Indra's Net, the Buddhist teaching that compares the universe to a cosmic net strung with jewels (or mirrors), each of which reflects all the others. As the nature of the universe is contained in each particle, all phenomena in the universe are interrelated. Both Mong and Conchola come to the profound realization that when we damage the Earth or any of its beings, we inflict dramatic, irreparable damage on ourselves. ❖

The Jewel Tree of Tibet: The Enlightenment Engine of Tibetan Buddhism

by Robert Thurman

Free Press/Simon & Schuster, 2006, \$14

The text of *The Jewel Tree of Tibet* began as a retreat led by Robert Thurman. Now in book form, it offers an experiential course in the essentials of Tibetan Buddhism.

Robert Thurman is professor of Indo-Tibetan studies at Columbia University and cofounder and president of Tibet House, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the endangered civilization and culture of Tibet. He was the first Westerner to receive ordination as a Tibetan Buddhist monk from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Thurman is a popular lecturer on Tibetan Buddhism around the world and is the author of numerous books. He has also translated many sacred Tibetan texts, both philosophical treatises and sutras.

The teachings contained in this retreat are steps on the path toward enlightenment as presented in the once-secret root text by the Fourth Panchen Lama entitled "Mentor Devotion." Lamaism was a term used by Western scholars initially to refer to the Tibetan form of Buddhism because of the central role of the lama. The lama, as mentor figure, empowers you toward self-transformation and realization of the teachings. He brings energy and life to the presence of the three jewels of Buddha, dharma, and sangha.

The three jewels are the foundation of all forms of Buddhism. Thurman interprets the Buddha as not simply the original Buddha but the teacher and the teachings. The dharma is the practices we do, the qualities we develop, and the reality of being a buddha ourselves. The sangha is the spiritual community.

The book is divided into six chapters that can serve as the basis for retreats in themselves, with meditations and

regular review of the principles that define the steps on the path to enlightenment. When he leads the reader and practitioner in guided meditation, Thurman leaves the door wide open for individual interpretation. For example, we're invited to invoke a mentor that can take the form of Christ for Christians, Moses for Jews, Socrates for secular humanists, or Muhammad, St. Teresa, St. Francis, Milarepa, Krishna, Lao-Tsu.

Each chapter opens or closes with a visualization in which we let the ordinary world dissolve, and we move into a meditative mode. Thurman endows the visualizations with a vivid reality that reaches out to believers of a diverse range of faiths. The jewel tree of the title is the tree of life, the tree of wisdom, and the bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment, filled with wish-granting jewels that make up a family of mentors. It is the setting for each step on the path, for each of the chapters, and for all of the themes and healing practices that move us toward enlightenment.

Thurman invites us to give up our ordinary perception in order to develop a transcendent attitude that will help us to exchange our "habitual bondages and addictive preoccupations" for an inner freedom that leads to real happiness. This involves a four-step program: to reevaluate our self-image, to confront our inevitable death, to commit to understanding the causes and conditions of things and events, and to confront our habitual egoistic mental process. This program is also known in Tibetan Buddhism as "the four reminders," because our frequent focus on each of these truths reminds us of the need to move from the suffering of our attachments toward a free, enlightened existence. ❖

Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships: Healing the Wound of the Heart

by John Welwood

Shambhala Publications, 2006

Psychologist, author, and teacher John Welwood's latest book, *Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships*, identifies the root cause of all relationship problems. Starting with the premise that an early "love wound" sabotages our ability to experience fulfilling relationships, he describes the cause-and-effect pattern that results.

If our parents didn't provide enough space, or if they didn't provide warm emotional contact, that wounding leads to a fear of intimacy. Because we don't trust that we can be loved for ourselves, this insecurity results in the game we play of moving back and forth between being open and closed in our relationships.

In addition, we harbor a long-term grievance over this lack of nurturing that provides us with a defense against

feeling vulnerable and prevents us from establishing any trust in ourselves or others. We become stuck in an emotional pattern of looking for love in the wrong places—outside ourselves and in imperfect relationships with imperfect people. In holding onto that grievance we disconnect from the flow of love within ourselves. Love can't flow from us or to us smoothly. This wound must be acknowledged, examined, and healed before successful relationships are possible.

The therapist as well as the Buddhist in Welwood then delivers the transformative message of this book. Welwood states that psychological work focuses on what went wrong, but spiritual work focuses on what is intrinsically right. He provides a guided meditation that takes us on a journey through a profound healing process.

Although he writes, "Perhaps only enlightened saints and buddhas can be perfect vessels through which absolute love flows unobstructedly," those of us who do not fall into either of those two categories will see our relationships improve if we remember that the less we demand total fulfillment from relationships, the more we can appreciate them. If we can accept others with all of their differences and limitations, and bring the absolute love within us to our relationships, we are well on our way to healing the wound of the heart. ❖

Adventures with the Buddha: A Buddhism Reader

Edited by Jeffery Paine

W. W. Norton Company, 2005

An anthology of personal adventures narrated by nine spiritual pilgrims, this book takes us from the "Era of the Heroic and Almost Magical," the time when Buddhism was completely esoteric, to the "Era of You and Me," in which Buddhism has become a commonplace practice in the West. We encounter incredible phenomena, intense frustration with obstacles, and some very sublime moments.

Alexandra David-Neel, the courageous French pioneer, takes us on her exploration and participation in remote Tibetan sites and rituals where she gets up close and personal with hermits and lamas, flying monks, and the practices of *tumo* (a Tibetan Buddhist meditative practice for surviving extreme cold) and mental telepathy. David-Neel was an aggressive and challenging researcher who blazed trails in forbidden areas with amazing daring.

In an excerpt from Govinda's *The Way of the White Clouds*, we meet a humble hermit lama who, once he encountered Tibetan Buddhism, devoted the rest of his life to its study and practice. Govinda's vivid descriptions of his travels and his close relationship with his teacher, Geshe Tomo, are those of a devoted artist highly receptive to the mystical and unafraid of that unknown quantity.

John Blofield's unassuming, natural, almost naïve approach to his personal quest balances travelogue with

serious religious exploration. His "Wheel of Life" is a spiritual autobiography of a British scholar who devoted his life to the study of Eastern traditions, from the renunciation and asceticism of Chinese Buddhism to the sumptuous, sensual practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

As a result of the Russian Revolution, Peter Goullart retreated to Shanghai, where he began his exploration of China's religions of Taoism and Buddhism. Goullart was a devotee of both and explored the way a religion based on nature (Taoism) is related to one based on spirit (Buddhism).

With no idea what was in store for him, Janwillem van de Wetering knocked on the door of a Zen monastery in Kyoto in 1958 and asked to be accepted as a disciple. For two years he lived the life of a lay Buddhist monk. "The Empty Mirror" contains vivid details of the extreme physical and mental hardships he endured in a one-week sesshin.

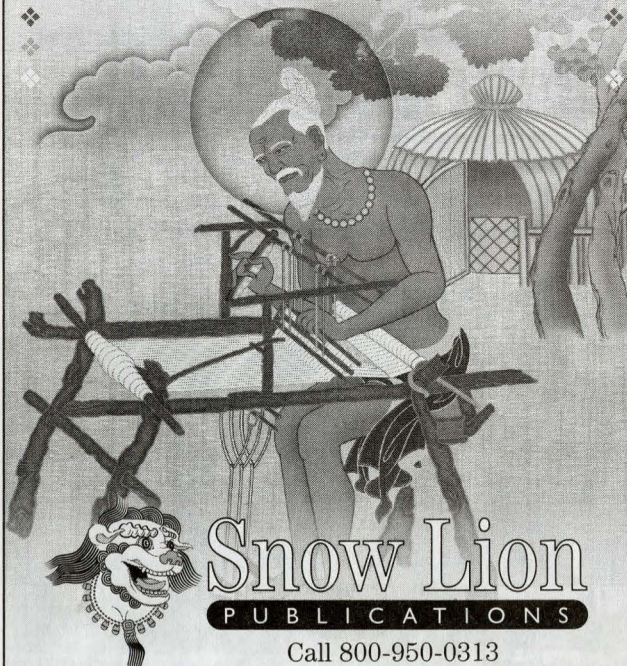
In "The Era of You and Me," Part II of the book, we meet the modern pilgrims. In a chapter called "An African-American Woman's Journey into Buddhism," Jan Willis describes profound joy and suffering during her 15 years as a student of Lama Yeshe.

In his introduction to this anthology, Jeffery Paine states that because there are many Buddhist books that edify, his purpose is to produce one that will entertain. He has achieved his original goal and also brought us many edifying moments. ❖

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Youth Program News

Teen Retreat

by Tempel Smith

The BPF Youth Program held its seventh intensive meditation retreat this winter for 31 teenagers at the Tibetan retreat center, Land of Medicine Buddha, near Santa Cruz, California. The teens came from the San Francisco Bay Area, Southern California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Michigan, and Tennessee. Flying as far as 2,000 miles and giving up precious vacation days seems a great indication of the hunger kids have for the dharma.

In addition to the meditation, spirituality, community, and social awareness issues that we explore every retreat, this year our focus was on social issues related to gender. One of our volunteers, Carin McKay, led a three-hour workshop on biological identity—how societal forces shape our experience of being male or female. This subject stirred up a lot for many of the teens. We were saddened to learn that gender issues are a tremendous source of pain for many young people. We also found much to celebrate and be grateful for.

With the recent addition of a transgendered youth to our community, we were all made more aware of gender issues. He had an exceptional ability to communicate what it had been like for the first part of his life as someone with a “masculine” mind in a “feminine” body, and what the transition to a “masculine” body had been like. Everyone in the community quickly learned that our traditional binary concepts “male” and “female” were crude and inaccurate as we tried to understand the incredible diversity of gender experience and identity. This expanded awareness was liberating for the other teens and the staff.

Our New Year’s retreat has become a haven for youth who want to have a meaningful, sober experience. One teen in recovery noted that this retreat not only connects him to a community, but that it is crucial for him in being able to trust that he will not relapse into substance abuse. Having us all hold the Fifth Precept—abstaining from intoxicants—was actually lifesaving for him, and it helped us all to understand the protection that the precepts offer.

The next teen retreat will again be at Land of Medicine Buddha from June 27 to July 2, 2006. For more on BPF teen retreats, see www.bpf.org/teenretreat.html, call 510/655-6169 ext. 301, or e-mail <teenretreat@bpf.org>. ❖

Larry Smith Where You Are

The baby has Buddha in his mouth,
one of the rubber kind from a quarter machine.
If you meet the Buddha, eat him.

Larry Smith practices with the Cloud Water Zendo in Cleveland and is coeditor of America Zen: A Gathering of Poets.

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From the Executive Director

Making a Difference

by Maia Duerr

I've been thinking lately about the nature of change—how do we really make a difference in the world? Is it even possible? The vision of a more peaceful and just world is one that I believe we all share, and it's the reason why we've found a home with each other here through BPF. And, in this world of impermanence and *dukkha*, this vision is one that will forever be just out of reach. That doesn't absolve us from continuing the struggle. As Suzuki Roshi once said, "Each one of you is perfect the way you are—and you can use a little improvement." We can easily apply that truism to our global situation. The Jewish tradition offers a similar thought in different language: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." And so we keep on keepin' on, with our intention rooted in lovingkindness.

BPF's 2006 Theme: Cultivating Peace, Dismantling War

In responses to BPF's 2004 membership survey, many of you noted that war and peace, and the related social diseases of militarism and consumerism, are the critical issues of our time. We see the need to address the many dimensions of peace, including environmental justice, economic justice, and human rights. His Holiness the Dalai Lama eloquently described this web of conditions in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989: "Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold.... Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free."

In that spirit, we are continuing the theme we set in 2005: Cultivating Peace, Dismantling War. BPF staff and board members are set to launch a number of projects this year that we believe will make a real contribution to the world. Some of these projects directly address militarism, others are intended to raise awareness of another essential element of peace: economic justice. We invite you to join in wherever you feel inspired. Information about all these events will be updated throughout the year on our website, www.bpf.org.

1. BPF Membership Gathering, Garrison, NY, June 22–25

BPF members are invited to join us in building community and sharing dharma practice and social change strategies. Please see page 5 of this issue to register for this event.

2. Responding with Compassion: A Monograph Series on Socially Engaged Buddhism

Many BPF members have expressed a desire for more articles that offer dharmic perspectives on sociopolitical issues, which can serve as the foundation for engaged Buddhist actions. The first in this series, "A Declaration of Interdependence," is posted on our website. Alan Senauke is working with a small group to draft a second paper, an in-

depth analysis of militarism from a Buddhist perspective, to be released later this year.

3. Conscientious Objector and Hardship Discharge Assistance

BPF volunteers working on this project will be trained to offer information and guidance to young people who may one day be affected by a draft, should it be reinstated, and to current enlistees in the military. BPF will also offer assistance to young people to build a paper trail in support of an application for C.O. status and archive these files in our office. The Center for Conscientious Objection already does good work in this area, but the need is great. Board member Chris Wilson has volunteered to head up this project.

4. Ask a Dharma Vet

This web-based project is intended to support young people faced with choices about military service and to connect young people with military veterans with a dharma practice who can speak about the reality of being in the military and how their spiritual practice has informed their work for peace. The model for this is a similar project from the Mennonite Central Committee.

5. The Coming Home Project

Our Prison Program staff, Michael Callahan and Hong Chingkuang, are developing an innovative postrelease program for those reentering society from prison in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Coming Home Project will support participants to make healthy life choices while simultaneously addressing systemic oppression and injustice within our communities.

6. BASE Groups and Chapter Mini-Grants

Thanks to support from the Hidden Leaf Foundation, we are able to offer modest stipends to BASE mentors so that we can plant the seeds for BASE groups in diverse geographic areas. We will also offer mini-grants to BPF chapters to help fund projects that meet local needs. BASE coordinator Tempel Smith and chapter coordinator Maia Duerr are working on this project.

We've been able to formulate these plans thanks to the input we've received from you, and the Chapter Council—the seven people across the globe who relay ideas to the BPF office. And we've been able to launch these projects thanks to your ongoing generous support of BPF. We are grateful for your participation in the BPF community. In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease. ❖

*Finding what is upright in attitude, thought,
speech, action, livelihood, effort, and mindfulness
and then doing it—this is our life work.*

—Robert Aitken

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This directory lists BPF chapters that are currently active. For an up-to-date and longer listing that includes "BPF Friends" (formerly called "Contacts"), please visit www.bpf.org.

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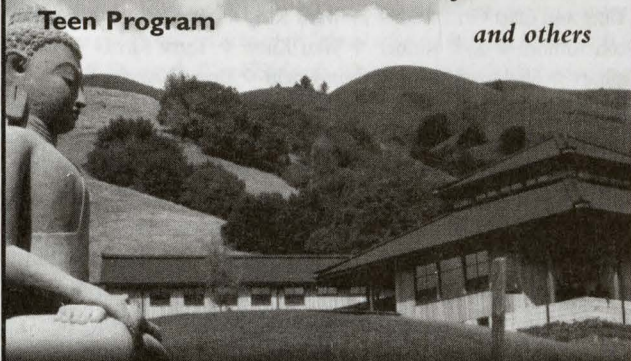
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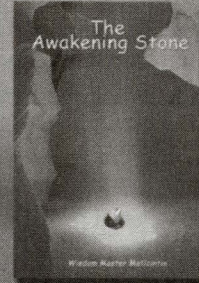
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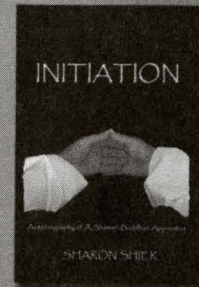


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