



# TURNING WHEEL

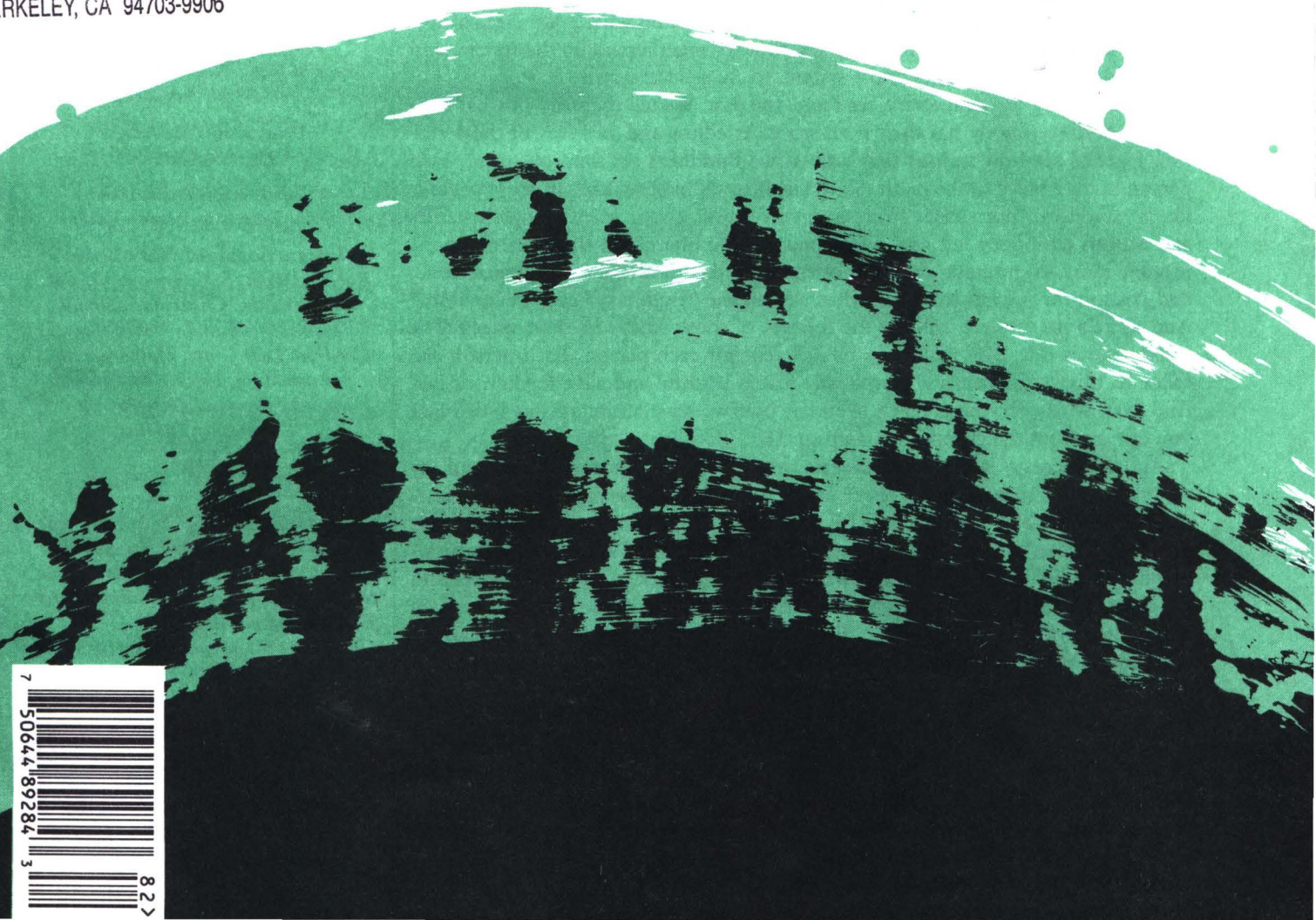
*Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship*

Summer 1998 \$4.00

## Buddhist Peace Fellowship 20th Anniversary Special!

**Robert Aitken, Joanna Macy, Nelson Foster, and others  
take a long look at Buddhist Activism**

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## *On anniversaries—*

These markers are made up. We celebrate the anniversaries of whatever we think is important. It's how we write the narrative of our life. So a person might say, this is the anniversary of when I stopped drinking. Or when I started sitting zazen. Or when my father died. Or when I came to Berkeley, California and looked out the window in amazement at psychedelic buses and palm trees.

When we say, "This organization was formed 20 years ago," what is "this organization"? It's some people doing things together. But the 4000 members of today aren't the same as the 31 members of twenty years ago. The things they are doing together aren't the same either. And the Maui Zendo where BPF was born no longer even exists. And when we say "This organization was formed," what is "formed"? It's not like a clay pot, that holds beans and you put it in the oven. "Formed" means a list of names on a piece of paper. The paper is copied and put into mailboxes and people read their mail and see their name, and they say, "Oh, I am a member of the newly formed BPF."

So it's ideas that hold us together, like: *Nobody's free till everybody's free.*

"Twenty years ago" is a real span of time. The earth has gone all the way around the sun 20 times since those people on the porch of the Maui Zendo said "Let's invent a Buddhist peace fellowship." Twenty years is enough time for babies to be born and grow up and have babies. For thousands of people to say they are members of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, and for those people to work together to save all sentient beings. For letters to be written, for demonstrations to happen, for monks to be released from prison, for medicine to be sent to the Burma border, for gardens to grow, for many people to work together within the system, and in the cracks and at the edges of the system, to change the system.

In celebrating an anniversary, we frame the past. We tell the story of what happened. And everybody has their own story. As editor and gatherer of these stories, I get to see how various they are. As we Buddhists are fond of saying, each person holds a piece of the truth. So the little bit of history that's in these pages is like a handful of pot shards from an ancient civilization. Many people's names and actions have been left out. Many people have offered up their hearts, hours, money, ideas, computers, cars, curiosity, soup, technical skills, bad jokes, tears, and passion for justice, to create what we call the "Buddhist Peace Fellowship." And there's no way we can put the fullness of those stories in these pages. The good news is that BPF really *can* be different for each person. Each person can relate to this "organization" in the way that is truthful and alive for him or her. And even with everything that's been left out, we have an impressive history, as you can see from the chronology on page 18.

And we'll create BPF's *next* 20 years out of the kaleidoscope of skills and joy we bring to it. I'm rooting for fewer words, more music, less paper, more circles.

Will you still be a member of BPF in 20 years? I will. I'll send in my renewals promptly. When the mail falls through the slot at the BPF residential community where I'll be living, I'll bend down a bit stiffly to pick it up off the floor, and I'll open *TW* to see what that young whipper-snapper of an editor has to say about the windmills on the hill. I'll read about people witnessing for peace in who knows where—I might go, too. I might sit on the tracks of a pipeline with a teenaged grandchild. It's possible. I can't know, but whatever BPF is in 20 years, it will come about because of what we all do now.

The years turn, anniversaries go out the door and come back in, and wheel after wheel spins in the air, way up yonder in the middle of the air. They shine and roll away like asteroids, like bicycles. ❖ —*Susan Moon*



## TURNING WHEEL

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Winter, '98-'99: **The Death Penalty**; Deadline: October 5, '98



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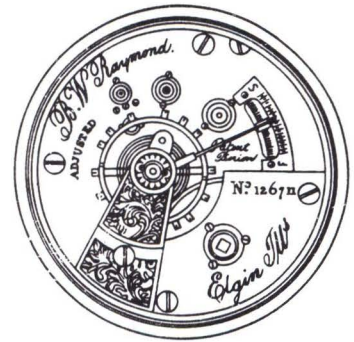
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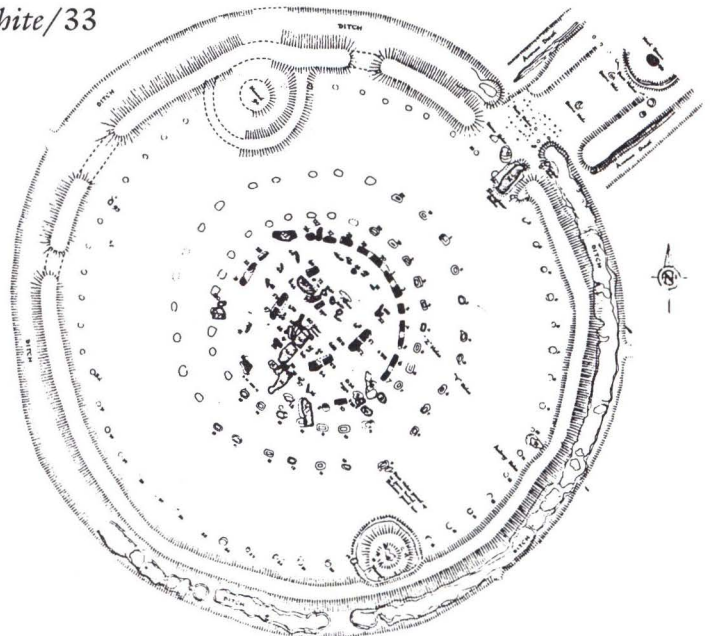


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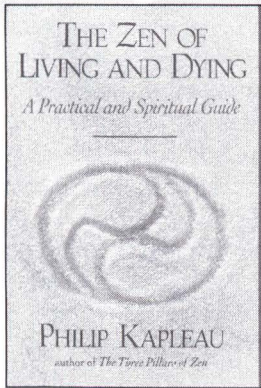
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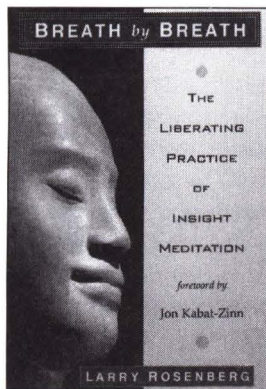
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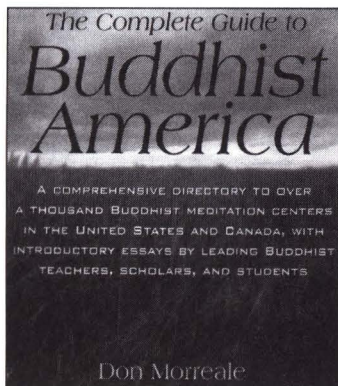
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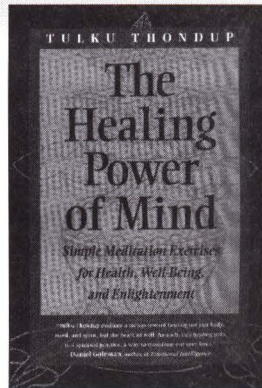


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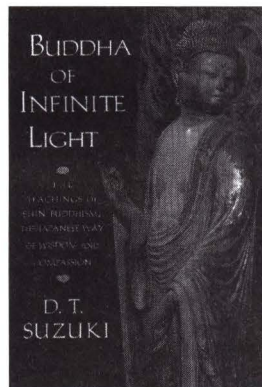
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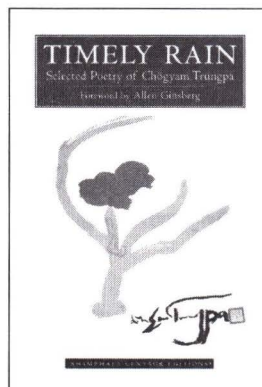
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# LETTERS

{All letters are subject to editing.}

Despite being committed to nonviolence, I have for some time had a problem with the gun-control movement that I could not put my finger on. The last issue of *TW* clarified what that problem was.

In his series of "Questions" Lewis Woods asks, "Should law-enforcement personnel be allowed to use chemical agents such as pepper spray?" To me, this begs the question, "Should law-enforcement personnel be allowed to carry weapons at all?" If we wish to build a nonviolent society, does it make sense that those whose duty it is to maintain public order should do so through violent means? Shouldn't we be seeking non-violent means of maintaining social order and resolving conflicts, rather than relying on armed police?

I respect the intentions of those who advocate gun control and my heart goes out to those whose lives have been shattered by gun violence. But I think they place unwarranted faith in both the U.S. and local government to act responsibly. Those poor, inner-city communities that are harmed most by gun violence are also harmed most by police brutality. Do they want these same police enforcing gun-control laws? Or do they want to place responsibility in the hands of the federal government—a

government that dropped the atom bomb on Japan, devastated Vietnam with chemical weapons, and has refused to sign a treaty banning land mines?

We must work to get guns out of the hands of the police and military as well as private citizens. —*Williams*

In the Spring issue, there is a reprint of a letter that Celeste West sends to the IRS annually, along with a suggestion to readers that they might wish to do something similar. This is a grossly irresponsible suggestion.

Naive readers may be unaware of the legal consequences of not paying federal income tax, and could find themselves in deep trouble: fines and imprisonment. While I certainly sympathize with those who feel that their tax dollars are not being put to good use (or, worse yet, to immoral use) they should be aware that tax protesters often pay dearly for their actions. As a lawyer, I have seen this happen. In my view, not paying one's taxes is an ineffective and dangerous (to one's liberty and finances) method of protest.

—*Ross Eric Payne, Orlando, Florida*

*Judging from my own experience as a tax resister, you get ample warning from the IRS before they take action against you, other than imposing a fine. They would much rather have your money than your house, car, or imprisoned body. Information is available from War Tax Resistance at 800/269-7464. —Ed.*

*"That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening." — Master Dogen*

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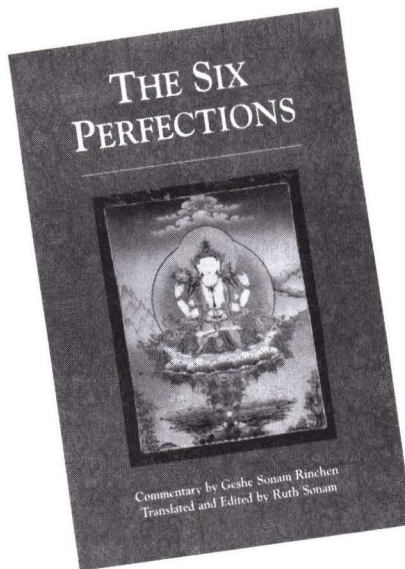
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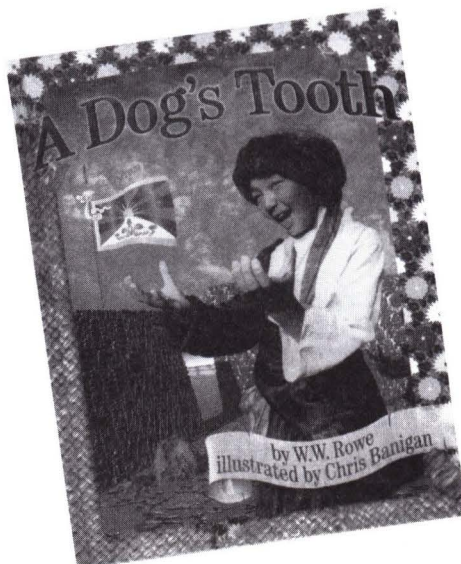


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# READINGS

## *Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage: Retracing the Journey of Slavery*

On May 30, 1998, The Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage began from the Nipponzan Myohoji Peace Pagoda in Leverett, Massachusetts. This Pilgrimage is retracing the historic routes of slavery in reverse through the United States, the Caribbean Islands, South America, West Africa, and South Africa. In the U.S. and the Caribbean, the Pilgrimage will visit sites of suffering and death such as auction grounds, slave quarters, and the sites of lynchings. The Pilgrimage will also visit stations on the Underground Railroad and other sites attesting to the monumental courage and conviction of those who worked for freedom and human dignity in the face of slavery and oppression. By acknowledging and embracing the terrible history of slavery and racial oppression, it is hoped that the journey will affirm the precious spiritual nature of all people and help cultivate the moral strength to reverse the vicious repercussions of our history.

Middle Passage refers to the portion of the triangular trade system that carried slaves from West Africa to North and South America and the Caribbean. For nearly four centuries, slave ships embarked from European ports, sailed to Africa to gather captives, brought the "human cargo" to the Americas, and then brought American goods to the port of origin. As they retrace the journey of slavery, participants in the Pilgrimage will offer prayers for the spirits of people of African descent who suffered and died during the Atlantic slave trade. The Pilgrimage will also offer multifaceted educational opportunities in the communities along the way on the institution of slavery and its present-day legacy.

The Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage was initiated by the Buddhist order Nipponzan Myohoji, and organized by an interfaith group representing Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Native American traditions, and traditional religions of Africa and their forms in the "New World." It is open to all who wish to join, and who agree to its purposes and principles. People are welcome to join for the entire year-long journey, or for a short portion of the route. In the United States, the Pilgrimage will travel south along the East Coast and will reach Charleston, South Carolina, on September 13. From there, the Pilgrimage will turn west, traveling through Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, and finishing its U.S. portion of the route in New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 3. From New Orleans the Pilgrimage will sail through the Caribbean Islands to Bahia, Brazil, and then eastward across the Atlantic, landing in Dakar, Senegal, on January 1, 1999. The Pilgrimage will continue south along the west coast of Africa, and conclude in June

1999 in Cape Town, South Africa. For further information on how to join or support the Pilgrimage, please write to: The Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage, c/o First Congregational Church, Room 11, 165 Main St., Amherst, MA 01002. Tel: 413/256-6698. Fax: 413/367-9369. Web site: [www.shaysnet.com/~pagoda](http://www.shaysnet.com/~pagoda).

## *Activists Oppose Burmese-Thai Pipeline*

On March 6, 1998, Buddhist social critic and human-rights activist Sulak Sivaraksa was arrested with 50 activists while camping in a forest in western Thailand. He was charged with obstructing the Petroleum Authority of Thailand's (PTT) construction of the Thai portion of the Yadana gas pipeline. Sivaraksa appeared in court on May 15 and awaits a June 30 decision. At his trial Sivaraksa stated, "It will be a shame for a democratic country like Thailand to fail to recognize that their trade is contributing to the denigration of democracy in its neighboring country [Burma]. The Thais should be aware that they are going to purchase natural gas which is derived from the blood and tears of the Burmese minorities."

The pipeline, which would bring gas from the Mataban Bay of Burma to a power plant in Ratchaburi, Thailand, has been opposed by human rights activists and environmentalists since the project's inception. Among other human-rights violations associated with the pipeline project, it has been reported that tens of thousands of villagers living along the pipeline's route have been forcibly conscripted by the Burmese military government SPDC (formerly SLORC). Villagers have been forced to work without pay building roads and railroads, and doing other construction for the pipeline. Opposition also cites the systematic destruction of villages in the pipeline region and other human-rights atrocities by the SPDC. In Thailand, the pipeline will pass through and destroy forest land that is home to rare plants and more than 20 species of land mammals.

The Yadana oil gasline project is funded by a consortium of oil companies, including PTTEP (a PTT subsidiary company), MOGE (Burma), Total (France), and Unocal (California). It was originally scheduled to deliver gas to the Ratchaburi power plant in July of this year, but implementation of the power plant has been delayed until at least this coming October. A committee set up by Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai to hear concerns about the pipeline has strongly criticized PTT for the lack of public participation in the decision-making process.

It is extremely urgent that the international community join activists in Asia to protect human rights and the environment in Burma and Thailand. For further information about the Yadana gas pipe, please contact:

- FREE BURMA: NO PETRO DOLLARS FOR SPDC, Pam Wellner, IRN, 1847 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94703. Tel: 510/848-1155. Fax: 510/848-1008. E-mail: [freeburma@irn.org](mailto:freeburma@irn.org).

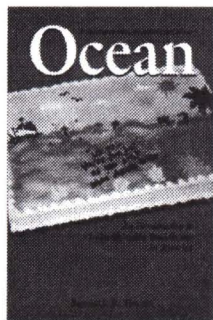


- The Free Burma Coalition, c/o Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin, 225 N. Mills St., Madison, WI 53706. Tel: 608/827-7734. Fax: 608/263-9992.
- Visit the excellent Free Burma Home website at: [sunsite.unc.edu/freeburma](http://sunsite.unc.edu/freeburma).
- To contact Unocal in opposition to the Yadana gas pipeline, please write to: Unocal Corp., 2141 Rosecrans Ave. #4000, El Segundo, CA 90245. Tel: 310/726-7600. Fax: 213/977-7591. Unocal CEO: Roger Beach, Fax: 310/726-7802. Unocal Thailand Vice President of Planning: Patrick Murphy, Fax: 662/545-5554.
- For Unocal's justification of the Yadana pipeline, please see their website at: [www.unocal.com/myanmar/index.htm](http://www.unocal.com/myanmar/index.htm). To see the SPDC's presentation of Burma on the web, please see: [www.myanmar.com](http://www.myanmar.com).

### **Tibetan Hunger Strikers Call Off Strike**

On March 10, 1998, six Tibetans from the Tibetan Youth Congress started an unto-death hunger strike in New Delhi, India. After 49 days of fasting, Indian police forcibly brought them to a nearby hospital. On April 27, their places were taken by six other hunger strikers. A participant in the second group, Thupten Ngodup, set himself on fire and burned to death in protest one day after the Indian government ended the initial strike. On May 15, 1998, after 18 days of fasting, the remaining five Tibetans called off their hunger strike.

"Let go... you're fine just as you are!"  
Namo Amida Butsu



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Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship

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The strikers had asked the United Nations to reopen debate on the issue of Tibet, but were satisfied by agreements from Poland, Norway, Costa Rica, Hungary, and the European Union to address the issue of Tibetan independence when the General Assembly reconvenes this fall. U.S. President Bill Clinton also pledged to address the issue of Tibet with Chinese President Jiang Zemin when he travels to Beijing this June.

More than one million Tibetans have been killed and more than 6,000 monasteries destroyed since China began its occupation of Tibet in 1951. The last time the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for China to respect Tibet's right to self-determination was in 1965. ❖

### **In Memoriam**

Sandra Jishu Angyo Holmes (1941-1998),  
co-founder of the Zen Peacemaker Order  
with her husband, Roshi Bernie Glassman,  
died of a heart attack March 20,  
shortly after they moved to New Mexico.

"...Only the wounded healer is able to heal. As long as we think that spiritual leaders need to be perfect, we live in poverty. I have a perfect teacher inside; there is no perfect teacher outside."

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# MY MOTHER, DYING

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

For behold your body—  
A painted puppet, a toy...

Your work is to discover your work  
And then with all your heart  
To give yourself to it.

—*The Dhammapada* (trans. Byrom)

She rages long-distance, screaming at me, “No one considers what *I* need. No one hears what *I* want. I gave up my entire life for you and you won’t give me a thing. Well, what did I expect! Your character is bad—it always has been. I’ll just check myself into a home and die there. I have no choice. No one will take care of me.”

\* \* \*

My mother was known for her tolerance and patience. She never spanked or punished us, and her sweet strength was spiced with a sometimes zany sense of humor. Although she came from a Buddhist family and had grown up in Hawaii, she practiced no formal religion and did not believe in God. Her Way was to quietly engage in the lives of those around her, supporting family, neighbors, and co-workers with an extra measure of attentiveness that made everyone feel especially nurtured. She didn’t smoke or drink alcohol, and she had many plans for an active retirement from her profession as a pharmacist. It didn’t seem “fair” to any of us, including her, when she was diagnosed with large-cell lymphoma around five years ago.

As her oldest child and elder daughter, I had always been my mother’s confidante. In my teen years, I used to sit in the bathroom while she soaked in a hot bath, and we would swap stories about our friends and our thoughts on life. Although conservative in some ways, my mother wasn’t prudish about nudity, and I loved to ogle her puffy abdominal scar, left after an emergency appendectomy; the broken varicose veins in her legs; and the freckles on her soft breasts. She looked completely beautiful to me. I knew that she loved me, although she never said so.

After numerous grueling treatments and two long remissions, she was again diagnosed with cancer in March 1997. For those of us in the so-called sandwich generation, dealing with our parents’ aging and dying while we are raising young children, the Bodhisattva Vow takes on new meaning, as do the teachings on emptiness and non-self. What I hadn’t understood was that “my mother” was an identity that would die before her, as she, Alice, faced her final work.

I was unprepared for her searing resentment and

rage, her irrational fears of abandonment, and her manipulative criticisms. Unexpectedly, her dying laid bare a lifetime’s unresolved conflicts. Yet, because I myself was a mother, I was able eventually to see my own task. Now it was my turn to stand firm for her, to accept everything she was going through, as though she were my child. Although I also wept and raged, there was a sense of rightness to this new turning of the wheel of life, as she regressed and I grew up some more.

I learned about heart-numbing anxiety in the long months of her dying, as I continually came face-to-face with my own fear of death. At night I would wake up to check that my husband and son were breathing. It was the longest and toughest *sesshin* of my life. And

*At night I would wake up to check that my  
husband and son were breathing.*

after she died, I had a visceral sense of the unexplored territory left to me in my own practice. I know I *don’t* know how I’ll feel when my own death comes.

When my brother finally received the last call he would ever receive from our mother last November, asking him to come, he was ready to help her die. Recalling his training as a medical doctor, he e-mailed me from our mother’s home in Virginia that the scene felt strangely familiar. He already knew “the moaning of shriveled-up, dying, old people, the smell of urine,” and had experienced “long periods of boredom punctuated by terror.” My brother is a scientist who holds no “spiritual” beliefs, but he said something remarkable to me at this time. “People say that this must be different because this time it’s my mother,” he said to me. And of course it *was* different. “But it’s always *someone’s* mother,” he added kindly.

We scattered her ashes in the Pacific Ocean, near where we scattered my father’s ashes two years ago, and, as she requested, followed the ashes with handfuls of fragrant rose petals. ❖

(For Alice Hisako Ikeda, Feb. 10, 1931—Dec. 2, 1997.)

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# LINGZONG

by Diane Patenaude Ames

It was not easy for a young woman to become a Buddhist nun in 4th-century China. Buddhism was still widely mistrusted as foreign, and most fathers enforced the Confucian dictum that daughters had a duty to marry. Even so, Lingzong (latter 4th century), a pious, upper-class girl in war-torn Gao-ping, did it the hard way: she was captured by the barbarian Hsiung-nu invaders (thought to be relatives of the Huns), who were overrunning northern China. When she realized she was probably earmarked to become the sex slave of some Hsiung-nu warrior who had never taken a bath, she plucked out her eyebrows and pretended to have leprosy. This worked all too well; her frightened captors abandoned her in the middle of nowhere without food or supplies. In the following days she nearly starved to death, at one point narrowly escaped from a band of cutthroats by hiding up in a tree, and struggled back to civilization barely alive. But since, ironically enough, the barbarians had killed off all the male relatives who could have forbidden her to become a nun, she was able to fulfill her dream of entering a convent.

Within a few years Lingzong had such a reputation for Buddhist learning and piety that Emperor Xiaowu (373-396) of the Chin dynasty sent her a letter of commendation. Her reputation stood her in good stead later, when the area was flooded with sick and starving refugees fleeing further barbarian invasions. After she had given all her resources to relieve their suffering, Lingzong used her prestige to raise contributions from Buddhist donors, and then braved great hardship and danger to carry supplies into remote areas. She saved many lives, though the effort left her so ill and exhausted that she became emaciated, and it was feared that she might die herself. Despite her many ordeals, she outlived most of her contemporaries. When she was 75 years old, she woke up one morning, told her disciples that she had dreamed of the Buddha's Pure Land, and abruptly died.

Buddhist charity like Lingzong's seems to have struck a very responsive chord in Chinese hearts. Certainly it popularized the new religion among China's poor. Within a few centuries, virtually all social services in the country—almshouses, hospitals, orphanages, organized charities, even public toilets—were being run by Buddhist monastic institutions. ❖

Source: Pao-chang. *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries: A Translation of the Pi-ch'u-ni-chuan*. Translated by Kathryn Ann Tsai. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1994.



# WALKING ON WALKING

by Stephanie Kaza

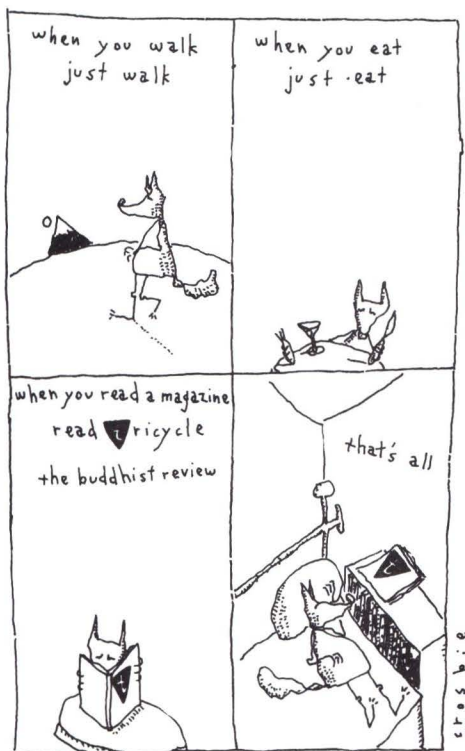
“Step back and gaze again at the land: it rises and subsides...walking on walking, under foot earth turns (p. 8).” Gary Snyder, BPF founder, elder, poet, visionary, sings the opening to his epic work, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. Like layers of rock, the lines of his poems fold in and out, showing the big shape of the world. One by one, he traces the songlines of waterfalls, desert playas, mountain escarpments, “streaks and strains, warp and slide,/ abraded gritty mudwash glide (p. 144).”

What a gift! What a grand celebration! What excellent storytelling in the old tradition. The elder gives forth about “the way things are.” We sit at his feet and listen, get up to dance every so often. In Zen terms, this is transmission of the finest form, pointing to the truth in the actual flow of time—hardened into mountains, carried along by rivers. “Sierra Nevada...thrust of westward slipping crest—one way/ to raise and swing the clouds around (p. 70).” Snyder speaks what he knows from walking the land for a lifetime. Direct experience, fully present to the “whole big story—Us critters hanging out together/ something like three billion years (p. 119).” A taste, a glimpse of time beyond the lifespan of one person passing through.

Core to Buddhist practice is grappling with one’s own death as a prime teaching of impermanence. The teacher helps nudge you closer to this awful fact—no letup, no escape. For Snyder, death is no abstract idea; it is rooted in the ongoing tumult of rock, water, and life—quite approachable—“the wideness, the/ foolish loving spaces/ full of heart (p. 152).”

This great poem transmission is a gift to those who will follow. It is a kind of medicine bundle for the younger ones, walking bravely toward the future. Snyder knows he won’t be around forever; the message had better be passed along. “Coyote says, ‘You people should stay put here,/ learn your place,/ do good things. Me, I’m traveling on’ (p. 121).” The opening dedication is to his children. But the poem is for all of us, given with the same free-spirited generosity as the “Smokey the Bear Sutra” (“may be reproduced free forever”).

What, then, are we to do with these teachings? How do we receive this transmission? In the Old Ways and the Zen ways, it is traditional to honor the elders and listen to what they have to say. It is our place to learn what we can. And then we go out and let the stories find us. Bristlecone pine story, for instance—“four thousand years of mineral glimmer/ spaced out growing in the icy airy sky/ white bones under summer stars (p. 147).” Then we have something to pass on to the next generation. “Walking on walking/ under foot earth turns (p. 152).” ❖



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# BPF LAUNCHES NEW PRISON PROJECT

*This is the first example of what will be a regular Turning Wheel column focusing on Buddhist activism in jails and prisons.*

At its December meeting, the BPF Board decided to form a Committee that will begin shaping a Prison Project. Like BASE, the Prison Project will be developed gradually, informed along the way by responses from members. The fledgling Committee has been surprised and impressed by the extent of Buddhist work in prisons and jails across the country. Books are in production and many innovative projects are underway: Dharma correspondence courses, stress-reduction classes, and ten-day jail vipassana retreats (to mention a few) are proving effective. Rather than breaking new ground, BPF hopes just to keep abreast of the devoted and imaginative work that so many groups and individuals are doing.

What is it about prisons that attracts Buddhists? Partly, it is the enormity of the problem. Almost two million people (mostly of color) are locked up. Since 1980 the population of prisoners has tripled, and it is expected to double again by 2005. The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration of any developed country. Most offenses are nonviolent crimes; at least 80 percent of those are drug-related. As sentences grow longer, rehabilitation programs are minimized or abandoned. The violence of the criminal justice system—its drain on resources and the way it perpetuates suffering—begs for Bodhisattva action.

Prisons also pose challenging opportunities for Buddhist practice. In a letter to *TW*, Douglas Ray, a former prisoner, describes how he used the insults of his experience to clarify and deepen his understanding. For Ray, the most valuable lesson from Zen practice in prison was that

Practice does not depend on circumstances...One of the strong points about prison practice is that the whole prison system is set up to eliminate, as much as possible, any idea of individuality or self-importance. Essentially you are a number...From the very beginning, the tone is set. "Inmate # 925275, strip! All right, lift your nutsack, turn around, bend over, spread your cheeks." This initial treatment pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the prison experience. Very little effort is expended towards giving the prisoner any feeling of dignity or self-worth.

From an ordinary point of view, this does not sound like a very liberating experience, but from a practice point of view, it can be the opportunity of a lifetime.

What is the core of the Buddha's teaching, [which] we

practice so diligently to realize? No-self. So who is it that "spreads its cheeks"? What is it that "takes offense" at this? What stands in the way of experiencing life, all of it, regardless of the circumstances? This can be a constant koan, the skillful means for realization, the [entry to a] full and joyful life of no-self...

What I have just said should not be construed as an endorsement of what is essentially a brutal and de-humanizing system. The current mode of what is deemed "Corrections" is as unrealistic in its approach towards rehabilitation as it is inhumane to the men and women who live inside these refuse sites of humanity. Having lived first-hand in that world, I would be the first to advocate reform.

The bottom line for a prisoner, however, is that prison life is what it is. However a prisoner feels about that, it remains unchanged. This is where Buddhist practice begins. Life is suffering. The cause of suffering is desire. Desire for what? That life be something other than what is. This is where the trouble and our practice begin, whoever and wherever we are.

As practitioners we reach out to one another, through and within prison walls. We learn and support and are inspired. BPF is committed to transforming suffering on a variety of interlocking levels: personal, institutional, and systemic. As part of this commitment, the BPF Prison Committee's draft plan proposes four types of action.

1. Networking—collaborating to develop a map of what Buddhist and other spiritually-based groups are doing in prisons, and establishing a clearinghouse of information and referrals.

2. Education—informing BPF members about problems in the criminal justice system; developing educational materials for prisoners and promoting the programs already designed to serve them; and educating correctional workers about the need to recognize Buddhism as an established religion.

3. Service—ministry, making direct and written contact with prisoners; helping prisoners start and maintain Buddhist practices; and doing outreach to correctional workers, volunteers, people leaving prisons, and those at risk of incarceration.

4. Advocacy—confronting the effects of structural violence against individuals and groups, and addressing the broader social and political forces that have created our present circumstances.

The Committee recommends that BPF hire a half-time staff person to coordinate the Project. A job description will be forthcoming. A small budget for a temporary, start-up position has already been granted, and Diana Lion has been hired and has begun to shape the project. Meanwhile, staff and volunteers at the BPF office struggle to keep up with prison correspondence and the many communications from Dharma groups. We hope readers will contact the BPF office with suggestions that will help make the Project a broadly-based collaboration. ❖



# HOW SHALL WE SAVE THE WORLD?

## *An Anniversary Essay on a Perennial Topic*

by Nelson Foster

When the Buddhist Peace Fellowship came into being, I was a youngster of 27 living on Maui, five years out of college, six years into Zen practice, and anxious to do something more about the sorry state of the world than I was doing as a high school English teacher. It seemed obvious to me and others in our tiny cabal that Buddhism demanded political expression, and it took just one brief meeting to decide we should do it—no consultation with others, no plan for funding, no attempt to base the project in a Buddhist community larger or closer to the center, socially or geographically, than the Maui Zendo. Despite such organizational naïveté, BPF flew from the start; it must have been, as the saying goes, an idea whose time had come.

Naïveté of another sort also played a part in BPF's creation, I now see, at least on my part—naïveté about Buddhism itself and the bodhisattva way of saving beings. While innocence may have served BPF well in other respects, I think in this respect it did not. As I reflect on developments of the past 20 years, it seems to me that BPF and other Buddhist projects of a similar nature have suffered from a failure to resolve crucial differences between the world view implicit in Buddhism and the world view that we absorb unintentionally as children of this culture.

(Given the diverse forms Buddhism has taken, I need to acknowledge that I am referring here to the world view implicit in Mahayana Buddhism of China and Japan, especially as manifested in the one sect I know intimately—Ch'an or Zen. I leave it to readers from other dharma traditions to decide what value my observations have, if any, vis-à-vis their own history, teachings, and experience.)

I grew up in a genteel, middle-class, Protestant family with mainstream liberal values. One grandmother in Baltimore expressed these values by campaigning for inner-city parks and against litter; my mother participated actively in the League of Women Voters. Like many other whiteskinned Baby Boomers, I was stirred by the civil rights struggle but brought to my feet only by our grisly war in Indochina and the commotion it created around me. Although I took part in the marches, rallies, and student strikes of my college years, I remained functionally ignorant of both street politics and political philosophy until I fell, by extraordinary good fortune, under the tutelage of Robert Aitken. He had not yet become an independent master but was already teaching Zen in a sort of apprenticeship, and as he did so, was passing along, willy-nilly, the political views he had

formed, refined, and acted upon since his incarceration three decades earlier in a Japanese internment camp.

Aitken Roshi understood Mahayana Buddhism as completely consistent with progressive, nonviolent activism. Every day, reciting the four great vows of Mahayana tradition, we swore to save all beings—and we meant it. That this ancient path of wisdom and compassion involved protecting people, plants, animals, and places in concrete, practical ways seemed to us self-evident. In a Zen monastery, not a drop of water or fallen leaf is wasted. How could we ignore the wasting of lives, species, and cultures occurring around us on a vast scale? Realizing the fallacy of dualistic thought puts the lie to the us-them distinction undergirding greed, hatred, and violence. Of course it implied political activism; indeed, it seemed to compel it.

Such thoughts spurred us to launch BPF, but we were by no means alone in thinking them. Probably the first to articulate them clearly for an American public was Gary Snyder, in his 1969 book of journals, essays, and translations, *Earth House Hold*. This volume, with the sizzling subtitle *Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries*, contains the essay "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution," in which Gary appraised the contribution Buddhism could make to the project of saving the world. He began with a hard-nosed critique:

Although Mahayana Buddhism has a grand vision of universal salvation, the *actual* achievement of Buddhism has been the development of practical systems of meditation toward the end of liberating a few dedicated individuals from psychological hangups and cultural conditionings. Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under.<sup>1</sup>

Gary concluded, however, by expressing an ardent hope for what the Dharma could offer: "The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both." He proposed that the classical three trainings of Buddhism (wisdom, meditation, and morality) were fully consistent with a revolution of the kind he had in mind. "This last aspect [morality] means, for me, supporting any cultural and economic revolution that moves clearly toward a free, international, classless world." Ultimately, he predicted, "the coming revolution will...link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our archaic past. If we are lucky we may eventually arrive at a totally integrated world culture with matrilineal descent, free-form mar-



riage, natural-credit communist economy, less industry, far less population and lots more national parks.”<sup>2</sup>

One may or may not subscribe to his vision of the future, but nine years before BPF’s founding, Gary’s essay boldly set forth what would become BPF’s basic premise: that Buddhist practice, rightly understood, can and should go hand-in-hand with purposeful efforts to better society. He joined up right away when we proposed the new organization, and off we all went, in pursuit of a liberation social as well as personal.

Perhaps that was the way it had to be, but I regret today that we did not squarely confront the question Gary’s essay begs us to ask: What has made institutional Buddhism so “conspicuously ready” to accommodate “inequalities and tyrannies”? Unless we are prepared to assume flagrant hypocrisy on the part of generation upon generation of dharma ancestors, we have to examine how they understood their vow to save all beings and why they did not act on that vow by organizing for social change in ways that seem important or even imperative from our perspective today.

In proposing to marry Buddhism with concerted work for social change, we could not overlook such questions entirely, but the answers we gave at the time look inadequate to me now, after further study. For his part, Gary attributed the discrepancy between Mahayana Buddhism’s “grand vision” and its institutional behavior to the failure of “Buddhist philosophers...to analyze out the degree to which ignorance and suffering are caused or encouraged by social factors.”<sup>3</sup> True, Locke, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Jefferson, Marx, and their brethren had no direct equivalent in the Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions, but Asian thinkers had developed their own highly sophisticated analysis of social causality, and Mahayana Buddhists were well aware of the impact that political and economic decisions had on public life. An example was the argument against financial reforms that the great 11th-century poet, artist, government official, and Ch’an layman Su Tung-p’o submitted to Emperor Shen-tsung.<sup>4</sup> Framing his case in conventional Confucian terms, Su predicted in detail the consequences that the laws would have—and the miseries they would bring down upon the populace. One might criticize Su’s position, which was conservative even by the political calculus of his own time, but one cannot fault his understanding of ‘social factors’ or his humane concern for the effect the new laws would have on his compatriots.

Aitken Roshi took another approach to the disparity between the bodhisattva ideal and Mahayana’s actual role in society. Sighing and looking a little pained, he would explain that, as a guest religion in North Asia, Buddhism lived “on sufferance” of the imperial order and so bottled up its transforming influence in order to escape persecution. I took this view to heart and

repeated it, along with Gary’s ideas, in an article that I published in BPF’s early years,<sup>5</sup> but subsequent reading and reflection have led me to set it, too, aside. Although Buddhism did, indeed, enter China and Japan as a foreign teaching, and occasionally became a target for repression, it received a remarkably warm welcome, all things considered, and its critics attacked it not for taking too forward a role in society but for *retreating* from civic participation.

The Buddhist practices of monasticism and celibacy drew especially vehement criticism in North Asia because, in “leaving home,” monks and nuns stepped

*Nowhere do we find great Ch’an or Zen teachers of yesteryear admonishing their students to organize for the common good. It simply is not there in the teachings, as much as you and I might wish it were.*

outside the social norms that had structured civilization since time immemorial. Begetting no children, abstaining from commerce and warfare, refusing to bow down even to the Son of Heaven himself—how could they honor and requite their debts to the emperor, to their ancestors, or to their parents? How could they serve beings, much less save them, by withdrawing from society? Such withdrawal was revolutionary in a certain sense, but certainly in a different sense than BPF’s founders had in mind.

The theory that social constraints inhibited political expression of the bodhisattva vow seems to hold no better for lay people than for the monastics. Even with a scant knowledge of Chinese history, it is easy to produce examples of politically active Ch’an laypeople. Besides Su Tung-p’o, already mentioned, two come to mind quickly. Pei Hsiu, a student and patron of the 9th-century masters Huang-po and Kuei-shan, held a succession of high posts in the government. His famous and sometimes outspoken contemporary, the poet-official Po Chu-i, studied with several Ch’an teachers and won himself a place in *The Transmission of the Lamp*, a great compendium of Ch’an biographies published shortly after his death. Similar figures could be named in Japan. We might call such people “engaged Buddhists” today; by the Confucian standards of their culture, they were simply good citizens, participating responsibly in civic affairs.

How, then, do we account for the perceived inconsistency between the “grand vision” of the Mahayana and our Dharma ancestors’ behavior? Part of the answer is surely that no one ever lives up to the vow to save all beings in its literal aspect. You and I are falling down on



it right now—grossly, horribly. Consider all the devastation we are party to, and it is not so difficult to imagine Buddhists a thousand years in the future shaking their heads mournfully over our failure to protect all beings.

But this is only part of the answer. After 20-odd years of grappling with the issue, I find myself inclined to think that the discrepancy we perceive may result more from culturally based preconceptions and expectations on our parts, from what a scientist might call “observer bias,” than from any shortcomings on the part of our Asian forerunners. I believe the old worthies *were* embodying the Mahayana vision as fully and faithfully as humanly possible—just in a way that is difficult for us to see and appreciate because it proceeded from understandings of society and of “saving” very different from those we receive from contemporary Euro-American culture.

I am not going to attempt a discussion of the differences between North Asian perspectives on society and our own. Let’s just acknowledge that the great principles of individual equality, rights, and freedom declared “self-evident” in the founding of the United States were, at the time, by no means self-evident to the British, much less to the Chinese and Japanese, and that they remain today, despite their dispersion and enshrinement in constitutions everywhere, genuinely foreign to the home cultures of Mahayana Buddhism. China and Japan traditionally have placed a higher premium on social harmony than on individual rights or desires, and that fact alone may go a long way toward explaining why, from our point of view, institutional Buddhism has accommodated itself too readily to odious events and conditions.

Another cultural difference deserves notice. While we belong to a society that views progress as normative, the more common perception worldwide has been that civilizations tend irrevocably toward decline. The ancient Greek imagery of a Golden Age degenerating by stages, through silver and bronze, into a strife-torn Iron Age had its near parallel in the Indian-derived cosmology of Buddhism. In the Buddhist account, a world system endures for a period of one greater kalpa, itself consisting of four lesser kalpas: a kalpa of Becoming succeeded in turn by kalpas of Abiding, Dissolution, and Emptiness. The Buddhist teaching itself was thought to wind down in three steps, with the Age of True Dharma (when Shakyamuni taught) giving way to an Age of Imitative Dharma, and then to the Age of Debased Dharma, in which we now find ourselves.

All this may sound quaint, but people of old took these images seriously, and in China and Japan, they persisted much longer than in Europe.<sup>6</sup> They helped to explain times of hardship and offered hope for the future, when a new Age of True Dharma was to begin with the arrival of the next buddha, Maitreya. This world view held such strong sway that teachers, includ-

ing Dogen, found it necessary to disabuse their disciples of the idea that realization of the Way was out of reach due simply to their birth in the Age of Debased Dharma.<sup>7</sup> The power and pervasiveness of this “pessimistic” outlook, combined with a cultural orientation toward social harmony, would make a campaign to renew society seem mistaken and futile.

As for “saving,” in classical Ch’an and Zen texts, when masters were asked a pointed question about saving others, they most often responded with a simple action such as ringing a bell, counting to five, raising a ceremonial whisk, or hoeing the rice paddy. Masters who addressed the question in a more discursive fashion made it even plainer that saving beings, as it was understood in Ch’an and Zen, is not to be achieved through helpful projects in the public sphere. Some taught that all beings are saved when a single one is saved, an insight captured in the words that Shakyamuni uttered on the occasion of his great awakening under the Bodhi Tree: “I and all beings on earth together attain enlightenment at the same time.”<sup>8</sup> Others, such as the eminent 8th- and 9th-century master Pai-chang, offered a counterpoint to this theme:

“The Buddha appears in the world and saves sentient beings” are words of...the incomplete teaching. Anger and joy, sickness and medicine, are all oneself; there is no one else. Where is there a Buddha appearing in the world? Where are there sentient beings to be saved?<sup>9</sup>

The modern teacher Yasutani Hakuun, my own great-grandfather in the dharma, set forth this second position in an even more striking manner:

Fundamentally, such matters as saving sentient beings are the delusions of bodhisattvas. Where are the sentient beings to be saved? From the pits of hell...to the summit of the Buddha realm, there is not even a single deluded sentient being...Sentient beings are originally buddhas. All are nothing but Tathagatas of pure gold. Is there any saving to be done?<sup>10</sup>

Whatever one makes of such dharma presentations, certainly they cannot be construed as manifestos for social change. Only now am I myself beginning to come to terms with them—with the uncomfortable fact that they represent our tradition’s ultimate outlook on the subject of saving beings. Nowhere do we find great Ch’an or Zen teachers of yesteryear admonishing their students to go yonder and shelter the homeless, feed the hungry, protest injustice, protect forests and rivers, intervene in military preparations, or otherwise organize for the common good. It simply is not there in the teachings, as much as you and I might wish it were.

In so saying, I am not suggesting that monastics and lay people of Ch’an, Zen, and other Mahayana sects entirely refrained from such activities. In an eagerness to find precedents and to feel continuity with my tradition, well before BPF’s creation, I began collecting historical instances of compassionate action taken by



members of Ch'an and Zen sanghas. Lin-chi planting trees; the exiled master Ta-hui enlisting his monks in an effort to aid the sick; his colleague Hung-chih sharing monastery supplies with villagers in a time of famine; Eisai Zenji giving a down-and-out samurai family some copper originally intended for use on an altar figure; Hakuin Zenji scolding a lord for treating his people poorly; Soto monks turning out to help villagers build bridges or irrigation canals; the Obaku priest Tetsugen furnishing funds for disaster relief out of money gathered to publish the Buddhist canon, not once but twice; the master and artist Sengai taking in unwed mothers; monasteries giving safe haven to refugees—the record is there, and I am grateful for it. It is a thin record, relatively speaking, but perhaps indicative of much more widespread service to others.

*Is personal self-cultivation really the only way to fulfill the vow to save others?*

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the record consists mainly of individual acts of kindness and uprightness. This is “entering the marketplace with helping hands,” as represented in the final frame of the Ten Oxherding Pictures, but it is not mobilization to overturn the status quo. A few mass movements did develop in Mahayana traditions before they came under the influence of Euro-American ideas—the White Lotus Society that arose out of the T'ien-t'ai sect in China, some Jodo Shin-inspired uprisings in Japan—but these exceptions prove the rule that the Mahayana did not historically take this direction in its commitment to save beings. The record of charitable activity in Ch'an and Zen provides, at most, a modest precedent for service projects today.

Again, I think it's important to ask why. Scholars going under the banner of “Critical Buddhism” have proposed that the reason lies in the Ch'an and Zen teaching of “original enlightenment,” the understanding that “sentient beings are originally buddhas. All are nothing but Tathagatas of pure gold,” as Yasutani Roshi puts it in the passage quoted above.<sup>11</sup> Taken logically, this understanding would make any effort to save others basically pointless; if slaves and clear-cut hillsides are buddhas from the beginning, why worry? But Yasutani Roshi was not speaking from the standpoint of logic; the operative word in his statement is *fundamentally*. During his life, far from denying the reality of suffering beings, he entered energetically into “the delusions of bodhisattvas,” traveling tirelessly hither and yon to save whoever was interested.

Here we reach the crux of the matter, and I want to describe Yasutani Roshi's life a bit more as a case in point. Although he held passionate political views—views so stridently right-wing in his middle age that

they make me wince<sup>12</sup>—like countless others before him, he invested his life in saving beings primarily by practicing and teaching the Way, not by organizing service projects or protest movements. In about 1969, near the end of his 88 years, Yasutani Roshi wrote an essay entitled “The Crisis in Human Affairs and the Liberation Found in Buddhism,” in which he appealed for a complete reconstruction of society to lay “a foundation for the peace of all mankind, recognizing international unity, the whole earth as one nation...transforming the suffering world into the Pure Land.”<sup>13</sup> As his title implies, however, he felt that this reconstruction could only be accomplished by seeing through the dualistic premises of modern ethics, economics, law, and so forth—in short, by awakening to the Way of the Buddha. “If the fundamental error...is not corrected,” he explained, “political manipulations will simply maintain a vicious circle of bad causes and bad effects.”<sup>14</sup> That is, society can create charity programs, reduce or expand welfare, or implement income-redistribution schemes *ad infinitum*, but if greed and delusion remain intact, even the most affluent nation on earth will not find a solution to poverty.

To place the priority so squarely on practice and enlightenment is utterly in keeping with the tradition of Ch'an, Zen, and all of the Mahayana, as far as I can tell. Sitting before the assembly of monks on his last morning, the eminent 10th-century Ch'an master Feng-hsüeh expressed a serene trust in the far-distant liberation of all beings, purely through the working of the Way:

Truth, availing itself of the flow of time,  
Must of necessity save all beings.  
Remote though they who long for it may be,  
Step by step they will approach it.  
In years to come, should there be an old man  
Whose feelings resemble mine,  
Day after day the incense smoke will rise,  
Night after night the lighted lamp will burn.<sup>15</sup>

The wellsprings of this trust lie deep in Chinese culture, in an understanding that the *only* reliable means of improving society is to cultivate one's own character. A seminal Confucian text, the *Ta Hsüeh* (ca. 200 BCE), instructs us, “From the emperor down to the common people, all, without exception, must consider cultivation of the individual character as the root. If the root is in disorder, it is impossible for the branches to be in order.”<sup>16</sup>

Some years ago, when I and other members of the Honolulu Diamond Sangha had the opportunity to interview Zen layman and distinguished scholar Masao Abe, he appropriated this ancient roots-and-branches metaphor, using it differently but to essentially the same purpose. He described Buddhism as operating invisibly, deep within a culture, rather than “fighting social evil” in the Christian manner:



The Christian church itself becomes a kind of social power which stands directly against and fights against a secular social power. Buddhism has been working not as a formal social power in the historical dimension but rather working underground as, say, underground water which tries to dissolve the roots of social evil. Before [even] the appearance of a form of social evil, Buddhism tries to solve, to dissolve, its root.

Of course, we should not divide the root and branch. But what I'm asking is, what is the branch, what is the root? The branches cannot support the root. The root can support the branches. That order must be realized clearly.

Dr. Abe offered low crime rates in Buddhist nations as evidence that this radical approach succeeds. While expressing appreciation for "the American form of working for social change," he concluded, "I just hope that American Buddhists also realize the importance of the work of underground water."<sup>17</sup>

I think we do—but we certainly do not trust it to the degree that Feng-hsüeh did. Not hardly. We want to hedge our bets, speed things up, get some tangible results. Is this mistaken? In an illuminating essay on the Confucian and Taoist antecedents of Ch'an, Harvard professor Tu Wei-ming submits that Ch'an (thus Zen) rests solidly on the classical Chinese perception that any endeavor to foment social change by the method Dr. Abe termed "American" will invariably prove fruitless:

...only by strengthening the root (self-cultivation) will the branches (regulation of the family and governance of the state) flourish. If we reverse the order by first imposing peace on society with the anticipation that people will learn to live harmoniously among themselves, we not only violate the natural process of moral education but rely on external political ideology rather than the trust of a fiduciary community. This is ineffective, for social harmony can only be attained through personal self-cultivation.<sup>18</sup>

I wonder how many BPF members accept this conclusion. I am not sure I do. I take it for granted that "strengthening the root" is essential for deep-seated change in ourselves and thereby in society, but Dr. Tu's flat declaration makes me squirm. Is personal self-cultivation really the *only* way to fulfill the vow to save others? Should we, like Feng-hsüeh, place our trust absolutely in the Dharma? Is that understanding integral to Zen and to Mahayana tradition more broadly, or is it an artifact of Chinese culture that we need to sweep away, along with all our American social conditioning, in order to see clearly how to embody the bodhisattva's vow?

I wish I had answers to these questions, but I do not. Perhaps by the time we celebrate BPF's 40th anniversary the answers will emerge. In the meanwhile, I take some solace in the thought that, as Wallace Stevens put it, "Questions are better than answers," and I look forward to exploring the matter further and more deeply with others in this still-growing community of wise friends. ❖

After staffing BPF as a volunteer in its first years, Nelson Foster worked for nearly a decade with the American Friends Service Committee and founded the Pacific Campaign for Disarmament and Security. He is author-editor (with Jack Shoemaker) of *The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader and teaches Zen, as a dharma-successor of Aitken Roshi, in California and Hawaii.*

#### NOTES

1. *Earth House Hold* (New Directions, 1969), p. 90.
2. *Earth House Hold*, pp. 92-93.
3. *Earth House Hold*, p. 90.
4. For a partial translation, see Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. I (Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 425-431.
5. See "The Politics of Prajna," *Blind Donkey*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1981), pp. 20-22, and "To Enter the Marketplace," *The Path of Compassion*, Fred Eppsteiner, ed. (Parallax Press, 1988), pp. 48-52.
6. The now-commonplace European notion of progress was not established in Japan until the latter half of the 19th century. For a samurai-scholar's reflections on the ensuing period of change, see Donald Keene, *Modern Japanese Diaries* (Henry Holt, 1995), pp. 102-03.
7. See Hee-jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (University of Arizona Press, 1987), p. 249, n. 17.
8. This version of Shakyamuni's words appears in Keizan Zenji's 14th-century text, the *Denkoroku*, translated by Thomas Cleary in *Transmission of Light* (North Point Press, 1980), p. 3. Earlier renditions of the statement are traced by Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki in *Zen Dust* (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 254-55.
9. Thomas Cleary, *The Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang* (Center Publications, 1978), p. 71. Reprinted in Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker, *The Roaring Stream: A New Zen Reader* (Ecco Press, 1996), p. 63.
10. *Flowers Fall: A Commentary on Zen Master Dogen's Genjokoan*, trans. by Paul Jaffe (Shambhala, 1996), p. 28.
11. For a summary of scholars' arguments, see Paul L. Swanson, "'Zen Is Not Buddhism': Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha Nature," in *Numen*, vol. 40 (1993).
12. For examples, see Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen at War* (Weatherhill, 1997), p. 168.
13. Yasutani Roshi asked one of his Dharma heirs, Maezumi Roshi of the Zen Center of Los Angeles, to have the essay translated into English and circulated to Americans. It was published posthumously in *ZCLA Journal*, summer/fall 1973. (Quote is from p. 47.) For reasons unclear to me, Daizen Victoria dismisses the essay as insincere; see *Zen at War*, pp. 168-69.
14. *ZCLA Journal*, summer/fall 1973, p. 40.
15. *Zen Dust*, p. 271.
16. Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. I (Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 115.
17. "As Zen Comes to the West," *Blind Donkey*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 19-20.
18. Tu Wei-ming, "Afterword: Thinking of 'Enlightenment' Religiously," in Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 449.

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# A PARTIAL BPF CHRONOLOGY

*Several people worked on putting together this chronology of BPF, poring over old BPF Newsletters, Turning Wheels, and computer files, and talking on the phone with longtime members. Turns out there's no such thing as exact historical truth, and we offer apologies in advance for any mistakes and inaccuracies. (Feel free to correct us.) But what follows is generally agreed upon.*

*BPF has done so much! So many activists are part of our history. And all of the activities that have manifested as Buddhist Peace Fellowship have been possible because of the support of our members, the people who really make BPF happen. BPF is truly a grassroots organization. Over 90 percent of our revenue comes from membership dues and contributions. So if you are a member, you can look at this history with great pride, and you can know that your support will make the next 20 years of BPF possible, with a range of actions, paradigm shifts, and liberations we can't even yet imagine. Go for it, BPF!*

**1978** • BPF founded at Maui Zendo in Hawaii by members of the Diamond Sangha, as part of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

- Mailing sent to all FOR members who have identified themselves as Buddhist.
- Hawaii members leaflet local Naval base.

**1979** • First BPF Newsletter. 31 members.

**1980** • First BPF Board established: Robert Aitken, Nelson Foster, Michael Roche.

**1981** • Michael Roche travels to Bangladesh to initiate BPF's first project—a campaign to stop the persecution of ethnic Buddhists in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

- First BPF chapters established in Rochester and Honolulu.

**1982** • Patrick McMahon hired as first paid staffer. 120 members.

- Joanna Macy and Thich Nhat Hanh speak at Inter-religious Peace Dialogue as part of the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in NYC, bringing together Buddhist activists from around the country.
- Mahasangha conference—Robert Aitken and Gary Snyder lead discussion on political activism and the dharma with members of Bay Area Buddhist communities.
- Statement of purpose amended to include environmental concerns.

**1983** • Thich Nhat Hanh's first U.S. tour (sponsored by BPF and San Francisco Zen Center) includes a retreat for activists at Tassajara, and stops at five Buddhist centers. BPF chapters open at each location.

- BPF poetry reading in Berkeley, Calif., with Thich

Nhat Hanh, Gary Snyder, and Robert Creeley.

- “Sangha” affinity group of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship commits civil disobedience together and is arrested at Livermore nuclear weapons laboratory as part of a large demonstration.

- BPF Board now includes Robert Aitken, Joanna Macy, Gary Snyder, Ryo Imamura.

- British BPF established.

**1984** • Approx. 450 members.

- BPF International Advisory Board established, with Thich Nhat Hanh, Robert Aitken, Sulak Sivaraksa, Ven. Dharmawara, and Maha Ghosananda.

**1985** • BPF sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's 2nd U.S. tour.

- BPF publishes *The Path of Compassion, Writings on Engaged Buddhism*, edited by Fred Eppsteiner.
- BPF starts Buddhist Action Group for Central America, to offer sanctuary to Central American refugees.
- *BPF Newsletter* is typeset and offset-printed for the first time.

**1986** • First BPF International members' meeting held in conjunction with Thich Nhat Hanh event, at the Naropa Institute in Colorado.

- Conference on Buddhism and Nonviolence at Rochester Zen Center.

- First BPF “Interdependence Day” celebration on July 4, in Concord, Mass.

**1987** • BPF/FOR delegation to Nicaragua with Witness for Peace.

- Sponsoring Hungry Families project begun, to send medical and other aid to families in Vietnam.

- Second International Members' Meeting, in western Mass.

- Imprisoned Monks and Writers Project started, to work for the freedom of a number of prisoners in Vietnam. Large demonstration held in San Francisco.

- BPF starts monthly vigil at Concord Naval Weapons Station. This continues until 1991.

- BPF sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's U.S. tour.

**1988** • BPF Elders' meeting and 10th anniversary at Green Gulch Farm.

- BPF representatives Arnie Kotler and Therese Fitzgerald meet with British BPF representatives in Plum Village, France.

**1989** • International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) begun.

- National Members' Meeting in Seattle.
- BPF sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's U.S. tour.
- Establishment of Tibetan Revolving Fund.



1990 • BPF co-sponsors a Burmese student's U.S. tour.  
 • Poster and packet on Buddhist environmentalism created and mailed to over 300 sanghas, to honor 20th anniversary of Earth Day.

- "Buddhism and Feminism" event with Joanna Macy, Charlene Spretnak, Susan Griffin.
- "Sex, Power, and Buddha Nature" panel and speak-out, with Peter Rutter, Yvonne Rand, and Susan Griffin.
- BPF statement on Gulf War and action packet created and mailed to more than 300 sanghas.
- First BPF-sponsored delegation to Burmese border.
- National Members' Meeting in Boston.

1991 • Town Hall meeting on Persian Gulf War.

- BPF sponsors "Despair and Empowerment" workshop and facilitator training with Joanna Macy.
- First week-long "Institute for Engaged Buddhism" with Robert Aitken, A.T. Ariyaratne, Pracha Hutuanuwatr, Deena Metzger, and others.
- *BPF Newsletter* becomes *Turning Wheel*.
- National Members' Meeting in Seattle.
- BPF co-sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's Berkeley talk, with Community of Mindful Living.

1992 • National Coordinator Alan Senauke goes on INEB's Burma witness delegation.

- BPF sponsors tour of Ven. Bimal of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the U.S.
- National Members' Meeting in Boston.

1993 • Members of BPF Board and staff go on INEB's Burma Witness delegation.

- Second BPF Summer Institute for Engaged Buddhism, with Joanna Macy, Sulak Sivaraksa, and others.
- BPF co-sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's Berkeley talk.

1994 • BPF organizes a Buddha's Birthday gathering and civil disobedience at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, in conjunction with Nevada Desert Experience.

- Veterans' Day demonstrations and vigils at gun stores around the country.
- BPF begins overseeing grants for medical aid to the Burma border.
- BPF begins coordinating a Network on Ethics and Abuse in Buddhist Sanghas.
- First Meeting of INEB Ordained Sangha.

1995 • First BASE (Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement) program launched, in SF Bay Area.

- BPF co-sponsors week-long East Bay Peace Walk, from Richmond to Livermore.
- Third BPF Summer Institute at Land of Medicine Buddha near Santa Cruz.
- BPF co-sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's Berkeley talk.

1996 • Formation of the BPF/INEB "Think Sangha" to develop engaged Buddhist theory and social analysis.

- BPF delegation to Buddhist-Christian conference on

Engaged Spirituality in Chicago. BPF co-sponsors Day of Mindfulness and Community Building in Chicago.

- Public talk by Capt. Lawrence Rockwood on U.S. military & Haiti.
- Second Meeting of INEB Ordained Sangha.

1997 • BPF delegation to demonstration to save the Headwaters Forest in Humboldt County, California.

- Evening honoring Jarvis Masters, San Quentin prisoner, and readings from his book by African American men.
- BPF co-sponsors Thich Nhat Hanh's Berkeley talk.
- Coordination and sponsorship of Thai Maechi [nuns] Education Program.

1998 • Approx. 4000 members.

- Town Meeting in Berkeley, co-sponsored with AFSC, about the possibility of a second Gulf War and the sanctions against Iraq.
- Beginning of BPF Prison Project. ❖

## BPF STAFF, PAST & PRESENT

### BPF Office Staff

- 1980-1982: Michael Roche\*
- 1982-1985: Patrick McMahon\*
- 1983-1985: Wendy Tripp
- 1985: Judy Gilbert\*
- 1986-1988: Therese Fitzgerald\*
- 1988-1989: Norma Burton\*
- 1989-1991: Margaret Howe\*
- 1990-1993: Will Waters
- 1991—: Alan Senauke\*
- 1992-1993: Veronica Froelich
- 1993-1994: Staci Montori
- 1993—: Lewis Woods
- 1994-1995: Ami Duncan
- 1994-1997: Diana Winston
- 1995-1997: Elsie Okada Tep
- 1997-1998: Karin Meyers
- 1997—: Tova Green
- 1998—: Mark Kunkel
- 1998—: Diana Lion

(\* indicates manager/coordinator/director)

### Editors of *BPF Newsletter* or *Turning Wheel*

- 1979-1982: Nelson Foster
- 1983: Andy Cooper
- 1984: Kent Johnson, Ryo Imamura, Gary Snyder
- 1985-1986: Fred Eppsteiner
- 1987-1989: Arnold Kotler
- 1989-1990: David Schneider
- 1990—: Susan Moon
- Spring 1992 & Fall 1995: Denise Caignon
- Spring 1996: Shannon Hickey

*No Need to Kill*, Bay Area BPF Newsletter  
 1982-1984, Editor, Kent Johnson



## I DON'T HAVE TIME

by Thich Tanh-Thien

I know that you have a bad habit. And I know that it is just a habit. I myself get caught in it sometimes. Don't we all sometimes? I want to talk about the habit of saying: "I don't have time!" all the time.

I don't think you really mean it when you say so. I don't think you are being true to yourself when you say it. I think you have plenty of time, no matter how busy you are with what you are doing. Time is not something outside of yourself; it is you! If you really care for your life, you will learn to use time to serve yourself and others well.

...Now, come closer—you and me, we will stand here, looking at this ever flowing river, yet we will not let it sweep away our time, and its freshness, and its ever newness...

You are free and so am I. You can take time to breathe. Nobody can stop you from doing so. If your nose does not breathe, my heart will not beat. The fact that you are breathing is a sign that we all can. When you are aware of this, you are free from time. Being free from time, let's breathe tolerance, let's breathe understanding and reconciliation, let's breathe some hatred-free air. Humankind has gone through too much suffering since they took this human form. Use your breath of freedom to shine on the ever-changing events happening inside of your body-mind. Enlightenment and nirvana dwell right here in this rented body of yours.

But you say you don't have time! The world is in danger of self-destruction and you don't have time. The arms race is leading the whole planet population into a dark tunnel of famine and wars; however, the arms themselves are not as dangerous as the institutionalized ignorance of the people who are using them...The only thing you can do is to use your time to save yourself from that ignorance: light up the torch of wisdom on the path you are going on now with

The following limerick appeared in the *BPF Newsletter* of January, 1984, after nonviolent protesters at the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab were found guilty of "willfully and maliciously obstructing traffic."

*In the road we did willfully sit,  
But acts wrongful we didn't commit.  
'Twas never our ploy  
To vex or annoy.  
Promoting world peace was our bit.*

—Susan Moon

your fellow companions...

If you don't have time, make time. Time is not given to you by some authorities or some godlike power. It's a question of choice and attitude. You are free, remember? Think of the children; they are the future and the goal of our lives. They have the right to life and a peaceful place to live in. They need to be fed with their parents' inner strength and equanimity in order to grow and in turn take charge.

Making time demands that you slow down so that you can fit in the harmoniously changing picture of Nature. This relationship with Nature will develop from within a way of life that liberates you and those around you...You will not say again that you don't have time; instead you will live your life fully, with aliveness, in a very modest way but like a warrior. ♦

[Translated from the Vietnamese by Jenny Hoang. From *Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter*, July 1984.]

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## CHARTER MEMBERS OF BPF

*Following is a list of names from the first Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter of March 1979. These were the first 31 people to respond to a mailing proposing the establishment of a BPF. Many of them are still BPF members.*

Robert & Anne Aitken—Haiku, Hawaii  
Richard Baker—San Francisco, California  
Kenneth Barklind—Edina, Minnesota  
Doug Blankensop—Anchorage, Alaska  
Alfred Bloom—Honolulu, Hawaii  
Linda Brown—Honolulu, Hawaii  
Mike Disend—New York, New York  
Fred & Erika Eppsteiner—Great Neck, New York  
Nelson Foster—Makawao, Hawaii  
Robin Foster—Honolulu, Hawaii  
Stephen Gockley—Haiku, Hawaii  
Johndennis Govert—Longview, Washington  
Margaret Habein—Honolulu, Hawaii  
Karl Hill—Larchmont, New York  
Jerry Houston—Starke, Florida  
Judy Hurley—Santa Cruz, California  
Jack Kornfield—Barre, Massachusetts  
Randy LaPolla—Smithtown, New York  
James Larick—Natalia, Texas  
Joanna Macy—Washington, DC  
Ron Miyamura—Chicago, Illinois  
Jim Osgood—Chicago, Illinois  
Mariquita Platov—Tannersville, New York  
Mike Roche—Kensington, California  
Gary Synder—Nevada City, California  
Barbara Spalding—Honolulu, Hawaii  
Hiroshi Suzuki—Waimea, Hawaii  
Daizen Victoria—Los Angeles, California  
Claire Whittlesey-Weigel—Mill Hall, Pennsylvania



# CONTEMPLATION AND REVOLUTION: *an Interview with Joanna Macy*

Susan Moon, editor of *Turning Wheel*, spoke with Joanna Macy at her Berkeley home in February, 1998, about the history of Joanna's involvement with BPF.

Joanna, a member of the BPF advisory board, lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, and teaches at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, and the University of Creation Spirituality in Oakland. She travels worldwide, doing anti-nuclear and deep ecology work. Her next book, *Coming Back to Life*, will be issued in the Fall of 1998 by New Society Publishers.

**Joanna Macy:** I first encountered the Buddha-dharma in the '60s, when my family and I were with the Peace Corps in India. During the '70s I went back to graduate school, in Syracuse, New York. I was then in my forties, and I wanted very much to focus not only on Buddhist studies but on spiritually based social action. There wasn't the term "engaged Buddhism," then. In my first year in graduate school, I said to my faculty advisor, "I want to do independent study on contemplation and revolution." I wanted precisely to look at the mystical component, not just the "be nice" ethics, and the "don't harm" ethics, which are in every religion, but *paticca samupada*, dependent co-arising, the release of your individual ego turf, not into God, but into relationship with other beings. But the academics said, "You're talking about polar extremes. These are opposite ends of the curriculum, the revolutionary and the contemplative." So I'm grateful for BPF. I'm lucky to be alive at a time in my own culture when that confluence is treated as perfectly obvious, normal, and useful.

**Susan Moon:** Me too. I was an activist long before I was a Buddhist, actually. And when I started being a Buddhist, in the '70s, it was another department of my life. It seemed to me that these people over here on their cushions thought it was pretty much a waste of time to go out demonstrating, and those people over there on the picket line thought it was a waste of time to go sit down and meditate. Of course I was imagining more of a rift than actually existed, but still, there was a gap.

**JM:** I learned about the BPF on a trip to New York during the U.N. special session on disarmament in

June, 1982. That was when I first met Thich Nhat Hanh. He had been very important in my life for the previous 10 years, but we hadn't met before. I also met Andy Cooper then. He tracked me down and interviewed me for *Ten Directions* [the Zen Center of Los Angeles journal], and it was one of those articles that kept turning up through the years in unexpected places. He did a beautiful job of weaving together many different parts of my life. I had recently come back from Sri Lanka, where I had been with the Sarvodaya movement [which involves Buddhists in volunteer social service projects], and I was in the process of writing *Dharma and Development*.

I had been with Buddhists in India and seen how those so-called ex-untouchables were using the dharma, and that was very moving to me. And I had visited Buddhadasa, the monk in Thailand who taught "dhammic socialism" [see article, p. 28]. So hearing that Robert Aitken had started a Buddhist Peace Fellowship was very exciting to me. That weekend I saw that Buddhist activism could be native to America.

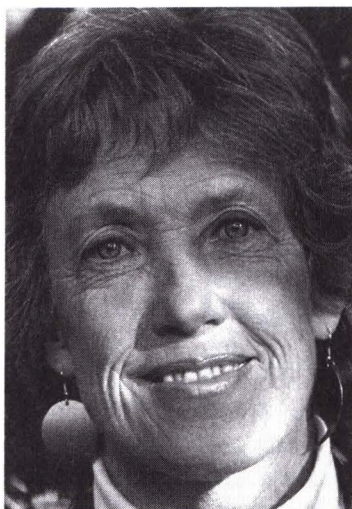
**SM:** What it was like in those early days on the Board?

**JM:** There was me and Gary Snyder and Ryo Imamura and Nelson Foster. Those are the names I remember.

**SM:** And Robert Aitken was on the Board, wasn't he?

**JM:** Yes, of course, of course. I hardly mentioned him. It's sort of like saying God was there, too.

Gary nobly took on the job of being our treasurer, and he was very meticulous. We had at least one meeting out at Kitkitdizze, his place, where I got to spend the night in the Ring of Bone zendo. I remember a couple of issues having to do with ethnic Buddhists. It was extremely arrogant of us—BPF people—to think that we represented Buddhism in America, when both in terms of time and numbers, we were overshadowed by the Pure Land and Nichiren Buddhists. And we were from very different cultures. Our social concerns were different. This came up around the middle word of our name. I assumed that "peace" meant social justice, but Ryo [a minister of the Jodo-Shinshu Buddhist Churches of America] felt that if we were to make that





very explicit, we'd lose a lot of his [Japanese American] congregation, a lot of the people he was trying to bring in, whose natural orientation seemed to be politically more conservative than the Caucasian American Buddhists. He felt himself being pushed into a place that would make it hard to bring in ethnic Buddhists.

It settled down. We never tried to change the name, and there's no question now, when we look at what BPF stands for and publishes, that social justice is part of it.

It was also very sweet being with Ryo, because one of Gary's first teachers was Ryo's father. That was a wonderful connection.

**SM:** And Ryo is right that we converted Buddhists have to really find ways to connect with and honor our debt to Asian American Buddhists.

**JM:** We had an epochal early BPF meeting down at Tassajara, when Thich Nhat Hanh came. Everywhere he went, he seemed to leave a time bomb. It was a muddy spring—March, 1983. And the first time in America, I think, that Thich Nhat Hanh offered his teaching of Interbeing. He didn't use a piece of paper, as he would do later, asking, "What is in this piece of paper?" and speaking of the trees, the water, the trucks, the road builders. That time he used a chair in the middle of the dining room. We all sat around and he put the chair out and asked us to see what made the chair, and we discovered that the chair was really made up of non-chair elements.

I was terribly excited because *paticca samupada*, or dependent co-arising, was the theme of my doctoral work, both in Buddhist texts and in systems theory. It still knocks me out—the teaching of the chair, or the piece of paper—it has such meaning for the healing of our world. I was thrilled that here was someone who wasn't just talking about it from the emptiness side, but saying that it's also *everything*, in that exquisite, dynamic interactive balance.

Thich Nhat Hanh was looking for a simple, clear name for this. He said, "What do you think about the name 'Togetherness?'" No, I said. I couldn't explain to him that it sounded like the *Saturday Evening Post*. I said it won't really grip people. Then he came up with "Interbeing."

Speaking of Thich Nhat Hanh reminds me that I'm so grateful for the service that Arnie Kotler and Therese Fitzgerald gave to BPF in the early days. The organization was greatly strengthened by their work, and the work of Thich Nhat Hanh. And later, during a shaky transition time, Stephanie Kaza's devotion as Board president helped to keep BPF alive. The first time I met Stephanie was at a BPF meeting where she stood up, holding her knitting, and led us in a song about decomposition. And Margaret Howe helped to hold BPF together in the office.

Now BPF has bloomed with Alan in there. It has exceeded my hopes. But I think it can play an even stronger role in western Buddhism.

When I look around at my colleagues in social change work, I can almost take it for granted that many will be Buddhists. When you go to the deep ecology summer school, which is a training for social action, it seems at least half the faculty's Buddhist. The same seems to be true of anti-nuclear work.

Nobody's taken an inventory of the Buddhist quotient in "the great turning," as I call this shift from the industrial growth society to the life-sustaining society, but it's palpable to me. I think future generations will look back and say, "That was the time of the great turning." That doesn't mean I think it's going to happen, because it could very well fail, and then there won't *be* any future beings to look back. But if we succeed in making this transition from the industrial growth society to a sustainable society, the dharma will be a part of it. I can smell it.

**SM:** Certainly it's getting stronger. But I have a number of friends, people involved in labor organizing and other social-justice work, who are still a little worried by Buddhism. They're afraid maybe it's too introspective, and personal. Or too patriarchal, too supportive of the status quo.

**JM:** Do you think that's a legitimate worry?

**SM:** No, I don't, actually. I used to think it was when I first began sitting, but now I think it's important to balance work and contemplation, as the Quakers phrase it. I also know non-Buddhist activists who have a commitment to nonviolence, and through that they feel really connected to Buddhism. Dan Ellsberg is an example.

But going back to the early days of BPF, why do you think there was such a preponderance of men at the beginning? You were the only woman on the Board for a while. Do you think that those were men who happened to have a very inclusive kind of energy anyway, so that it didn't make that much difference?

**JM:** I would certainly say yes. Because it wasn't an issue for me. Also, I was coming back from Asia, where women were even more peripheral.

**SM:** Was BPF a sangha for you, or was it more of a network?

**JM:** Well, we never sat together, which would have been nice. During the Gulf War some of us started sitting at our house at quarter of seven in the mornings. But it was just a handful of people, all BPF-related.

BPF is like a family. It's a family with a shared history and shared language and shared agenda. And it's marvelously open to decentralized, diverse initiatives. So it's



more than a network, but it's not a sangha in the sense of practicing together. I'm particularly grateful that BPF is non-sectarian. When we western Buddhist teachers met with His Holiness the Dalai Lama back in '94, he was pushing the idea of generic Buddhist centers, so that western Buddhists wouldn't get so preoccupied by who their teacher was and what the lineages were. He hoped for a broader base for American Buddhism. As for me, I do bridge different traditions in my own personal life. BPF's non-sectarian approach still may be unique in that regard. And because of this nonsectarianism, BPF may hold more potency for the future.

It's so easy to get attached to form, form in the sense of concept, as well as ritual. But all our talk about the differences between this school and that, this teacher and that, can obscure the stunning reaches of commonality that exist, and that are so full of promise for the future of our people on Turtle Island.

**SM:** I think we can have both. I mean, we get to have the texture of particular traditions and to know our commonality.

**JM:** I like the word "texture." You're Soto Zen, and that has a certain color and flavor, and it has its figures, its lineage.

**SM:** But I definitely don't feel that the way I've been practicing is *the* way to practice. It's a vocabulary that I can use. I have to stand somewhere and sit somewhere, and study something. I want to have particular images and symbols to give me a place to connect. But I agree with you that the non-sectarian aspect of BPF is not only vital but fertile.

**JM:** Another thing that is significant about Buddhist social action in the west is that it's not dependent on supernatural commands.

**SM:** You mean, we're not waiting for God to tell us to do it?

**JM:** Yes. From a Christian perspective, we're accustomed to thinking that if you go forth for the sake of all beings, or change your diet, or bike to work, it's because you have your marching orders from God, or the absolute.

Now, if I hadn't gone the academic path, and done my doctoral work on the ethics of *paticca samupada*, I might not be so aware of this. It has to do with the confusion we fall into with the word "relative." If everything is interdependent, then where does the Buddhist ethic stand firm? Well, it's only relative because we're all in relationship; but when a person suffers because of greed, hatred, and confusion that's an objective fact.

In the great turning, the industrial growth society—and its financial institutions and values—will be pulled

apart. This can be a time of panic, and one of our great challenges is how to be with fear. I feel very strongly about this. When we panic we turn on each other. We become more dogmatic and fundamentalist. In Sri Lanka, I've seen Buddhists become as mean as any other fundamentalists. At gunpoint, what are the five precepts?

BPF is helping us learn, as volatile, willful, passionate westerners, to act out of a sense of our interbeing, rather than out of divine command. The dharma can teach us to relate to our world in a non-self-righteous way, and this is tremendously important. The BASE program is an example of us taking this seriously.

We need to recognize that Buddhist social action has been strongly nourished in Asian cultures.

**SM:** We Americans tend to think we invented social action. But engaged Buddhism is not something BPF invented. We are part of a long, long tradition of non-violence, and we can look not only to Thoreau, but also to Asian Buddhists.

**JM:** You know, the influence has gone the other way, too. It was Quaker work camps that helped inspire Sarvodaya. And Christian missionaries also evinced a caring for the social lives of people that inspired Buddhists of the late 19th century, such as Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka. This was a role that the Buddhist sangha *had* played, but lost under the British. The British colonial system put in place social programs and schools that left the Buddhist monks with very little to do but chanting and collecting *dana*.

**SM:** So there has been a lot of cross-fertilization.

**JM:** Yes. Just as Gandhi was influenced by westerners, he influenced westerners in return. It's nice to see ourselves as part of this back-and-forth, as we're finding the revolutionary roots of our faiths.

**SM:** You have been devoted to BPF for a long time. It means a lot to me when I see your face at BPF events. You just keep showing up! I feel extremely grateful for your loyalty. You've been an elder and mentor to all of us in BPF, in the full sense of those words. ❖

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# GOING AND COMING

## *Musings from two BPF old-timers*

"Coming and going we are never astray."

—*Shodoka*

### *Going*

by Michael Roche

It's difficult to be brief about something I was involved in over a period of years, and that brought about a major change in my outlook, but I'll try. My involvement in the peace movement before BPF consisted of organizing guerrilla theater actions in Charlottesville, Virginia, working for the New Mobilization Committee in Washington, DC, and some GI work after that. When the Buddhist component came, via a phone call from Nelson Foster, it was during a time of intense change in my practice, and at the beginning of my involvement with tantra—an approach to Buddhism that I have loved and been confounded by ever since.

Nelson was Zen-clear. I recall him saying, "There is no coercion in the Dharma," in making an early request of me to participate in a nascent BPF, and I knew that he meant it. My clarity consisted of a firm belief that through my involvement in dharma I would become a better, and happier person, and would improve the world by working for peace. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship made sense in this context. Accordingly, I ran for and was elected to the first board of directors of the BPF, and I became the secretary, in charge of the correspondence and mailing list.

Shortly after I was elected to the board I embarked for Asia (my first time out of the country) on a double mission of self and world improvement. My itinerary included three months of tantric teachings and retreat, followed by a three-month peace pilgrimage that included meetings with the Dalai Lama (a life changing event), Mother Theresa, and Japanese peace activists, and missing a meeting with Sulak Sivaraksa. I also went to the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, where I was able to make contact with oppressed Buddhist tribal people, not even realizing that I was establishing a relationship that would remain a BPF commitment to this day. On a less heroic note, I smoked a cigarette with the Patriarch of Bangladeshi Buddhists, and thus got back into the habit of smoking.

There were the setbacks and eye openers of a first trip to Asia: seeing intense and chronic poverty, the usual experience of dysentery, an unusual bout of malaria (which I initially thought was a psychological reaction to Calcutta), and having to explain to Mother

Theresa that I had been a Catholic before embracing Buddhism, and somehow it hadn't worked for me.

All of these experiences paled, however, in comparison to receiving traditional tantric teachings. In the course of taking the Lam Dre teachings in Northern India, in early 1981, my own facile clarity about political involvement and everything else completely ended. I learned, to my chagrin, that tantra was not a program of self-improvement that would allow me to rationalize sex and drinking while taking a shortcut to enlightenment. Tantra was presented without psychological palliatives as a system that sees our construction of the world as a sham built on self-serving ignorance, to be deconstructed by 24-hour-a-day devotion to a challenging practice.

I felt existentially devastated in learning about tantra, but by the time I was exposed to it, it was so cogent to me that it was too late to turn back and reject it. I was not the first to experience this dilemma; a common metaphor used to describe a tantric student is "a snake in a bamboo tube."

I came back from Asia a changed and confused man. My plan for gradual self-improvement and evolution in the cocoon of dharma was a story I had told myself in order to feel safe. The worst part of it was that I couldn't put my finger on the cause of my cosmic malaise. How was I now to walk "in the footsteps of Gandhi" (as a later book would have it), when I had been so radically unable to understand my own path? Hadn't I seen, in the '60s and '70s, how the best of idealistic intentions could bring decidedly mixed results into people's personal and political lives? And finally, how to explain to the other two BPF Board members, both of them Zen Buddhists, what had happened to me? In effect, both the teachings of tantra and the very different understandings of Buddhism I had been exposed to on my trip had challenged my sense of what was "Buddhist" in a Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

When I returned to the States and resumed my duties as secretary and board member of the BPF, my belief systems and parts of my personality were in a state of disarray. I think Nelson sensed this and was afraid I might do something rash, like burn all of the BPF correspondence in some sort of fire ceremony. I remember him saying in one telephone conversation in a very sincere and compassionate way, about the duties that had suddenly become too much for me: "Don't worry, whatever we need to do, we'll do it..." His attitude was of immense help to me at the time, and really expressed the spirit of a Buddhist approach to peace.



Shortly after this, I believe at the suggestion of Nelson, my good friend Pat McMahon entered the BPF picture. Pat and I were mutually acquainted through Sue Moon, but our real friendship was forged during this nascent period of BPF. Not being privy to my state of existential confusion (which I myself was hardly aware of) Pat saw me as a reasonable fellow with a bit too much on my plate. In the end, this approach, again an expression of fundamental Buddhist sanity, brought out my own fundamental sanity and I was able to “snap out of” my confusion. I answered some of the correspondence, delegated the remainder to Pat, wrote a somewhat perfunctory piece for the BPF Newsletter about my travels, and finished out my term as secretary and Board member. Pat and I became close friends and he began to organize BPF’s first home office. I moved away from BPF at a time of real growth for the organization that has more or less continued. It was right for me to move away, because my experience of Buddhism was in radical flux. Yet when I look back at the ability of many of the early (and later) people in BPF to move forward in a kind of void—and to move compassionately—I get a glimpse of what is Buddhist in the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. And, though I rarely see them, I still feel a connection with the people of BPF.

*Mike Roche is a school psychologist in Oakland, California, and is president of The Sapan Fund, a non-profit group dedicated to translating Tibetan Buddhist texts, and the world’s most obscure Buddhist organization™.*

## Coming

by Patrick McMahon

Yes, Mike was indeed in a state of existential confusion when I met him in 1982, shortly after his return from Asia—but then so was I. Having survived the Vietnam War years physically and psychologically, I had hidden myself away in Zen practice for some years, until in 1980 I saw a film on nuclear holocaust called “The Last Epidemic” which got me scanning the horizon looking for a mushroom cloud. Business as usual abruptly ceased to make sense: the gardens I was growing for a livelihood lost their vitality, and the insular world of the meditation hall no longer protected me. In the holocaust of my own heart, all that was clear was that I’d have to put my shoulder to the wheel of activism. Little did I know that I’d soon be chauffeuring the vehicle itself. A month after I began to help Michael with “answering a few letters,” I found myself to be the office manager of the BPF. Manager seems an exaggeration: as sole staff I wasn’t managing anyone but myself. I maintained a membership list of 200, picking up the mail once a week, and keeping records by hand. I worked out of my tiny home office, sharing desk space

and telephone with my gardening business—which was rapidly taken over by weeds, as my energies were diverted into cultivating this new plot of BPF.

The rest is, indeed, history. The Bay Area BPF was formed and began publishing a local newsletter, *No Need to Kill*, through Kent Johnson, so good and so regular that Aitken Roshi asked us to take on publishing the national newsletter. We organized the Mahasangha conference at San Francisco Zen Center, bringing together many local sanghas for the first time to address global peace concerns. Meanwhile, the national Board expanded, bringing in Joanna Macy, Gary Snyder, Ryo Imamura, Fred Eppsteiner, and Jenny Huang. BPF sponsored the U.S. visit of Thich Nhat Hanh, and with San Francisco Zen Center, organized the Tassajara Peace conference that constellated around him. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s wake, new local chapters were formed. By the time I turned over the management to Judy Gilbert in 1985, the membership had quintupled, recordkeeping was computerized, and the newsletter had gone from a photocopied newsletter to a printed journal.

Presently I have no formal contact with BPF, although many of the people I met in those years have become friends, teachers, and—more recently—owners of the gardens I am once again growing for my livelihood. On a tea break from working in the garden of BPF president Tova Green, I mentioned to her my feeling of being a lapsed activist, spending my days very little with human concerns per se, intimate mostly with plants and stones and earth. But even as I stated the separation, I could see what a divided world I was buying into. “You’re bringing peace directly to the earth,” she reminded me.

I recall a communication I had, back in my early BPF days, with my mother. In response to my inviting her to support the Nuclear Freeze Campaign, she wrote, in her condensed way, “I have just written to Senators Cranston and Hayakawa. I planted 314 potatoes for food.” I wrote back: “Please keep sending letters...Do what you can from where you are, while I do what I can from where I am. If you plant fewer potatoes because you’re writing letters, save the ones you don’t plant for the seed potatoes of next year. Just don’t stop planting, but with each eye, include the truth that’s becoming evident: whatever we do is for everyone and everything.”

My hope and intention is that whether I turn over a spadeful of earth, or write a piece for *Turning Wheel*, or tell a story about the Buddha to my godchild, it’s for everyone and everything. That’s the fellowship from which there can’t be any coming and going. ❖

*Patrick McMahon creates rock gardens in California.*



# TURNING THE WHEEL

by Margaret Howe

BPF came into my life in June 1985 and has not left. It was a young organization then, and I, too, was young in my understanding both of Buddhism and social action. I was fortunate to assist in promoting Thich Nhat Hanh's first public talk and retreat in the U.S. that summer, and soon after, was introduced to Joanna Macy and her work. Discovering people and an organization working to wed Buddhism with social action was like finding heaven for me.

Now in 1998, after playing various roles with BPF over the years, time and activity have slowed to a halt for me, and I sit next to the wheel watching it spin. Motherhood and many life changes have shaken my life in unforeseen ways, forcing a time of dissolution and self-reflection. Long a vocal advocate for BPF (and myself) to become a more radical voice, not afraid to push the edges, I am now struck silent. Not with burnout, nor loss of passion, but with an unknowing that is disturbing. Back to beginner's mind—a reconsidering of all I thought I knew. And this exhalation goes on and on, as I breathe out all ideas of what "right action" is, of myself as "engaged Buddhist," of what is "radical enough."

As I consider BPF on its 20th anniversary, I am proud of what we have been and done. We have held firm to the belief that within Buddhism is an imperative to act on behalf of all beings, and we have illuminated some of the paths that one might take. BPF has helped encourage the exploration of engaged Buddhism, so that now in our sanghas it is more common for social issues to be raised and actions to be taken—the serving of soup, environmental clean-ups, prison work. And we hold the mirror up that asks Buddhists to question "What is enough action" in today's world. We can be proud that BPF has changed the face of Buddhism. And we can be proud of the many actions BPF has taken, as our chronology elsewhere in this issue clearly shows, to bring more peace and justice to our world.

I have rich memories of my time with BPF.

In the mid-80s the East Bay chapter declared itself a "Sanctuary church" for Central American refugees, and also began a monthly vigil at the Concord Naval Weapons station. The first time we arrived there with zafus and altar paraphernalia, we were met by an angry, local group shouting and blaring Christian radio music from the other side of the street. After an attempt to speak to them was not successful, we proceeded with our meditation, while people in passing cars yelled at us. During the closing lovingkindness meditation, our group huddled in a circle, ostensibly to be able to hear the meditation, but also out of a need to be close to

each other with our fear in the face of such conflict. We left sobered by the reality of what it means to be committed to socially engaged Buddhism.

Listening to the full tape of messages on the machine at the BPF office the day after U.S. bombing began in Iraq in 1991, we heard Nanda Currant's voice from a pay phone in Santa Cruz. In agony over the war, she had called from a demonstration, wanting to feel connected with sister Buddhists, knowing we, too, had been on the streets in the Bay Area.

I remember the waves of anxiety I felt during the planning meetings for the "Sex, Power, and Buddha Nature" event, realizing what a thin limb we were walking on to address such a topic. The event was the first one BPF did in the "town hall" format, and we wondered if people would feel free to speak out. That night, hearing from person after person during the open mike, it was apparent that ecumenical, teacherless BPF was one of the safest places for Buddhists to speak up about such a sensitive subject.

BPF has been praised, and it has been criticized—for being too soft, not deep enough, not Buddhist enough, not activist enough, too meddling. While I have been on both ends of these evaluations, I don't believe we need to apologize for any of our actions. Engaged Buddhism is a new path in the West and we can best dance along this path by being fluid in our understanding, not afraid to fall, ready to change the music or try new steps. We must be bold in our efforts, not always waiting to act until we are "sure." Part of the learning is in the stumbling, regrouping, and then going out to try it again. Buddhism urges us not to flee from challenge and BPF encourages engagement with the world. We know this commitment brings with it times of great joy, great despair, and deep humility—all part of the dance of the bodhisattva working on behalf of all beings.

I hear the encouraging voices of some of our engaged Buddhist teachers: Joanna Macy, Aitken Roshi, Charlene Spretnak, Sulak Sivaraksa, Christopher Titmuss, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Maylie Scott. I am grateful for their presence and wisdom over the years. And I feel the spirits of all the BPF members I have met and worked with who have inspired me with their dedication and resolve. BPF has done much in these last 20 years, and both our spiritual practice and actions have deepened our wisdom. I hope BPF'ers can meet the challenges of the next 20 years with our hearts, wisdom, and dancing shoes! Happy Continuation Day, BPF! ❖

*Margaret Howe has circumambulated BPF through a variety of roles: East Bay chapter contact, National Coordinator, Board president, at-large member, and now BPF representative to the FOR National Council.*



# GROWING INTO STABILITY

by Stephanie Kaza

It was the summer of 1988—a foggy summer, I think—and I was living at Green Gulch Zen Center in Marin County, California. I was working at Point Reyes Bird Observatory and joining the Green Gulch practice group for regular sittings and dharma talks. One weekend, I heard the BPF board and staff was having a meeting with a group of elders in the conference hall. Joanna Macy, Ty Cashman, Robert Aitken, and others were there to figure out the next steps for the organization. It was, apparently, at a crossroads. To be or not to be? That was the question.

I didn't know much of what was going on; I was just a regular member. I read my newsletter and signed petitions but that was about it—until I got drafted. It seems that the entire staff and board had hit burnout at the same time. Ty Cashman approached me, asking if I'd be willing to serve on the board and help BPF keep going. I myself was barely recovered from a serious bout of chronic fatigue syndrome. How could I willingly take on yet another demanding situation? And yet, and yet...

After several long walks on the beach and several more talks with Tyrone, I said yes. BPF's spirit was sound; many people had loved it well into being. But it was having growing pains: the current structure was inadequate for the swelling size of the organization.

Here is some of what I learned in my seven years on the board. BPF had no money to pay for board travel, so we tried holding board meetings by conference call. This turned out to be both frustrating and time-consuming without being very effective. We thought if we could just meet in person at least once a year, we could make it through the other months. Somehow we got everyone together and held our first meeting over a sunny January weekend at my home, now in Muir Beach. Ah! the great delight of being in each other's company! To mitigate the tensions of no money and many questions unresolved, we used the mindfulness bell throughout the sessions, beginning and ending with a short period of sitting. This seemed crucial to maintaining some equanimity in the face of the challenging work before us.

The times were indeed tough. BPF activities, chapters, and membership seemed to be growing beyond the capacities of the office, the staff, and the budget. To get through the lean time, we slid by with very part-time staff at very meager wages on a generous loan. We sent out a strong fundraising pitch. This was hard, considering BPF did not have much in the way of an ongoing program with so little staffing, but people believed in us and sent money anyway.

At the end of my first year we could see the board arrangement was still not working very well because too

much happened from month to month, and phone calls and minutes weren't adequate. So we came up with the idea of a larger board of ten local people who would attend monthly meetings, and five national people who would come to the twice-yearly weekend meetings. This was the first major act of organizational stabilizing.

Then we got to work fundraising so we could afford a 3/4 time office manager and 1/3 time newsletter editor. This is the boring side of peace and justice work, but it just had to be done. Otherwise we couldn't do anything for anyone else. Then there was the accounting. We needed regular reports to the board so we could see the cash flow from month to month. The board began to pass budgets, very conservative budgets.

The theme during these transition years was "steady as she goes." One step at a time, no big risks. And throughout our work, we tried our best to keep to good, open, facilitated process based in mindfulness practice. Certainly there were mishaps, but for the most part, everyone was committed to BPF work as Buddhist practice. There was an altar in the office and the staff took mindfulness breaks for reminders to breathe.

We made it through the narrow time; by 1991, BPF was clearly alive and well and important to many in the Buddhist community. We were strong enough now to offer a real voice of resistance. As our membership grew, we could hire more staff, who could undertake more programs, such as BASE (Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement), now growing by leaps and bounds.

Looking back on this period of history, I can say a few things made a big difference. Steadiness, faith, equanimity, commitment. All of us in BPF decided to keep going and see if the world would respond. And indeed, as we now see, Buddhism in America is growing very rapidly, and that is reflected in BPF's membership, now over 4000 strong. At the core of this commitment were the individual practice commitments of each of the board and staff members. We also were committed to good group process—consensus decision-making, vibes-watching, mindfulness bell ringing, agenda setting, etc. As our process skills developed, that steadiness manifested in revised by-laws, data base and accounting upgrades, and a major undertaking in fundraising and donor development. This kind of internal health maintenance is not very glamorous activism; but to walk a steady path is a great accomplishment.

It has really been a great joy to serve an organization so thoroughly and then to be able to leave, passing responsibilities on to others with confidence in the basic stability of the organization. BPF is not going to fold any time soon. ❖

*Stephanie Kaza was on the BPF Board from 1988 to 1995, and was president/chair for much of that time. She teaches environmental studies at the University of Vermont. She is co-editor, with Ken Kraft, of a forthcoming book, Dharma Rain, on Buddhism and ecology. And she writes TW's regular "ecology column."*



# BUDDHADASA AND THE BASE COMMUNITY IDEAL

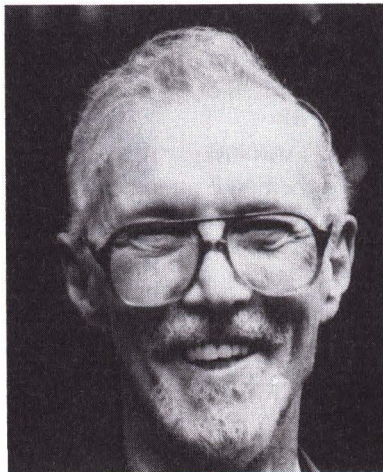
by Robert Aitken

Over the past several years I have sensed a growing affinity between progressive Thai Buddhists—both monks and lay people—and BPF members. Leaders of the International Network of Engaged Buddhism in Bangkok, and in such ashrams as Wongsanit and Suan Mokkh, have evolved a close working relationship with their counterparts in the Berkeley office of BPF, and with members of the BPF Board of Directors and its committees. I am altogether sympathetic to this development, and in this piece I should like to set forth the personal affinity I feel for my Thai friends and their endeavors, to trace the perennial nature of their labors, and to suggest how we as Buddhists in the West might find inspiration in their principles and examples.

Of course, the Buddhism of Thailand is by no means entirely progressive. Officially, Buddhism is a state religion, with the *Sangharaja*, His Holiness the Patriarch of Thai Buddhism, appointed with the approval of the King. Sangharaja's many followers tend to avoid anything that might be considered political.

The progressive wing of the religion is much smaller in numbers, and is made up for the most part of disciples and followers of the late Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993). They are independents who squarely face the pernicious influence of Coca-Cola culture, and have separated themselves politically from their more passive colleagues. Many are forest monks, and as they are finding that their forests are going or gone, their role of religious guidance has expanded to community organizing. Seeking to integrate the best of the old teachings and sangha practice into their present setting, many are using modern technology, including e-mail and the World Wide Web. A very interesting and instructive Buddhism is emerging, a Buddhism that has a solid metaphysical foundation in the writings of Buddhadasa:

The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and soil. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering and death, then we can build a noble, even heavenly environment. If our lives are not based in this truth, then we shall all perish.<sup>1</sup>



In many respects, the thinking of Buddhadasa is non-sectarian and perennial. He writes from his experiences in his home country of Thailand—an economic, if not a political colony of the United States, Japan, and Europe—but his thought applies everywhere. Colonies similar to Thailand are spread across the world, and include broad segments of First as well as Third World populations. Vast numbers of individual breadwinners, east and west, along with their communities and their countries, find themselves hostage to an economic system that lines the pockets of the prosperous few. The age-old system of trading with people of other cultures allowed traditional people to maintain their way of life without much change, but over the last few hundred years a very different world economy has gripped and forever transformed virtually every corner of the world.

Sulak Sivaraksa, the leading lay follower of Buddhadasa, traces this corrosion to consumerism and its appeal to human greed. These are the obstacles to happiness that determined Buddhists acknowledge and confront in their daily practice:

To put it very bluntly, the so-called free world uses greed and the accumulation of money as a standard for being accepted in society. The more money you have, the more powerful you become. This greed is inevitably linked to sensuality and lust. Look at the television advertisements in this country—they speak for themselves...From a worldly standpoint, the more desires are increased or satisfied, the further development can proceed. From the religious standpoint, the more desires can be reduced, the further development can proceed.<sup>2</sup>

Of course the worldly have one definition of “development,” and the religious quite another. Notice that Achan Sulak uses “religious” rather than “Buddhist” to contrast with “worldly.” In this he is faithful to his mentor Buddhadasa:

We do not need to speak of the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Sangha, or any points of doctrine, or of the history of Buddhism. We have to forget about all those things, and begin our studies by examining the words “me” and “mine,” or rather the feelings of the heart which give rise to these words. *To truly understand me-and-mine leads to the extinction of suffering.*<sup>3</sup>

*Me and Mine* is the title of a collection of essays by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, edited by his long-time friend



and translator, Donald Swearer.<sup>4</sup> It is the preoccupation with “me and mine,” projected upon the world in an acquisitive system through highly evolved technology, that dominates and crushes self-reliance and self-determination in living cultures.

Susan Sontag, in writing about this pervasive system of exploitation that originates in Europe and has spread to North America, Japan, and elsewhere, said it is “the cancer of human history,” that “Mozart, Pascal, Boolean algebra, Shakespeare, parliamentary government, baroque churches, Newton, the emancipation of women, Kant, Marx, and the Balanchine ballets don’t redeem what this particular civilization has wrought upon the world.”<sup>5</sup>

As someone of European stock I must swallow this truth as bitter medicine, just as people of other heritage must swallow the truths of less pervasive evils in their own histories. Buddhadasa was Thai, but ethnically Chinese, with his own cultural heritage to deal with. However, he did not dwell upon his past. He did not point the finger at any particular ethnic or national villains and villainies, but simply looked into the perennial human causes of the “cancer of human history” and offered redemption.

Still, though his expressions were non-sectarian, Buddhadasa spoke from within Buddhism, a religion that has historically taught liberation through personal meditation while ignoring social reality. He parted from this tradition, and set forth what he called “Dhammic socialism,” that is, socialism that is in keeping with political, social and ecological conditions, as well as with historical Buddhism. To quote one of his followers, Tavivat Puntarigivat:

It is the task of Dhammic socialism to reinterpret Buddhism from a socio-political perspective for social justice, adding a new dimension of Buddhist hermeneutics for the poor and the oppressed. Greed, for example, should be interpreted not only as a personal practice, but as a built-in mechanism in an oppressive social structure. If greed is to be reduced or eliminated, not only a personal self-restraint is required, but also unjust social structures need to be changed.<sup>6</sup>

Buddhadasa’s friend and translator Dr. Swearer criticizes him for not presenting his vision in practical terms. *How*, for example, are unjust social structures to be changed? This criticism is well taken, but we can be grateful to Buddhadasa for his vision itself and for his Tao of practice for the modern world. There are three main fields of Buddhist work, he said: the personal, the communal, and the ecological.<sup>7</sup>

First the personal: Buddhadasa was committed to the importance of liberating people from their self-centered preoccupations. He did not take the position that you must release yourself from selfishness completely before you move actively into communal and ecologi-

cal fields, but nonetheless stressed the vital importance of individual restraint and discipline. In this respect, he was a conventional Buddhist, but he reworded the teachings to give them everyday pungency:

If we want to prevent rats from coming around and disturbing us, we keep a cat. All we have to do is look after the cat, and the cat will go about its business and the rats will disappear without our having to catch them ourselves. Because of the cat, the undesirable thing is no more...If we oversee the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind in the proper manner, the killing of defilements occurs naturally.<sup>8</sup>

If we nurture our inner pussycat, she will monitor the rat-holes of greed, hatred, and ignorance for us, and pounce if any of them appears. This is a personal practice for everyone, and is not just the business of monks and nuns, or of Buddhists only, or even of just the people who are formally religious.

The second field, the communal, is universal as well. The sangha, or fellowship, which forms the organizational structure of classical Buddhism is akin to the base communities of Latin America and the Philippines, little voluntary groups that meet weekly to study the Bible, discuss its implications for themselves, and network with other base communities for social action.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Puntarigivat makes this kinship of Buddhadasa’s “Dhammic socialism” and Christian base communities clear in his study, *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism in Dialogue with Latin American Liberation Theology*. He cites several small Thai communities of

*If we nurture our inner pussycat, she will monitor the rat-holes of greed, hatred, and ignorance, and pounce if any of them appears.*

Buddhadasa followers which are intentionally organized to revive Buddhist values, and to help rural people retain a level of self-sufficiency and independence. Like the Christian base communities, these communities network with each other, and the analogy is so close that Dr. Puntarigivat terms them Buddhist base communities.<sup>10</sup>

Each of these Buddhist communities is inspired by charismatic leaders who are monks or former monks. Much of the infrastructure is clerical, though it seems that villagers are gradually becoming empowered to take responsibility for their own local programs.

Dr. Puntarigivat lists just five such communities in his study. Latin American and Filipino base communities are incomparably more widespread, and tend to be independent of charismatic leadership. Emphasis in the Thai communities is upon self-sufficiency, or *swaraj*, to use Gandhi’s term, and more incidentally upon resistance to injustice. The opposite seems to be true in Latin America and the Philippines, where the struggle for economic and political equality is of primary concern.

Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement [BASE] communities sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in San Francisco and a few other locations in the United States are inspired by their Latin American



and Filipino lower-case namesakes, as well as their Thai relatives. The BPF communities require outside funding. They are groups of about 10 people giving six months of their time to serve as apprentices in social-welfare, health, and social-justice organizations. They hold evening meetings for sharing, training in human relations, Buddhist study, and periodic retreats.

Thus base communities in Latin America, Thailand, and San Francisco are analogous to one another, while at the same time they differ more or less in specific purpose. Other similar groups, with cultural variations, can be found among the affinity groups in social-justice movements of earlier decades in Europe and North America, the Catholic Worker houses in major North American cities, the *grupos de afinidad* and the “society of societies” of European anarchism, and the North American utopian societies in the 19th century. They can all be viewed as “base communities”—a perennial phenomenon, recognizable as small, networking groups of high-minded people who seek social change for a decent and sustainable world.

The third field of practice is the ecological, and here, as in the other two fields, Buddhadasa offers a particular kind of inspiration. The operant word is *anurak*, which is usually translated “conservation” or “protection.” Dr. Swearer offers this interpretation:

One cares for the forest because one empathizes with the forest, just as one cares for people because one has become empathetic. But how does one become empathetic? *Anurak*, in this sense, is fundamentally linked with non-attachment or liberation from preoccupation with self, which is so central to Buddhadasa’s thought. We truly care for our total environment and for our fellow human beings when we have overcome selfishness and those qualities which empower it, e.g. desire, greed, hatred...

Caring in this deeper sense of the meaning of *anurak* goes beyond the well-publicized strategies of the conservation monks to protect and conserve the forest, as important as these strategies are in Thailand today...*Anurak*...translates as having at the very core of one’s being the quality of caring for all things in the world in their natural conditions; that is to say, caring for them as they are in themselves rather than as I might benefit from them or as I might like them to be.<sup>11</sup>

Here Buddhadasa shakes hands with Arne Naess, founder of the Deep Ecology movement: “The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.”<sup>12</sup>

The personal, the communal, and the ecological are the same field, of course, with three aspects. Human potential is not fulfilled without a personal practice of honor, without the synergy of decent people working together, and without the imperative to protect the many beings.

It seems to me that base communities by whatever

name meet Buddhadasa’s three-part criterion best when they fill economic needs outside the mainstream of the world economy, while at the same time resisting the pernicious influences of Coca-Cola and Nike. Such enterprises already flourish—I think, for example, of small entrepreneurs surviving on licensing fees in the software industry. Other conscientious enterprises can be encouraged to develop and evolve: cooperative farmers who cultivate their fields while bearing in mind the welfare of their descendants to the seventh generation in those very fields; booksellers and publishers who buy and sell while bearing in mind the intellectual and moral health of their constituencies; parents and teachers and counselors who labor with children while bearing in mind the broadly diverse adult potentials of their younger companions.

I view *swaraj* as the Tao of the base community, but self-reliance and independence were problematic ideals even for Gandhi. I have heard that one of his main supporters complained about how expensive it was to support Gandhi’s life of poverty. On the other hand, Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker, did not write a grant proposal in her entire life, and I dare say that no Catholic Worker house or farm has written one either. The ideal is, in Wobbly terms, to build the new within the shell of the old. Let *swaraj* stand as an ideal, and each base community work it out on the ground. Networking with like-minded groups, such communities can change the world. ❖

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*Robert Aitken is one of the founders of BPF. In 1996 he retired from being the head teacher of the Diamond Sangha, and moved from Honolulu to Pahoehoe on the Big Island, where he continues to write and to guide students in the dharma.*



*How Things Get Started:*

## THE TIBETAN REFUGEE CHILDREN'S PROJECT

by Gordon Tyndall

My participation in BPF goes back to 1987. At that time, my wife Margo and I were still relative newcomers to Buddhism, but we quickly became active in the East Bay Chapter. I remember how much I enjoyed helping Therese Fitzgerald and Arnie Kotler send medical supplies to destitute families in Vietnam—how carefully we counted out the various pills so there would be the same number in each package. I remember the joy of working with Vietnamese Buddhists in Fremont. And the Sunday mornings spent sitting and walking on the “Concord tracks”—the short rail that carried munitions to the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

Then in October 1989, we flew to Kathmandu for a vacation and after a few days of sightseeing, went on to Pokhara in western Nepal. We had heard that we could find many easy trails leading into the foothills of the Annapurna range, with wonderful views of the mountains. We were not disappointed—the views were incredible, even from our hotel window. On one of our last climbs up a fairly steep ridge, we looked down and saw some white dots beside a rushing river, and were told by our 10-year-old guide that it was a Tibetan refugee camp. For reasons we have never understood, we both decided instantly to spend our last day in Pokhara visiting that camp.

As we approached the camp—named Tashi Palkhiel—we were accosted by a pleasant young man who asked if he could be our guide around the camp. He showed us the one-room mud home that he shared with his wife and young child, the camp nursery where a large group of toddlers were being cared for, the small monastery where some young monks were playing soccer, the weaving shed where carpets were being made. He explained how much they would like to be able to serve milk to the children in the nursery, and to have teachers for the four- and five-year-olds, and how difficult it was for families with several children to provide for their education, especially when the children reached the age at which they had to be sent to a residential school. (The camp school only went up to Grade V.)

As Margo and I walked the several dusty miles back to our hotel room in Pokhara, we knew that as Buddhists, as BPF-ers, as compassionate human beings, we must try to do something for those children.

That “something” turned out to be the Tibetan Refugee Children's Project. With the enthusiastic spon-

sorship of the East Bay chapter and the blessings of BPF's National Board, the TRCP was established in 1989. Our goal quickly expanded from helping the children at Tashi Palkhiel to providing similar assistance to as many other refugee settlements in India and Nepal as our limited resources would permit. The financial support we received in response to an all-BPF mailing in 1991 led us to contact His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Central Tibetan Relief Committee, part of the Tibetan government in exile. At their suggestion we contacted an additional three settlements, all of them in India, and discussed how the funds might be used most effectively. Today, because our sangha of supporters has widened, the Project is now providing assistance to six settlements—one in Nepal and five in India—with an annual total commitment of \$25,000. In some camps all the funds are used to provide supplementary nutrition of some type, usually at the midday meal at school: milk,



fruit, vegetables, eggs. In other camps a significant fraction of the funds goes directly to the poorest families so that can send their children to school.

We, and more importantly, the Tibetan refugee children and their parents, are deeply grateful for the support that many BPF members (and quite a few others) have given to the Project. We would love to (at least) double the number of camps the Project supports, but we can only do this if many more members of BPF participate. Today the participation among BPF members is about 10 percent. If you are among the 90 percent who are not participating, won't you ask yourself: Couldn't I give a dollar or two a week (or hopefully much more) to help the Tibetan refugee children?

These children need our compassionate giving so that they can enter the 21st century with healthy bodies and well-trained minds. During the 20th anniversary celebration of BPF, a gift to the Tibetan Refugee Children would seem particularly appropriate. And we can assure you that every dollar you send will go to the children, because Margo and I meet all of the project's administrative and fundraising costs.

Even though Margo and I haven't been able to return to Tashi Pashkiel, we hear frequently from the children and their families; we feel a strong connection with people of these camps. ❖

*Gordon Tyndall, a retired investment advisor and former BPF Treasurer, and Margo Tyndall, a retired Unitarian minister, co-direct the TRCF. They are vipassana practitioners.*



# REPORT FROM THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

by Alan Senauke

The road into the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in south-eastern Bangladesh, winds up from the port city of Chittagong on the Bay of Bengal, past a long strand where huge ships are beached and broken down for scrap. It passes through teeming bazaars full of bone-thin men and endless blocks of shabby apartments. It meanders through flat green paddy land, where Bengali farmers scrape out a bare living, up into the rolling hills, with their stripped-out forests, enticing valleys, and ubiquitous army encampments and checkpoints.

Not much traffic as you climb the narrow, pock-marked road into the Chittagong Hill Tracts towards Khagrachari. The only vehicles are buses with passengers spilling onto the roof, a few baby taxis spewing dark, oily exhaust as they labor up the steep incline, and military vehicles full of impeccably uniformed Bengali soldiers.

I've been back from Bangladesh for three months, and the images and memories still come to me in a flood. As they stream along, I have a hard time knowing just what to share with you, and I wonder about my personal responsibility, as I recall bitter realities and painful, impoverished lives.

I spent two weeks in Bangladesh this March—traveling, witnessing, and working with INEB's Ordained Sangha: socially engaged monks, nuns, priests and ordained people of different religious traditions. The center of my long journey was the Ordained Sangha meeting at Parbatya Bouddha Mission, a spacious rural temple and orphans' school in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. For seven years, the abbot, my friend Ven. Sumanalankar, has been inviting me to visit him in Khagrachari. Only recently was the Bangladesh government willing to let us in.

After 20 years of guerrilla war, there is a moment to breathe in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This once-forested region has been home to 600,000 tribal people for several centuries—mostly Chakma and Marma Buddhists, Tripura Hindus, and many animist groups, in contrast to more than 120 million Bengali Muslims who live in the alluvial plains to the west. In 1900, British colonizers recognized the fragile balance of populations

and set regulations that limited the migration and settlement of Bengali Muslims in the Hill Tracts. But with the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the brutal war for Bangladesh independence in 1971, the CHT was once again vulnerable to settlement by a rapidly expanding Bengali population, and also vulnerable to outside exploitation of its forests, lands, and minerals.

In the late 1950s and early '60s, the government created a huge lake and hydroelectric plant at Kaptai in the Hill Tracts, which flooded rich valleys and destroyed 40 percent of the arable land. One hundred thousand hill people were displaced without compensation, and many fled to India. The ancient tradition of swidden agriculture, called *jhum*, was no longer practical. Too much land had been

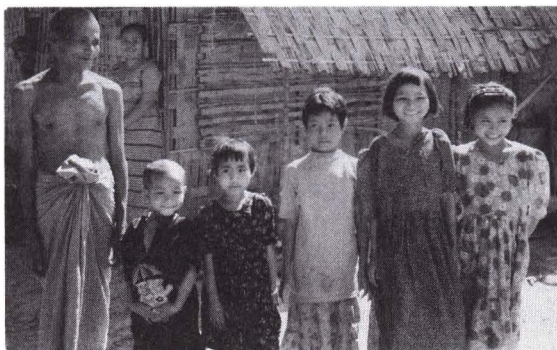
destroyed. More land was lost in the years after independence as the Bangladesh government implemented a policy of Bengali settlement in the hills. This set the stage for 20 years of forced relocation, murder, torture, cultural oppression, and fierce rebellion. It has been a bitter civil war, unseen and unheeded by most of the world.

In December 1997, a peace accord was signed by the government, the military, the hill

people's political organization (the Jana Sanghati Samity or JSS), and its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini. The day before we arrived in the Hill Tracts, several thousand insurgents had surrendered weapons in a ceremony at the sports arena in Khagrachari. It was the second such ceremony, and it expressed an intention of peace, if not the realization of justice. The challenge now is implementation: resettling and compensating exiled hill people, building schools and indigenous institutions, developing democracy, and healing wounds of war. Can this be accomplished in the face of pervasive poverty, unchecked population growth, and global systems of exploitation? We must try.

This is an old commitment for Buddhist Peace Fellowship, our first international program, in fact. Board member Michael Roche traveled to the Hill Tracts in 1980 and wrote a series of reports for BPF and IFOR. We undertook political lobbying with the U.S. Congress and began to send money to orphanages in Bangladesh. Long friendship with the Chakma monk Bimal Bhikkhu, still exiled in Calcutta, has kept

*(Continued on page 41)*



*Chakma family just back from exile in India, after the signing of the CHT accord.*



# COMMITMENT FIRST

*A talk with Aung San Suu Kyi*

by Judith White

I became interested in Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi a few years ago when I began studying the common elements between the feminist ethics of care, and Buddhist ethics of compassion and understanding. Aung San Suu Kyi, a woman, a Buddhist, and leader of Burma's democracy movement, uses insight, understanding, nonviolence, and compassion to bring change to a country controlled by a repressive and violent military regime. Her person and actions captured my moral imagination and I set out to interview her in Rangoon, Burma, in March 1997.

The interview took place in Aung San Suu Kyi's home on March 27, 1997. Although I had prepared for a two-hour discussion, the interview was unfortunately brief because of strained circumstances. Earlier in the day there had been a "Festival of Resistance" at Aung San Suu Kyi's compound, a counter-celebration to the military's observance of the 52nd anniversary of Armed Forces Day. I had attended the festival, which was hosted by Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy, and attended by approximately 700 Burmese and 10 Westerners from the Rangoon press and diplomatic communities.

Aung San Suu Kyi was obviously fatigued from the day's activities and the week's preparation for the festival, which included negotiating with the police to allow a gathering of more than the officially permitted five persons. While she is no longer officially under house arrest (as she was from 1989-95), the road to her house has been blocked off by the military since September 1996, so as to deny most people access to her. This means that anyone wanting to see her—or any other resident of the street—must stop and have identification checked by the military. One of her close associates told me Aung San Suu Kyi had not been in good health and had been fatigued for months.

I knew from others who had interviewed her that it was not certain I would be able to get in to see her. The weather was very hot, and my personal sense of discomfort was intensified by the constant presence of soldiers with rifles and bayonets on many street corners throughout central Rangoon and on the way to her compound.

At the beginning of the interview, I asked Aung San

Suu Kyi about her practice as a Buddhist, and the influence it has on her leadership. She said she didn't want to talk about her Buddhist practice because she does not consider herself to be an expert in Buddhism. Nevertheless, later in the interview she spoke of the essence of Buddhism: kindness and compassion.

\* \* \*

**Judith White:** In your writings you talk about the importance of a "revolution of the spirit," of changing people's minds and hearts. You also talk about intellectual will. Can you explain that?

**Aung Sang Suu Kyi:** By that I mean that you should not be emotional in carrying out your goals. If one is led by emotion, it leads to all kinds of undesirable elements such as racism and a belief in certain other "isms." Of course you need to look at the heart, because politics is about people, but one has to look at problems in an intellectual way. You've got to study the situation and find out what is wrong and try to bring about change. That is what revolution is all about. It is not just upsetting a system. You've got to have something to replace it with. If you say,

"we don't want a military dictatorship," you've got to say what you want to replace it with and provide a viable alternative.

The role of people who are involved in political leadership is to convince others to commit themselves to a certain cause. Once you are committed, then you can really move mountains. But so very few people—including leaders—are really committed. You can't persuade other people to commit themselves if you yourself are not committed.

**JW:** What do you think is the obstacle to people being fully committed?

**ASSK:** Commitment to a cause means commitment to a cause *beyond* your own personal circumstances, beyond your own inclinations. And it is not easy for people to do that. They will commit themselves, but only to a certain extent, because they will not do anything that they feel will hurt their personal standing or their family. You have to identify with the cause to which you are committed, so that you achieve fulfillment from working for the cause rather than from personal satisfaction.



*Aung San Suu Kyi and Judith White*



**JW:** So how does one balance a personal life with a political life?

**ASSK:** In revolutionary circumstances, it is never possible to balance personal life with your commitment. Commitment has to come first. I don't think you can say, "Well, it is 50 percent personal and 50 percent the cause." It has got to be 100 percent the cause, and if you are lucky you have a supportive family that can work together with you.

**JW:** How do you change people's mental attitudes about things like this?

**ASSK:** If I had just one sure-fire method, I'd use it all the time. You have to appeal to people in different ways depending on the circumstances. And you have to work *with* other people. No one person can bring about revolutionary change. There are so many things to be done. But part of the process of changing people's attitudes is making them understand that if we want something to happen we can *do* it. All right, it is difficult; all right, the authorities are putting all sorts of obstacles in our way. All right, there are many restrictions, but we will *do* it. So you have to find people who are as committed as you are. You find this out the hard way sometimes, slowly, by a process of painful elimination.

**JW:** Gandhi talked about power as serving other people rather than as controlling circumstances or people. What are your thoughts about power?

**ASSK:** Power is something that is active, something that moves. It is not something that is stagnant or passive. Gandhi used power to serve his people; that is active, serving. Power is the ability to move things in one direction or the other, and it can be for the good or the bad. Someone like Gandhi obviously used it for the good, but there are others who use it for bad purposes.

**JW:** I think of Havel, Gandhi, King, Tutu, and certainly yourself, as people who have been leaders of social change movements, and who have had a spiritual practice. Havel talked about the importance of a spiritual practice. He said that without some kind of spiritual sustenance or foundation, change wouldn't come about. If you didn't have *your* practice, if you weren't a Buddhist, would your leadership be different? Would it be as effective?

**ASSK:** Well obviously, if I were not a Buddhist, my whole cultural background would be different, so I'm sure I would be a different sort of person. But besides my religion, my parents and my education contribute to the kind of person I am. So a change in any of these

aspects would mean a change in my style of politics.

**JW:** What is your sense of how committed people can be towards justice, towards truth, without a spiritual practice? I'm speaking as a person from the West, where most people have a secular life.

**ASSK:** I know people who absolutely declare they are not religious, or that they have no time for religion, and yet they are very, very committed to justice. This all boils down to a sense of empathy: "Do to others as you wish they would do towards you." An understanding that what hurts you would hurt other people, too. To see others in the same light as yourself. Whether or not you are a religious person, you can have that quality.

**JW:** That is what the Dalai Lama talks about: one doesn't need to have any particular kind of religion to practice kindness. So one might not be an activist but could practice *metta* [lovingkindness]. Would that be sufficient?

**ASSK:** Well, it depends on what you mean by practicing *metta*. I don't think that one can really practice *metta* passively. Sitting and thinking loving thoughts about people isn't enough. His Holiness does more than simply think loving thoughts about others. He actually cares for people. He takes the time to talk with them. That is *action*.

He takes the trouble to share his thoughts on compassion. I don't believe that real *metta* is passive. Real *metta*, real compassion, means that you just can't sit by and see other people suffer or sit by and not do anything about acts of injustice. Because injustice makes people suffer. You just can't sit there and say, "Oh, I feel so sorry for the other person." That's not really compassion. You go and do something wherever you can.

**JW:** Who has been most influential in your thinking about your leadership role?

**ASSK:** I very much admire people like Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, but I think I have been more influenced by the leaders of the Indian independence movement and my own father than by anyone contemporary.

**JW:** In your videotaped speech to the International Women's Conference in Beijing a few years ago, you talked about the role of women, that women bring in qualities of care and nurturing that you feel have perhaps been missing in some of the male leaders in the world. Do you see yourself as a woman leader, as a feminist leader?

**ASSK:** I don't see myself as a feminist, because I've never really felt crushed as a woman. My father died when I was two, and my mother reared a family and was a very successful person in her own right. I always

*Freedom from fear means you don't let it dominate you. Even if you are afraid, you must have the ability to do what you know is right.*



thought that men and women were equals in their ability to change their world. Of course, I am very aware of the fact that in Burma—as in many other countries—men are very much the privileged gender. I have both men and women friends, and women and men can be equally nice or equally nasty. Their approach is just different. I don't think the difference between the sexes is purely social. I am sure there must be something biological. There ought to be, because they have different jobs to do. Anyway, I don't try to make a man out of myself. I don't need to develop a masculine style to be effective as a politician.

**JW:** Are there other women in the executive committee of the National League for Democracy?

**ASSK:** There used to be one, but she left.

**JW:** What keeps women from being involved in the higher ranks of the NLD?

**ASSK:** One of the things that prevents women from rising as high in politics as they ought to is the fact that they give considerable time to their families, and that means they have less time to devote towards a political career. And a political career under the circumstances under which we live now is a very risky and uncertain business; some of our people in prison are women. It's not like being a doctor or a lawyer or a professor, where you can always justify your dreams, where you are earning money to contribute to your children and a higher standard of living.

**JW:** You've talked about the idea and experience of fearlessness. How do we cultivate the state of fearlessness?

**ASSK:** You know, I don't think that anybody is totally fearless in this life. I myself am not entirely without fear. Perhaps we should talk in terms of *courage* rather than fearlessness. Freedom from fear means that you don't let fear dominate you. It does not mean that you don't know fear. Even if you are afraid, you must have the ability to do what you know is right. That is freedom from fear. You are not going to let it shackle you.

**JW:** Doesn't it require some kind of spiritual belief to go beyond the fear?

**ASSK:** No human being can do without some kind of spiritual cultivation, because there is a spiritual dimension to life. I don't think you can deny that. Why are there religions in the world? Because there is this human need to cultivate the spiritual dimension. I think that we are more than just mere matter. There

are those who will say that our emotions are all chemical reactions. Be that as it may, you still have to say that one chemical process is what we define generally as spiritual. It is something that goes beyond the mere gratification of the body, of material needs. Why is it that the greatest number of poems in this world are about either love or about religion? Poems are actually about spiritual needs. Why do people feel the need to love or to be loved? That is a spiritual need. What people really want is kindness and compassion.

**JW:** On a different track, what is your sense about the future possibilities for Burma? I am so distressed about

Western investments here. Finally Pepsi has pulled out, but it's easier for a soft drink company to pull out than a gas company, with its extensive capital investment.

**ASSK:** A lot of businesses are only concerned with making money. We've got to face that.

**JW:** So do you think they will never pull out of Burma if their only motivation is making money?

**ASSK:** Well, consumer pressure can make them pull out.

And those who have compassion will do whatever they can. Pepsi pulled out because it was not worth their while to stay on in Burma. They were losing more than they were gaining.

**JW:** I hope we can bring down some of those companies in the West, too.

**ASSK:** Of course you can, if you organize yourselves and if you are committed enough. Because those consumers who decide to boycott the companies that invest in Burma, really, they don't have to give up that much. What does it involve, not drinking Pepsi and drinking Coke instead? What does it involve, not buying gas from UNOCAL and buying it instead from another company? The consumers have nothing to lose because they live in a market economy and the market offers alternatives.

**JW:** Tell me, what more can those of us in the West who are active in the Free Burma movement do for Burma?

**ASSK:** Just what we've been discussing here: We would really like you to organize a consumer boycott on a much wider basis, a consumer boycott of those companies invested in Burma. ❖

*Judith White sits with the vipassana community in Santa Cruz, California, and has been studying and practicing Buddhism for 18 years. She teaches organizational behavior at California State University Monterey Bay.*



*Street cleaners in Rangoon*



## REVIEWS

### *The Voice That Remembers*

by Ama Adhe

Wisdom Publications, 1997, 257 pages, \$19.95, paper

#### Reviewed by Daidie Donnelly

I met Ama Adhe last August, through a mutual friend in Berkeley. The moment she walked through my door, I understood why she'd affectionately been given the name "Ama" (mother) by the Tibetan community in Dharamsala, India. She exuded a maternal warmth, and over the next few hours, she frequently took my hand and stroked it as she spoke in her native Tibetan. Our friend acted as translator.

Later, during a drive in the Berkeley hills, she got out of the car and stood in silence, looking out over the rolling expanse of green. She turned and said, in a barely audible voice, that it was the first time in many years she'd seen land that reminded her of home.

Born in Eastern Tibet in 1932, Adhe was 18 and newly married when the Chinese entered her region of Karze. At first the Chinese tried to woo the Tibetans, saying they had come to "liberate" them from "imperialist powers," but as years passed and the Tibetans were unresponsive, the Chinese began a campaign of intimidation. Monasteries were destroyed, monks and nuns tortured, and townspeople forced to turn against each other. Several years later, Ama Adhe's husband was mysteriously poisoned (by the Chinese, it was assumed). At the time she had a one-year-old son and was pregnant with a daughter.

By 1958, many of the men in her village had taken to the hills to resist the Chinese, and Ama Adhe organized local women to bring them aid. Several months later, she was arrested, forcibly dragged from her children, and imprisoned. For the next 27 years she was housed in numerous Chinese prisons across Tibet, and endured repeated torture and starvation. Only her faith and the support of other women prisoners enabled her to survive.

After her release in 1985, she went briefly to Lhasa, then on to Nepal and India. In 1989, while living in Dharamsala, she was invited to the first international hearing on Tibet in Bonn, Germany. A few months later, she spoke to an audience of five hundred at a second hearing in Denmark.

She has continued to live in Dharamsala. In 1990 an officer of the Tibetan government-in-exile introduced her to the American writer Joyce Blakeslee. According to Blakeslee, they felt an immediate bond, and at that first meeting Ama Adhe asked Joyce to tell her story.

*The Voice That Remembers* is the result of their collaboration. It is written in the first person, beginning

with Ama Adhe's first childhood memory, and ending with her trip to Denmark in 1989. In the book's preface, Blakeslee says that wherever possible she has tried to be true to Ama Adhe's "stark narrative style." She successfully interweaves that voice with cultural and historical details, painting a rich, often painful, picture of the Tibetan tragedy.

The book is full of detailed and moving descriptions of Tibetans' experiences in Chinese prisons. For example, the account of her initial arrest:

Very early in the morning of October 16, 1958, I arose. Little Chimi was just waking up. I hugged him and dressed him in his tiny yellow *chuba* [jacket], securing its red sash and adjusting the cloth above it, as he stood sleepily looking into my eyes...Suddenly the sound of barking dogs attracted my attention. Lifting the tent flap I saw six armed Chinese policemen..."They're here to arrest me," I thought, and my legs began to feel weak...One man, then several more, came forward...they kicked and hit me, and I was struck very hard on my right ear...My son kept crying, screaming and calling, "Ama, Ama"...trying to reach me to grasp my dress, but soldiers kept pushing him back, kicking him hard with their boots...They dragged me outside...pulling me along the ground. As I was being taken away, I could hear...my children's voices calling from a long distance. For a while, it was possible to see the small terrified figure of my son running, trying to catch up.

Much later, she learned that her son had thrown himself into a nearby river and drowned, shortly after her arrest. She also learned that her mother had died during a famine, her brother had starved, and her sister had gone mad and died. Ama Adhe's story is not unique. As she says in her epilogue, "this book is a living testimony on behalf of Tibetans...it is the voice that remembers."

This January, after I had read her book, I saw Ama Adhe for a second time when I went to Dharamsala to pick up one of her best friends, a nun named Ani Pachen, whose story I am writing. She came to see us off, laden with bags of apples, cookies, chocolate. As we were leaving, she touched my forehead with hers, and put her large soft hands around mine. I noticed for the first time that one of them was disfigured. I felt a small shock as I remembered reading of the bamboo shoots that had been inserted beneath her nails—a common form of torture in Chinese prisons.

That those hands could still be so gentle, reflecting a heart free of bitterness, is a tribute not only to Ama Adhe, but to a people whose resilience and spirit seem unbreakable. ❖

*Daidie Donnelly has been involved in Buddhism for many years, and is currently writing a book about Ani Pachen, a Tibetan nun. Daidie has worked with community projects such as The Daily Bread Project, The Garden Project (for prisoners), and other programs that reconnect people with their food sources.*



***Bodhisattva Archetypes:  
Classic Buddhist Guides to Awakening  
and their Modern Expression***

by Taigen Daniel Leighton

Penguin Arkana, 364 pages, paper, \$14.95.

**Reviewed by Judith Stronach**

Taigen Leighton once told me that BPF is the main organization to carry the bodhisattva ideal. So what better reading than this book to celebrate BPF's 20th anniversary? To be a bodhisattva is to strive for the world's awakening, to turn back to the world after meditation with the insights and composure found there. Meditation is incomplete if our bodhisattva nature does not awaken. Taigen Leighton makes this luminously clear in his incisive and provocative book.

Leighton has found meaning in his own life as a bodhisattva. As a student at Columbia University he was active in SDS and against the Vietnam War. Later he became a Soto Zen priest. As a member of BPF, he organized a BPF conference at the San Francisco Zen Center in 1980 and also became involved in the neighborhood association there. Currently, he embodies his compassion by participating on the board of a homeless coalition and in various anti-nuclear and environmental groups. Leighton is also a scholar, having spent decades studying Buddhist texts with informed teachers, and he has translated many of the writings of Dogen.

The most apt word I can find for his current book is *integrated*. Leighton has integrated the teachings as only he can. He has made them his own. The results are original, and accessible in their clarity. He generously shows us the details of the path he has followed so we can feel the grit of the sand and pebbles beneath his feet. And he challenges us to become our own unique bodhisattva selves.

Leighton's thesis is that "by seeing the bodhisattvas as archetypes, patterns or approaches to awakening actions, we may learn models with which we can express the elements of our enlightening and beneficial nature." (p.3) He gives more than two thirds of this book to the major bodhisattva figures: Shakyamuni Buddha; Manjusri, bodhisattva of wisdom and insight; Samantabhadra, bodhisattva of enlightened activism; Avalokiteshvara (also known as Guanyin and Chenrezig), bodhisattva of compassion; Jizo, protector of women and children and bodhisattva to those in hell realms; Maitreya, bodhisattva of loving-kindness, and the future incarnate Buddha; and Vimalakirti, a wealthy lay disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who is a model of lay practice.

In the first third of the book, Leighton carefully lays out an overview of Mahayana history, philosophy and practice, including the Ten Transcendent Practices, or

*paramitas*. The paramitas are the means to realize oneself and to serve others: generosity, ethical conduct, patience, effort, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, vows, powers, and knowledge.

Each paramita, I believe, is necessary to awaken. Each reflects the reality discovered on awakening. Each keeps us on the path to sustain our awakened nature when the brilliance of insight wears off. And when we try to bring a dharmic perspective to problems in the world, Leighton reminds us to refer our actions back to the paramitas. Through the bodhisattva archetypes he opens up the subtle forms and textures of the paramitas, so words like "patience" ripple with nuance and new possibilities for meeting the world with benevolence.

In the book, each bodhisattva captures at least one Transcendent Practice. Maitreya, for instance, who waits eons for his own realization, must practice patience, finding peace with what is so, finding balance with what seems unsatisfactory. This recognition of unfulfilled potential as well as of great possibility in turn gives rise to loving-kindness. I found it helpful to look scrupulously at how the paramitas can be embodied. What paramitas do I feel to be my natural abode? What tools of kindness lie in my hands?

For each bodhisattva, Leighton describes their histories, related sutras, iconography, alternative forms, associated pilgrimage sites, prayers and venerations, folklore and teaching stories about them. I found these intellectually fascinating and also inwardly opening.

Leighton's boldest contribution is his gallery of exemplars, who personify aspects of the bodhisattvas. For instance, he uses Daniel Ellsberg to illustrate aspects of Siddhartha, who chose to leave the allure of worldly power after he was exposed to suffering. Leighton shows how not only St. Francis of Assisi, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Johnny Appleseed, but also Clint Eastwood, George Lucas, the Rockefellers, Christopher Reeve, and Muhammad Ali are powerful activists dedicated to visions of social change.

I'm grateful to Leighton for making the bodhisattvas approachable. Statues on altars are less mysterious now that I know who rides the elephant, who the lion. Many exemplars have strong shadow sides, which gives me hope that I, too, with my ancient twisted karma, might still be capable of magnanimity. Leighton points out that bodhisattvas are not usually glamorous celebrities. They are regular people who are expressing open-heartedness. The vow to save all beings remains as impossible as ever. But my desire to run from the enormity of social problems is diminished by the knowledge that these bodhisattva qualities are available in me and that they are also external forces that can express themselves through my work. ❖

*Judith Stronach is a former board member of BPF and a writer living in Berkeley, California.*



**Bringing Up Baby:****The Art and Science of Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Children**

by Barbara Hirshkowitz

***Free the Children! Conflict Education for Strong and Peaceful Minds***

by Susan Gingras Fitzell

New Society, 1997, 208 pages, \$15.95, paper.

***Motherlight***

by Betsy Rose

CD by Paper Crane Music, 510/528-1260, or 800/634-6044.

***The Tibetan Art of Parenting: From Before Conception Through Early Childhood***

by Anne Hubbell Maiden and Edie Farwell

Wisdom Publications, 1997, 186 pages, \$16.95, paper.

***Spiritual Parenting:******A Sourcebook for Parents and Teachers***

by Rabbi Steven M. Rosman

Quest Books, 1994, 134 pages, \$12, paper.

***Raising Spiritual Children in a Material World:******Introducing Spirituality into Family Life***

by Phil Catalfo

Berkeley Books, 1997, 256 pages, \$12, paper.

***Everyday Blessings:******The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting***

by Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn

Hyperion, 1997, 400 pages, \$22.95, hardbound.

***Meditating with Children:******The Art of Concentration and Centering***

by Deborah Rozman

Planetary Publications, 1994, 164 pages, \$14.95, paper.

These seven resources provide helpful insights and tools for any adult who wants to teach children social skills and spiritual values.

Those who raise children within established religious traditions may have relatively clear guidelines for childrearing. But if, as Phil Catalfo notes, one has stepped outside the faith community in which one was raised, as more and more people in the 20th century have done, then what guidelines are there? How does one teach children ethical values, conflict-resolution skills, good manners? How does one impart spiritual sensibilities?

The books reviewed here offer some of the most interesting current thinking on the topic. They offer

encouragement, helpful stories and examples, fresh ideas, and effective techniques developed through trial and error. They do not reflect a common ideal or a consensus about what is "right." Both childrearing and spiritual practice involve very personal choices, and nothing can replace one's own experiences and experiments.

A few common strands run through all these texts. They agree, for example, that a child benefits enormously from attention—especially mindful attention. This should come as no surprise. They note that children can discern whether adults are being authentic about their beliefs and feelings, and when adults are confused. It is ineffective to tell a child to "do as I say, not as I do." You are the role model, like it or not. And yet, these authors note, children are also our teachers—they know, deeply and intuitively, many important spiritual principles we adults may have forgotten. The chapter headings in *Everyday Blessings* convey this: "Live-in Zen Masters" and "An Eighteen-Year Retreat."

*Free the Children!*, crammed with resource lists, is not meant to be read cover-to-cover. It is designed to be a reference and research tool. It also gives a fantastic overview of age-appropriate methods for teaching conflict-resolution skills to children, from preschool through high school. Each chapter gives an overview of children at a particular stage of development, examples, and an extensive list of resources for more in-depth study.

Suppose, for example, that you are teaching a class of first-graders—or a single child of six. Chapter 3, "The Lower Elementary School Child," recommends making a Conflict Tool Box. It might contain a block with different emotions inscribed on each face, which a child can use to express feelings. Or a "jar of patience" the child can draw upon when necessary.

In the mode of a singer and storyteller, Betsy Rose shares wisdom she has gleaned from parenting on her new CD, *Motherlight*. The songs range from the humorous, encouraging "Mama's Milk" ("I called up La Leche, 'Am I doin' it right?") to the touching story of a girl who has a baby at 18 and gives the child up for adoption. With the last line—"Took her 22 years to write this song"—we understand the story is her own. The music is her own as well. She play guitar and sings in a voice full of heart.

*The Tibetan Art of Parenting*, written by a psychotherapist and a cultural anthropologist who are not Tibetan, attempts to give a thorough presentation of Tibetan customs surrounding conception, birth and early childhood. It is written from an outsider's perspective, and an academic one as well, and is based on extensive interviews with Tibetans in exile and on translated Tibetan texts.



Often, a different culture's perspective can help one see one's own culture more clearly. The low self-esteem that plagues so many American children (and adults), for example, is baffling to some Tibetans, including H.H. the Dalai Lama—the very concept is unfamiliar. Tibetan Buddhist culture offers a refreshing perspective and helpful guidance for parents anywhere. Many children are raised in and around monasteries. The monk Gyatso, asked about the ideal conditions for childrearing, said:

The most important aspect of Tibetan birth for people in other cultures to know is the value and use of spiritual ritual and initiations. When the baby smiles for the first time, celebrate it. When the baby walks for the first time, that is significant. Write it down. Capture the magic and celebration of each new development in an infant's life. Massage and bodily touch from the moment of birth are also essential to full development. And breastfeeding needs to happen as soon after birth as possible.

Although written by a rabbi, *Spiritual Parenting* draws inspiration from many religious traditions. Each of the three sections—Getting Ready, Going Outside and Going Inside—includes wonderfully detailed instructions, as well as encouragement to improvise and adapt to particular circumstances. The first section addresses an aspect of life often overlooked in our oh-so-busy modern world. It includes chapters on purification rituals and breathing exercises, as well as simple yoga routines. The middle section describes nine activities one can do, using nature as a base for spiritual experience. The third section addresses service to others:

Akiva [a famous rabbi and scholar] associated the performance of service, or mitzvot, with our growth toward unity and wholeness...With every breath we take, with every opening of our eyes, every sound we hear, with every raising of our voices, with every step we take, and with every reaching out of a hand, we have an exalted invitation to participate in the sacred task of moving ourselves and our world closer to wholeness.

The book is beautifully designed, the instructions clear and concise. Inviting paths are laid out, and who knows how deep and far they can take you?

*Raising Spiritual Children in a Material World* began life as an article in *New Age Journal*. Its style is chatty; its content is based partly on the author's experience parenting three children, and partly on sociological research. The author surveyed 350 families and interviewed a dozen at some length. Here you'll find quirky stories, ideas and advice, interesting data, tales of struggle. The emphasis is on adults rather than children, on process rather than technique.

For a thoughtful, evocative treatise on practice and parenting, see *Everyday Blessings*. The authors, Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn, are parents of three and long-time practitioners of meditation. They draw upon Buddhist stories and concepts along a winding path toward their

epilogue, "Seven Intentions and Twelve Exercises for Mindful Parenting." Although the book is not difficult to read, it rambles a bit, and the thread can be difficult to follow. Fortunately, the authors often remind the reader that, as with practice, one can always begin anew in this moment, and again in the next moment. This is indeed valuable when the child sitting in your lap is asking you to read the same story—a story you might not like—for the umpteenth time. They note that the child experiences the story fresh each time, and so could you. An especially noteworthy chapter is "Letters to a Young Girl Interested in Zen," correspondence with a friend's young daughter.

Last but not least is *Meditating with Children*, revised. The book is organized for use with children in groups, but can be used with individuals, as well. Children of any age can learn to meditate, but it's best if all children in a group are roughly the same age. The book provides clear, step-by-step instructions and suggests follow-up activities. The author wrote it because she wished someone had taught her to meditate as a child. Her philosophy is summed up at the end of the introduction:

The deeper that teachers, parents, and children, together, learn to find their real hearts and communicate from there, the more they increase their appreciation and understanding of each other. The result is a happier, more caring and productive learning environment. ❖

## San Francisco Zen Center

### Beginner's Mind Temple

300 Page St. San Francisco CA 94102

Phone (415) 863-3136

e-mail: sf-zen@pacbell.net

### Green Gulch Farm

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## BOOKS IN BRIEF

### *Buddhism and Human Rights*

edited by Damien V. Keown, Charles S. Prebish,  
and Wayne R. Husted

University of Hawaii Press, 1997, 240 pps., \$48, cloth.

The genesis of this book was an on-line conference in October 1995 sponsored by the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. The book begins by reprinting the UN Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in December 1948, proceeds with a series of essays, including remarks by His Holiness from a speech given in Vienna in 1993 on "Human Rights and Universal Responsibility," and concludes with an extensive, annotated bibliography organized by subject and including online resources. The essays are thoroughly researched and scholarly, but not dull. Be prepared for a rigorous intellectual workout, as with this excerpt from Strain:

True to the meaning of their tradition, engaged Buddhists will seek a middle path between Western social models built on greed, insatiable desire and hatred and the repressive models of State socialism. Likewise, each of us creates distinctive forms of practice for engaging in the struggle for human rights. For engaged Buddhists, following a middle path to secure basic rights will require a mindful awareness that resists the inclination to find solutions either in social engineering or in individual conversion.

Two disappointing elements about the book are its lack of women authors and the high price.

### *The Complete Guide to Buddhist America*

edited by Don Morreale, foreword by the Dalai Lama  
Shambhala, 1998, 448 pages, \$23.95, paper.

The front cover describes this book as "the most comprehensive introduction to Buddhism in America—with dozens of articles by leading Buddhist teachers, scholars, and students, and detailed listings to over a thousand Buddhist meditation centers in the United States and Canada." Cross-indexed by name as well as location, this volume functions well as a guidebook, though it will not fit into your pocket. The book is divided into four sections, reflecting the major paths of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, and a fourth called "Buddhayan: Nonsectarian Buddhism and Mixed Traditions." Here you will find a very brief description of BPF and a somewhat longer passage on the BASE program.

There's more than one lifetime of possibilities listed here for investigation. Wonderful photographs of many of the authors and a clear design make this an invaluable tool for any seeker, useful for search, research, and tasting the many flavors of contemporary western Buddhism. Both the reality of *so muchness* and of putting it between covers is an awesome accomplishment.

### *The Zen of Eating: Ancient Answers to Modern Weight Problems*

by Ronna Kabatnick

Perigee Books, 1998, 208 pages, \$13, paper.

This excellent book is not only for people with weight problems but for anyone interested in using food as a focus of practice. The author extends "an invitation to transform the emotional hungers that create eating problems into spiritual nourishment that creates inner peace." The book first takes up the four noble truths and looks at the interplay between taking physical nourishment and finding emotional sustenance, giving many opportunities for daily practice. Chapters on the eightfold path include recipes (exercises) that apply the precepts to the problems. For example, "Don't kill your difficult feelings or emotions by eating" and "Don't steal by taking more food than you need." Engaged Buddhists will find information about food politics and thought-provoking ways that food can be used in social justice work.

Both traditional teaching stories and contemporary experiences are used as illustration. While steeped in research, the book has a bite-by-bite approach that makes for a tasty, mindful meal, though it may take a lifetime to digest.

### *Walking on Lotus Flowers: Buddhist Women Living, Loving and Meditating*

by Martine Batchelor

Thorsons, an imprint of HarperCollins, 1996, 224 pages, \$18, paper.

Adding to the growing body of work on women and Buddhism, *Walking on Lotus Flowers* presents interviews with 18 women practitioners from all over the world, some well known and some not. Each interview gives a brief description of a Buddhist practitioner and her thoughts on a variety of issues, including meditation practice, finding a path, social justice, being a nun, relationship to creativity, etc. The breadth of thinking contained in this book is amazing. Here's just a taste from a young Korean nun, Jongmok Sunim, who does a weekly radio show called "Helping Our Neighbor in Difficulty."

Sometimes I answer the phone for our Buddhist on-line phone service, called the Compassion Line. Until recently there was no Buddhist counseling telephone service because a telephone was seen as a machine, with materialistic and mechanistic connotations. Buddhists have a tendency to see themselves beyond matter. However, society is changing, the telephone has become an ordinary part of life, and we realize people benefit from telephone consultation and counseling.

As with any book relying on brief encounters, the reader is sometimes left with many questions and a desire to hear more, before moving on to the next chapter.



***Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter****edited by Amy Morgante*

Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC), 1997, 92 pages, \$3, staple bound. Available from BRC, 396 Harvard St., Cambridge, MA 02138. E-mail: [brc21c@aol.com](mailto:brc21c@aol.com).

After a foreword by Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International, and an introduction by Virginia Straus, executive director of BRC, nine essays follow, giving various perspectives on the Earth Charter and how it does and does not reflect a Buddhist land ethic. Contributors include Stephanie Kaza, Yoichi Kawada, Sallie King, and Steven Rockefeller.

A very well-thought-out yet brief document, it includes a copy of the Earth Charter as approved at the UN meeting on the environment in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in March, 1997. Anyone interested in environmental ethics will find this a rich resource. Kaza sums it up: "The Earth Charter is a call for karmic responsibility, for generating awareness around the consequences of individual and corporate actions."

***Engaging Buddhism: The Active Integration of Inner and Outer Peace***

A collection of articles from *Indra's Net*, Journal of the UK Network of Engaged Buddhists.

*edited by Martin Pitt*

40 pages, \$6.40, staple-bound. Available from BPF office.

As expressed by the title, this slim volume covers a lot of ground, with interesting articles by Ken Jones, Christopher Titmuss, and Adam Curle, among others. The subjects range from "The Dharma of Fox Hunting" to a piece about the Galapagos Islands called "Of Boobies and Buddhas," in which author Agnes Smith ruminates on meat-eating. This booklet is a good way for us to stay connected to our engaged Buddhist cousins in the U.K. Includes an extensive, annotated bibliography of engaged Buddhist resources organized by subject.

***International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, May 24, 1998****edited by Shelley Anderson*

Special publication by International Fellowship of Reconciliation and International Peace Bureau. 32 pages, staple-bound. Contact IFOR, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, Netherlands, or e-mail: [office@ifor.ccmil.compuserve.com](mailto:office@ifor.ccmil.compuserve.com).

Contains both long and short articles on work-in-progress all over the world by women for women, on issues ranging from nuclear disarmament to justice for "comfort women," from home-brew awareness to rape. Includes a directory of women's organizations, by country. An excellent networking tool for anyone interested in or working on women's issues. ❖

**Chittagong (Continued from page 32)**

our contact fresh even though foreigners were banned from the CHT for many years. But monks, organizers, and church groups knew we were watching. Over and over as I traveled, hill people expressed gratitude for BPF's attention and support. It is important to them to be heard by people from the outside world.

The short time I spent in Bangladesh was not easy. With my friends Ven. Bodhinyana and Sister Cecilia, a Catholic nun, I traveled to the cities of Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar, and Teknaf, far from the capital of Dhaka. I saw burned-out homes of poor Hindus, desecrated stupas, a rickshaw driver collapsed by the roadside, and officious military police at checkpoints in the CHT. In the streets, young mothers held out their frail babies and beseeched us for alms.

But I also met curious, friendly, generous people of many ethnicities. From the bus window, I could see Bengali men walking arm in arm, coming home from the fields in early evening. In Dhaka and Rangamati we visited Banophool and Moanaghar, two large schools and orphanages housing hundreds of children from the CHT. They are partly financed by Partage, a French organization founded by Thich Nhat Hanh's student Pierre Marchand, who personally took on his teacher's message to save the world's children.

Distilling needs is a slow process. From discussions at the Ordained Sangha meeting and long talks with Santikaro Bhikkhu, Brother Jarlath D'Souza, Ven. Sumanalankar, Ven. Bodhinyana, and others, we are evolving a long-range plan so that monks in the Hill Tracts can help their own people. This plan—jointly undertaken by BPF, INEB, and BPF-Bangladesh, calls for dhamma education, meditation instruction, critical thinking, non-violence training, and reconciliation work. It calls for great patience, and we all wonder whether we can act in time.

As night falls, the children at Parbatya Bouddha Mission chant their lessons in dimly lit dormitories. From their separate spaces, girls' and boys' voices mingle in nearby fields. The sweet, musical sound contrasts with the violence they have all witnessed. How close to the surface the violence is, even in myself. How vulnerable these children are. In Bangladesh I could also see the illusion we have in the West that our own vulnerability is protected, buried beneath layers of self and possession. When we stand with these children, with the hill people, we set aside all separation and allow our true vulnerability to arise. The Chittagong Hill Tracts are very close. I wish I could show you more. ❖

*If you want to learn more or support the CHT training program organized by BPF, INEB, and BPF-Bangladesh, contact me by mail or e-mail at the BPF office: [bpfbpf.org](mailto:bpfbpf.org). Please mark any donations "CHT" in the memo section of your check. Thank you. —Alan Senauke*



# WHAT TO DO ABOUT BPF'S TWENTIETH

This column has traditionally dwelt on specific “what-to-do” actions related to the theme of the issue. Although such listings may seem random and/or overwhelming, we hope they have occasionally been helpful. This anniversary presents an occasion to consider the process of our Buddhist activism: how the practice of present mind leads towards action, how we take first steps, how we keep in touch and share what we do, how we heal the world and ourselves together.

## 1. Moving towards action.

The military buildup aimed at Iraq at the start of this year shocked many into action. Vajrayana teachings remind us to be grateful to our enemy. Those with an activist bent revved up their social-change energy while others committed themselves to small but significant actions, such as making their first phone calls ever to the White House. During this crisis a sense of collective responsibility was aroused; the first Bodhisattva vow, to save all sentient beings, became urgent.

At this writing, the level of crisis has slipped back to normal. We are accustomed enough to the violence in the fabric of our everyday lives, so that mostly, we don't feel any acute disturbance. This is when the focus of practice may narrow towards our personal suffering, towards what we “get” from practice. The understanding that personal suffering is not different from world suffering slackens. But the vow to awaken with, or to save, all beings implies complete responsibility. Of course, we are not ready for this (most of us), and we have to be mindful of the balance between taking care of our inner wounds and taking care of the world's wounds, as we carry ourselves peacefully and mindfully forward. However, we do need to be alert to the possibility that Buddhist practice can lull us into a limited and therefore false equanimity. We do need to ask, continually, how we are moving *towards* the suffering of the world. We need to identify and acknowledge the pain of insufficient action.

## 2. Taking the first steps.

Setting forth from the comforts of home and habit to address the structural violence around us is like trying to get a foothold on a steep, icy slope. We need help from one another to do it. Taking action against Goliath usually has a marginalizing, disorienting quality. Intention and plan may be relatively clear and then the action itself often has a lonely, ragged quality. As you explain your position to a senator's aide, you begin to sound muddled. As you wonder what to do in a homeless day center or an AIDS center living room, or, in a demonstration, as you carry a white cardboard cof-

fin down a busy street, you may feel foolish, disjointed, ridiculous. “What is it that I'm trying to do?”

From a Buddhist perspective, this “I-don't-know” quality has great value; such confusion can be the ground of transformation *if and when* we have the intention, faith and support to nurture it. These are the strengths we need to build into our Buddhist sangha. We need to find community that is both local and national, so that no matter where we are—cooking at a shelter, standing out in the rain with a sign, corresponding with a prisoner or writing a postcard to Washington—we know we are acting with all beings and, invisible as the action may seem, it is making a difference. Our confidence in this difference is supported by our experience in meditation: that in each moment we return to the present, awakened mind manifests.

## 3. Encouraging, networking, supporting, inspiring; identifying Avalokiteshvara's thousand arms.

Many seeds of engagement have sprouted in Buddhist sanghas over the past couple of years. Social action is widely viewed as a legitimate and important form of practice. Sanghas and individuals are on the lookout for what they can do. BASE, the first activist BPF program, began in 1995 and is spawning graduates across the country. The BPF Board is developing a Prison Project that will help to coordinate the diverse and widespread work being done nationwide. There is a renewed interest in BPF chapters and in action-oriented sangha groups. More members who do not have a sangha affiliation or group in their area are calling in to become “contact persons.” E-mail and the BPF website make our larger map more visible. A number of us are hopeful about starting a Peace Action House, where we can live and work together, and conspire to take on the hard issues of systemic violence in closer concert with one another.

Western Buddhist practice is very young. We have been greedy for the fruits of meditation and we have been profoundly instructed and rewarded. Our present challenge is to discover how to address the suffering of our social systems with the same constancy and equanimity that we apply to hindrances in our own minds. The bodhisattva does not have expectations about world change, but never stops persevering, because without action, there cannot be connection. We often don't know what to do, but we can discover through our practice what we *can* do. Joanna Macy has posed our Twentieth Anniversary question: “How can we become simply *present* to what is going on and let it become real to us?” Right action will naturally follow. ❖

—Maylie Scott



## BPF ACTIVIST NEWS

### Of historical interest:

In BPF's April, 1984, *Newsletter*, the Chapter News column describes a phenomenon still true of BPF's local chapters 14 years later: they "continue to emerge, change and go dormant, all in all bringing much energy to BPF as a whole." From our earliest days, chapters have experimented with meeting formats, actions, and outreach.

The first BPF chapters were formed in Los Angeles and Rochester, New York. The first meeting of the San Francisco Bay Area Buddhist Peace Fellowship was held December 12, 1982. Forty-two people from a variety of sanghas met for a day. Patrick McMahon wrote in *No Need to Kill*, "as well as Buddhism, we shared concern for the precarious situation of today's world, a growing sense of responsibility for that situation, and an intuition that responsibility is part of the Buddha way."

The International Advisory Board formed in 1984. That same year, the regular Board "reaffirmed its intent to reach out" to ethnic American Buddhist communities.

By 1984 there were eight U.S. chapters: San Francisco Bay Area, California; Boulder, Colorado; Honolulu, Hawaii; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Providence, Rhode Island; Rochester, New York; Woodstock/New York City, New York; and Salt Lake City, Utah; as well as the first Overseas Affiliates in Lismore, Australia and Kent, England.

Chapter activities have been varied. From the earliest days, chapters organized "Despair and Empowerment" workshops led by Joanna Macy, a founder and early board member. She will lead a similar workshop in June, to help launch a revived Twin Cities, Minnesota chapter.

Chapters have invited international activists to speak at meetings, held letter-writing evenings, vigiled and protested, and done nonviolent civil disobedience at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, Vandenberg Air Force Base, and other sites where nuclear weapons were, and in some cases still are, manufactured or stored.

By 1990 there were 20 BPF chapters; now there are more than 40 chapters, contacts and affiliates. We welcome inquiries from BPF members who are interested in developing new chapters. Please call the BPF office if you'd like to explore this.

### More recent news:

Iraq vigils have been a focus for several groups. In **New York**, about 30 people gathered with candles in Washington Square Park on March 2. In late February, the **Arcata** group stood with umbrellas spelling "No War" at a rally protesting U.S. military buildup. BPF member Gordon Anderson spoke about why sanctions against Iraq are ineffective. At these actions, BPF networked with other local peace groups. The **North Carolina** group, for example, participated in a vigil

organized by North Carolina Peace Action. In **Berkeley**, BPF co-sponsored a Town Meeting with the American Friends Service Committee and Peace Action. At that meeting, BPF member Karen Payne invited others to join her in a public funeral for Iraqi children who have died as a result of sanctions. The next week a small procession of people dressed in black carried small coffins through San Francisco's financial district.

Other chapters are joining with Buddhist groups in their areas for ecumenical celebrations. The **Milwaukee** BPF chapter met with seven of the 10 Buddhist groups in town, including a Vietnamese group, for an ecumenical celebration of Buddha's birthday. The **Yellow Springs**, Ohio chapter held the first of a series of inter-faith dialogues between various spiritual groups in the area. In **Foster City**, south of San Francisco, BPF members are connecting with a local Community of Mindful Living for weekly meditation and study, and will begin exploring action possibilities. In **New York**, Val DuBasky will act as coordinator for the next few months, while Amy Krantz travels in India.

**For information on Bay Area BASE groups for Fall 1998, call the BPF office. ❖ —Tova Green**

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## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I am not big on anniversaries. Twenty years of Buddhist Peace Fellowship—we don't even know the exact day—and there is so little time to reflect. The phone and e-mail beckon. Here in the office we must attend to practice and projects...and pay the bills. We try to recollect our breath and the present moment. Of course there are spaces for reflection and appreciation; then it's back to work. My own nature seems to urge me to get on with it.

But my time at BPF since 1991 has been widening, rich, surprising, and sometimes difficult—for me and for an organization coming of age. We have seen our circle expand greatly, and we have also seen socially engaged Buddhism take root on the hard rock of so-called Western civilization. More and more, the idea of what we're doing finds currency with practitioners and dharma communities. That is tremendously encouraging. Even though there is still war, personal cruelty, and structural violence in the world, we have more tools available for understanding and ending such suffering. It feels necessary and good to be a part of that movement.

For more than seven years, my life has been bound up with BPF. Like a marriage: for better and worse. Better and worse is okay with me. Better and worse steps away from idealization, walking into the real. Carrying on with BPF's work and history is a great honor. I try to do it as steadily and doggedly as I can.

If *Turning Wheel* Editor Sue Moon had given me unlimited space for this column, I could name and bow to all the friends, family, teachers, and board members who have helped me keep my seat all these years. Too many to list briefly. They are constantly providing me with inspiration, direction, and criticism. Nothing would be possible without them.

In early May we had our first National Board retreat at Vajrapani, a Tibetan retreat center in the redwoods not far from Santa Cruz, California. Stretching out our usually intense schedule of business, for once we had



Board/staff retreat at Vajrapani. Standing, left to right: Pam Siller, Petra McWilliams, Maylie Scott, Paula Green, Greg Mello, Melody Ermachild Chavis, Sue Moon, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Donald Rothberg. Sitting: Mark Kunkel, Alan Senauke, Peter Wood, Tova Green, Barbara Hirsbkowitz, Lewis Woods

time as well for meditation and long walks, time for sharing our lives beyond the BPF work we all do together. It was also wonderful to meet at a dharma center run by friends, to eat their good food, and to do our engaged Buddhist work surrounded by bright images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protectors in a shrine room blessed by the Dalai Lama. We came away refreshed and recommitted to the widening scope of our work—BASE, the prison program, education and training, international support, and more.

My last column in *Turning Wheel* was written on the eve of impending military action against Iraq, and of my travels to Bangladesh and Thailand. Well, thanks in part to the peacemaking skills of Kofi Annan, the U.S. government stopped just short of bombing Iraq. But punitive and ineffective sanctions still apply. Children are still dying in Iraq.

My trip to Bangladesh was hard and productive. I write in more detail about it elsewhere in this issue (see p. 32). My mind keeps coming back to the people there, to their great energy and unimaginable poverty. Where am I in this intimate circle?

Today's news is political upheaval in Indonesia, ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo; schoolyard gunfire and death in Springfield, Oregon; nuclear testing and competition between India and Pakistan. At the second Buddhism in America Conference in San Diego at the end of May, Zen teacher John Tarrant spoke about what the poet John Keats called "negative capability." This is not the capacity for evil, as you might suppose, but in Keats' words, is the ability to live "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." My practice and intuition says this is of utmost importance. And what is my next step? ❖

—Alan Senauke

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**HOMELESS AND HOUSED** people meet weekly in Berkeley, California, for meditation and discussion. Volunteers from Berkeley Zen Center and East Bay Insight Meditation facilitate sessions oriented toward stress reduction. Free coffee and bagels. Mondays, 7:30 to 9 p.m., 2345 Dana St., Berkeley. For more info, call the Chaplaincy to the Homeless at 510/548-0551. All are welcome.

**INEB IN BANGKOK** is hiring an Executive Secretary, to begin in Feb., 1999. Salary is equivalent to other Thai NGOs. Send CV plus a letter describing interest by Oct. 30 to INEB, PO Box 19, Mahadthai Post Office, Bangkok 10206, Thailand. E-mail: [ineb@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:ineb@loxinfo.co.th).

**GREEN CITY VOLUNTEER NETWORK** lists over 430 Bay Area green environmental groups who are offering services and/or looking for volunteers. For free environmental information and referrals, give the network a call at 415/285-6556.

**THE CONCH-US TIMES**, the Journal of the Dead Buddhists of America, for those appreciating both Grateful Dead and Buddhist Cultures: \$8/yr. Payable to: Ken Sun-Downer, Box 769, Idyllwild, CA 92549.

**SOCIAL CHANGE SANGHA.** A sangha for those interested in blending mindfulness practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh and social change work is forming in the Berkeley-Oakland area. If interested contact Lawrence (e-mail is best: [le@dnai.com](mailto:le@dnai.com); or call 510/482-0750).

**PRISON SANGHA.** Theravadin group in Michigan requests books, tapes, incense, robes, pictures or posters of Buddha, an altar cloth, and a visit from a Bikkhu. Contact Richard L. Kaufman, #224865, Riverside Correctional Facility, 777 West Riverside Dr., Ionia, MI 48846.

**BISEXUAL BUDDHIST ASSOC.** affirming unity, positive self-image, and bisexual identity for those committed to meditation and mindfulness practice. P.O. Box 858, Amherst, MA 01004.

**SUPPORT HOMELESS PEOPLE:** The Berkeley Ecumenical Chaplaincy to the Homeless is seeking supporters for its "Community of Compassion," a group of people underwriting monthly rent for the Haste St. Transitional House, which seeks to empower adults in their move to permanent housing. This interfaith program involves homeless people in counseling, volunteer work, job development and community living. For information, write: 2345 Channing Way, Berkeley, CA 94704, or call 510/548-0551.

**HELPING HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN:** You can help by donating personal care items that are greatly needed—toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, hair brushes, combs, and hand lotion—to the Women's Daytime Drop-in Center in Berkeley. Volunteers are also needed to work with the women and children. For more information call: 510/548-6933.

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

**GAY BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP:** sittings, speakers, and discussions every Thursday evening and every other Sunday morning in San Francisco. Classes, workshops, retreats, monthly potluck dinners, and work in Buddhist AIDS projects. Newsletter, with information and articles on topics of concern to gay Buddhists, available for \$15/8 issues. (See inside back cover for address).

**FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION 1998 NAT'L CONFERENCE,** "A Future of Nonviolence," July 15-19, Milford, Indiana. Gathering of activists from around the country and world to discuss how nonviolence can transform injustice and oppression. Issues include Israel/Palestine, South Africa, gay/lesbian rights, youth and violence, death penalty, worker justice. 914/358-4601 P.O. Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960. E-mail: [formembers@igc.org](mailto:formembers@igc.org).

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For more information, see page 31 of this issue.



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# BPF CHAPTERS & AFFILIATES

## BPF NATIONAL OFFICE

P.O. Box 4650  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
Tel. 510/655-6169  
Fax: 510/655-1369

## CHAPTERS

### BOSTON, MA

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

### COLORADO

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

### DEKALB, IL

PRAIRIE BUDDHA  
Estelle von Zellen  
136 Ilehamwood Dr.  
DeKalb, IL 60115  
815/756-2801

### EAST BAY, CA

Sandy Hunter  
1409 Oxford St. #3  
Berkeley, CA 94709  
510/654-8677

### EUGENE, OR

Steve "Faddah" Wolf  
P.O. Box 744  
Eugene, OR 97440  
541/465-8687

### HONOLULU, HI

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

### LOS ANGELES, CA

Kara Steiniger  
732 Howard St.  
Venice, CA 90202  
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### MILWAUKEE, WI

Paul Norton  
3238 N. Shepard Ave.  
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### NEW YORK, NY

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c/o Mandala Institute  
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916/481-0424

### SAN DIEGO, CA

Ava Torre-Bueno  
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619/266-2442

### SEATTLE, WA

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### SONOMA COUNTY, CA

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743 West Sparrow Rd.  
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937/327-9491

## CONTACTS

### ALBANY, NY

Beverly Petiet  
8 Wendell Drive  
Albany, NY 12205-3222  
518/438-9102

### ARCATA, CA

Mark Pringle  
P.O. Box 2085  
Trinidad, CA 95570  
707/677-0429

### CAPE COD/SOUTHEAST MA

Chuck Hotchkiss  
P.O. Box 354  
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### CHARLOTTE, NC

Bob Repoley  
P.O.Box 26938  
Charlotte, NC 28221  
704/597-3737

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Meghan Caughey  
25111 Webster Ave.  
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### NEVADA CITY, CA

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### NORTHEAST OHIO

Matt Wascovich  
P.O. Box 252  
Elyria, OH 44035  
216/556-2847

### OKLAHOMA

Jill Lacher Holmes  
P.O. Box 981  
Stillwater, OK 74076  
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### PHILADELPHIA, PA

Barbara Hirshkowitz  
4709 Windsor  
Philadelphia, PA 19143  
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### SANTA FE, NM

Greg Mello  
204 Alto Lane  
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### YAKIMA, WA

Douglas C. Ray  
261 Rowberry Way  
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## AFFILIATES

### BPF AUSTRALIA

(MELBOURNE)  
Jill Jameson  
9 Waterloo Crescent  
St. Kilda 3182, Victoria  
Australia

### BPF AUSTRALIA

(SYDNEY)  
Gillian Coote  
31 Bonnefin St.  
Hunters Hill, NSW 2110  
Australia

### BPF BANGLADESH

Brother Jarlath D'Souza  
St. Joseph's School, Hsad  
Gate, Mohammedpur  
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81 Honyashiki  
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Aichi 446, Japan  
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### KARUNA CENTER

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

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A benefit for Buddhist Peace Fellowship's BASE program

Suggested Donation—\$12

Co-sponsored by Buddhist Peace Fellowship and GAIA

For information, call BPF at 510-433-9128

## BPF

## 20th Birthday Party!

Saturday, September 19, 1-5 PM

Tilden Park, Mineral Springs picnic area, Berkeley

Bring your friends, family, and a picnic.

Call 510-655-6169 for more information.

### Buddhist Peace Fellowship

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