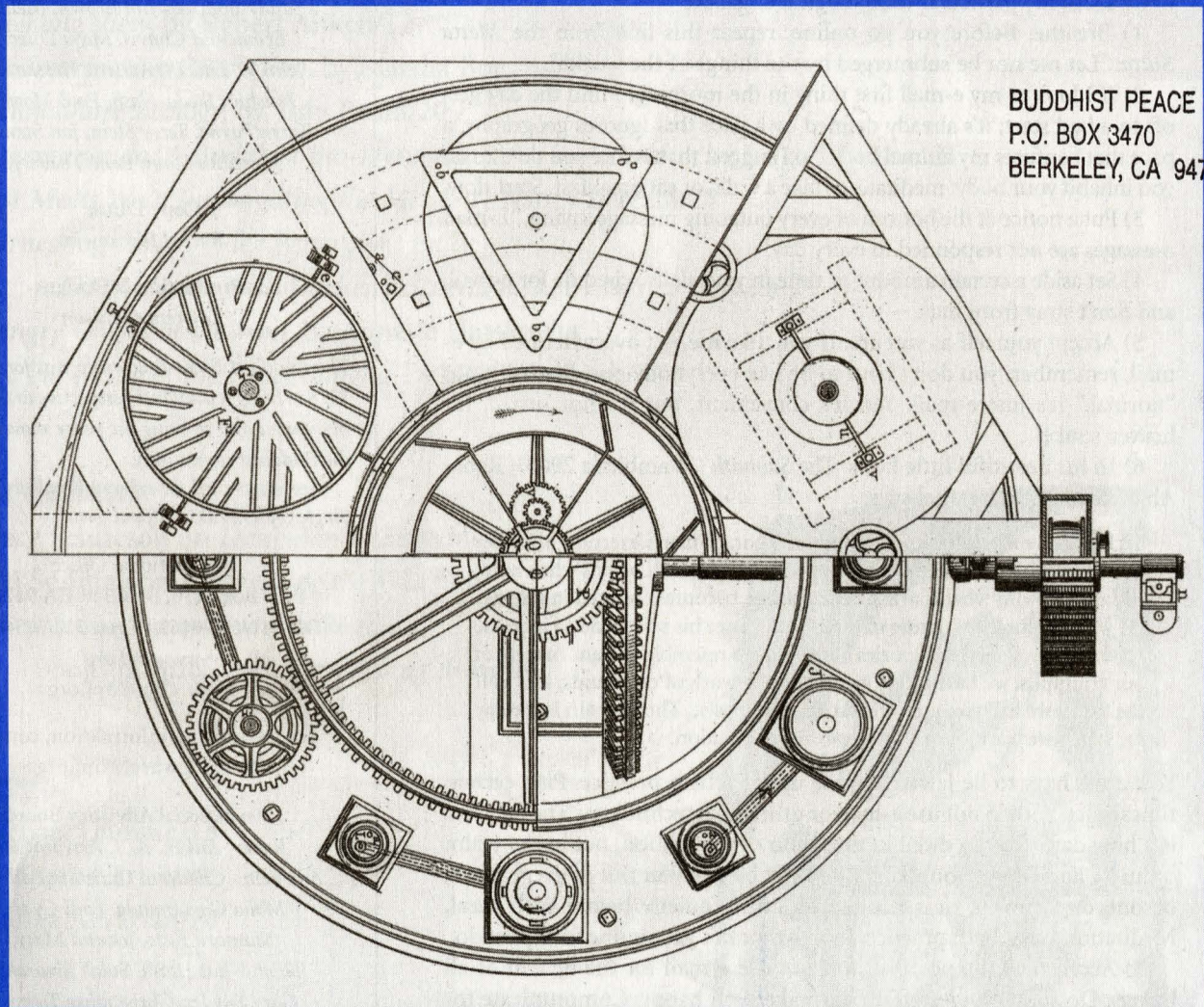


# TURNING WHEEL

*The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism*



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## TECHNOLOGY & MIND

*Plus: Robert Aitken Finds Hope in Human Power  
and Tofu Roshi Holds Forth on Answering Machines*





## From the Editor

I was going to use my editorial to go on a rant about how e-mail is ruining my life. At work today I received 50 messages, including 27 ads for various mortgages, plus the usual smattering of penis enlargement ads and lottery scams. Just deleting them takes time. Is this what I want to do with my precious human birth?

But I must admit that such downward-spiraling conversations are becoming a habit with me—a comfortable trap. My friends either join me in grouching at the alienating effects of computer technology, or they defend computers as instruments of peace and point out to me my own hypocrisy as a user, but either way it feels like the same conversation. So I'll skip the rant and speak instead about practicing with things as they are. How can I work with technology without feeling enslaved by it? I offer a few suggestions about my particular technological bugaboo.

1) Breathe. Before you go online, repeat this line from the *Metta Sutta*: "Let me not be submerged by the things of the world."

2) If I look at my e-mail first thing in the morning, I find the day gets off to a bad start; it's already defined by a pace that ignores geography, a pace that confuses my animal body. So I suggest that before you do e-mail, you inhabit your body: meditate, or take a walk, or eat breakfast. Start slow.

3) Put a notice at the bottom of every outgoing message saying, "E-mail messages are not responded to every day."

4) Set aside a certain amount of time in your daily schedule for e-mail, and don't stray from that.

5) Accept yourself as you are. If you, like me, get overwhelmed by e-mail, remember: you don't have to be like everybody else. E-mail is not "normal." It's just e-mail. Yes, it's convenient, but it's not *sacred*, for heaven's sake!

6) In his beautiful little book *The Sabbath* (Shambhala 2003), Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel says:

Technical civilization is the product of labor, of man's exertion of power for the sake of gain, for the sake of producing goods. It begins when man, dissatisfied with what is available in nature, becomes engaged in a struggle with the forces of nature in order to enhance his safety and to increase his comfort.... Yet our victories have come to resemble defeats. In spite of our triumphs, we have fallen victims to the work of our hands; it is as if the forces we had conquered had conquered us.... The Sabbath is the day on which we learn the art of *surpassing* civilization.

You don't have to be Jewish to take up a Sabbath practice. Plan certain times when you do not use e-mail or other such technology. The Sabbath is a holy day, a day to dwell in the realm of celebration, not in the realm of hurry and worry. Your Sabbath might be one year out of every seven, or one day a week, or a minute of sitting quietly before each meal. Meditation is Sabbath practice, too—you can't get on line in the zendo.

7) Accentuate the positive. You *can* use e-mail for the benefit of all beings. Do something with it that makes you happy. Communicate for free with someone you love who is far away. Join MoveOn.org, and help to change the world.

8) Breathe again, look up from the screen, and thank the universe for your precious human birth. ❖ —Susan Moon

Coming deadlines for *Turning Wheel*:

Winter '04: **Refuge and Shelter**. Deadline: September 1, 2004

Spring '05: **No Theme**. Deadline: March 1, 2005

Send submissions of essays, poetry, drawings, or photographs to *Turning Wheel*, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703, with SASE; or to <turningwheel@bpf.org>.

We also welcome letters. Send to "Editor" at address above or via e-mail.

# TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



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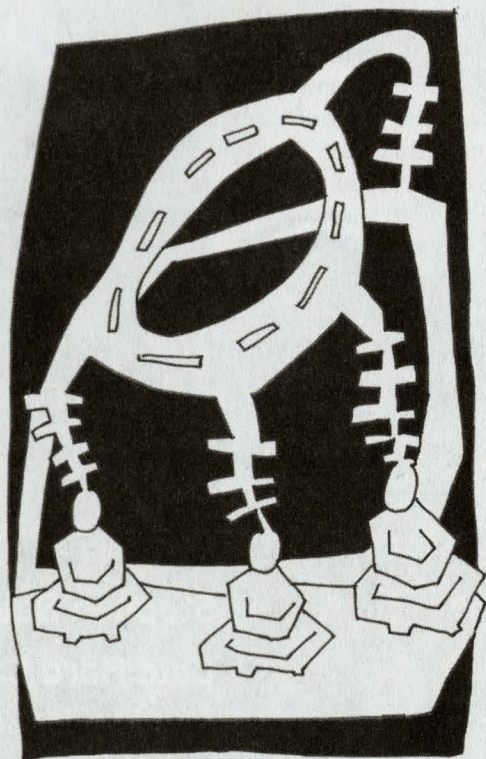


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THE RIDDLE OF DESIRE

Alan Ball's  
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## Letters

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

### On Pema Chödrön's talk

I must work hard every day to release my anger and work with peace within me in these trying times. I am most often not successful, but I keep practicing. I understand the message presented in Pema Chödrön's article, but I myself cannot equate bigotry with compassion, murder with love nor terrorism with bearing witness. And yet Pema Chödrön quoted Jarvis Masters doing just that. [In her article, Pema quotes Jarvis Masters, who, after observing the faces of demonstrators on TV, writes, "Sometimes they're wearing Klan outfits, sometimes they're wearing Greenpeace outfits, sometimes they're wearing suits and ties, but they all have the same angry faces."]

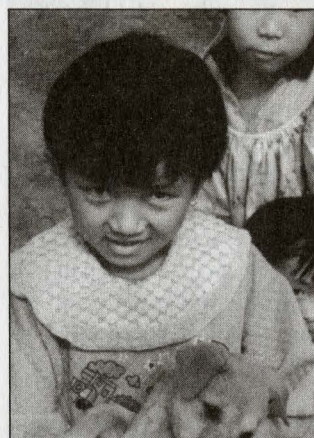
To compare the Ku Klux Klan and Greenpeace is at best disingenuous and at worst slanderous. The KKK is an organization based in violence and bigotry. Greenpeace is an organization dedicated to bearing witness to injustice and greed. In the early days it was angry in its voice but never violent in its actions. The men and women of Greenpeace risk their lives to bear witness in places all over the world. What possessed Mr. Masters to equate the KKK and Greenpeace?

—Sandy Olson

### Response from Jarvis Masters:

What I said was that the angry faces are the same. Not their hearts, not their hatred, not their convictions. The comparison was of the same ol' angry faces—nothing more, nothing less. Neither Pema nor I were "equating bigotry with compassion." No matter who we are, no matter how just we are, the face of anger belongs to whoever wears it. I could never equate the KKK to Greenpeace, but I do know anger is anger is anger. And what Pema was saying, I believe, is that all anger comes from hardening our hearts, no matter what "side" we find ourselves on.

—Jarvis Masters, San Quentin State Prison,  
San Quentin, California



### AN APPEAL TO HELP SAVE TIBET

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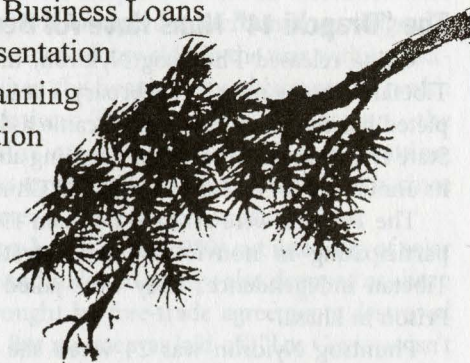
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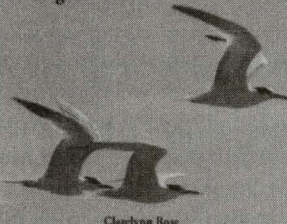
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# Indra's Net

Compiled by Annette Herskovits

*In the image of the "jeweled net of Indra," found in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the universe is represented as an infinite network of jewels, each of which reflects all the others. We are always struck in putting this section together by the way all our lives touch each other, as symbolized by Indra's Net.*

## The "Drapchi 14" Nuns Have All Been Released

China released Phuntsog Nyidron, the last of the 14 Tibetan "singing nuns," in February, a year before she completed her sentence. Her release came a day after the U.S. State Department denounced "ongoing abuses" in Tibet in its annual report on human rights in China.

The 14 nuns were arrested between 1989 and 1992 for participating in nonviolent demonstrations calling for Tibetan independence. They were jailed in the Drapchi Prison in Lhasa.

Phuntsog Nyidron was 24 when she was arrested in 1989. She was reportedly tortured and given a nine-year sentence. In 1993, she and 13 companions secretly recorded independence songs on a tape that was smuggled out of the prison; these became a rallying cry for supporters of the Dalai Lama. One song went:

*The ruler of this land  
Is the Compassionate Avalokitesvara.  
Under his compassionate and benevolent leadership  
The people of this land love peace.*

Another depicted conditions in Drapchi:

*The food is like pigs' swill,  
The beatings are violent,  
The prison years unending.*

The nuns were charged with "spreading counterrevolutionary propaganda" and their sentences were extended. Phuntsog Nyidron was treated most harshly, receiving eight additional years because she had been the "chant mistress" in her tiny nunnery.

Tibet activists launched a worldwide campaign to free the 14 nuns. Thousands of postcards were sent to the Chinese government, and there were concerts, vigils, and protests at Chinese consulates.

One nun, Ngawang Lochoe, died in prison at age 28 in 2001. Most served their full sentences and now suffer from long-term illnesses as a result of beatings and torture. They are still under tight surveillance, which increases the difficulty of resettling in society.

## Western Amazonia: The Reunion of the Eagle and the Condor

Santiago Kawarim sits at a computer in San Francisco, dutifully teaching himself English. He is an Achuar, a native of the Amazon rain forest in eastern Ecuador. He is visiting the U.S. in order to speak about the needs of his people. Although still young, he has already served six years as the

elected leader of his nation and is an articulate spokesman in both Spanish and his native Achuar.

The Achuar rely on their dream-visions as their primary source of guidance. Years ago, a dream-vision told the Achuar elders that something threatened their ancient way of life but that they could prevail if they prepared themselves. In response, the Achuar created a political organization to interact with the outside world, and the younger Achuar men began to learn Spanish and the ways of that world.

By the mid-1990s, the threat to the Achuar had become clear: international companies were pressing Ecuador to open Achuar lands to oil development. Burdened with a staggering foreign debt, the government seemed to have little choice. For the Achuar, this would mean the end of their dream culture. They would be driven into shantytowns like other Amazon tribes displaced by development.

But the rest of the world would also pay a high price. The planned concessions included one of the largest contiguous tracts of rain forest ever opened to development. As rain forest vanishes, so does one of the world's best natural defenses against global warming.

These concerns led a group from the United States who had visited the Achuar to found The Pachamama Alliance, or TPA ([www.pachamama.org](http://www.pachamama.org)), named after the earth goddess of the Andean people.

TPA seeks, first, to empower indigenous Amazonian people to defend their lands and culture. It has funded training centers, facilitated transportation to help the region's many tribes develop a united front, and brought in financial experts to advise them in negotiations with the government. (One plan calls for reducing Ecuador's foreign debt through credits for the carbon dioxide absorbed by the forest.) To date, Ecuador has not awarded the oil concessions to any foreign corporations, partly because of TPA's efforts, and most importantly because Ecuador's indigenous peoples are the best organized in Latin America.

TPA's second mission is even more daunting. The Achuar seek "to change the dream of the North," that is, they want TPA to work to change the ways of industrialized nations. A first step in this campaign was a public event in April, in which primatologist and conservationist Jane Goodall interviewed Santiago Kawarim. Held in San Rafael, California, the event attracted 2,000 people.

TPA has developed the Global Citizen Briefing, a curriculum meant to help Northerners create a sustainable economy, and it will offer a website (developed in cooperation with BPF) listing simple actions people can take today to change our energy future.

These efforts are in keeping with the Andean legend of the eagle and the condor, which predicts that the Earth will come into balance when people of the modern world (the eagle) join with the indigenous people (the condor) to form a whole that integrates the mind's genius with the heart's wisdom.

—Chris Wilson



## Sustainability and Peace in a Colombian Village

Colombia's vast savanna, Los Llanos, is sparsely populated with Guahibo Indians and *llaneros*, white settlers raising cattle. The climate is harsh and the soil poor. Guerrillas and paramilitaries control Los Llanos. But in its midst, there is an oasis of peace: Las Gaviotas (named for a local breed of gull), a village of 200 people.

In the 1960s, Paolo Lugari, a Colombian development expert, realized that in an increasingly crowded world, people would have to live in inhospitable environments like the immense South American savanna. So he acquired 40 square miles in Los Llanos and invited engineers, agronomists, chemists, and technicians to invent a civilization from grass, sun, and water. The adventurous, idealistic, and inventive came and created an ecological and social utopia, Las Gaviotas, that has survived the country's continuing civil war.

The surface water was undrinkable, so an engineer invented a lightweight pump that could tap the deep aquifers. The pumps are powered by children playing on seesaws. As the soil is naturally too toxic to grow vegetables, the Gaviotans built 80 acres of hydroponic greenhouses. They designed a durable windmill that catches the slightest breeze, and a solar water heater that works under cloudy skies; they built a plant in Gaviotas to manufacture the windmills, and one in Bogotá to make the heaters. They invented a solar kettle that purifies water to make it drinkable. People the world over freely copy every invention, as the Gaviotans shun patents.

Reforestation was a priority to the Gaviotans. They found a Caribbean pine that survived in Los Llanos and

planted millions. Miraculously, a tropical forest emerged, as seeds carried by birds and wind from the Amazon jungle far away thrived in the shade of the pine trees. By the mid-1990s, 260 new plant species had been established in the forest, as well as new insects, birds, and mammals.

Over the years, street children from Bogotá, *llaneros*, and Guahibo families joined the community. In the 1980s, Gaviotans built a solar hospital—even the sterilizers were solar—to serve Gaviotas and the surrounding villages. It cared for the wounded of any side in the war without asking questions. When the hospital closed because of health insurance regulations irrelevant to the region, the Gaviotans turned it into a water purification and bottling center, which also serves the local population's health, since contaminated water is the source of most diseases.

The oil industry boom of the 1980s cut into sales of solar heaters; sales of windmills and pumps also dropped as cheap food imports brought by free-trade agreements destroyed local agriculture. But no one was laid off. "Las Gaviotas isn't a company," Lugari says. "We're a community." A new source of revenue was found: the pines produce a resin that can be processed into turpentine. The factory Gaviotans designed to distill the resin won a U.N. Zero Emissions award.

Every family enjoys free housing, community meals, and schooling. There are no police and no jail. No one carries pistols in town—not even members of the various armed groups who come through from time to time.

Today, Las Gaviotas is fully self-sufficient—it receives no grants—and is energy independent. Carlos Sanchez, who

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has lived in Las Gaviotas for 25 years, says: "Here, there is no war. People pass through, but they don't find anyone to fight with because we respect them."

### Families of Soldiers in Iraq: Anguish, Bitterness, and War Resistance

As Iraq descends into a guerrilla war with no end to U.S. involvement in sight, the families of U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq grapple with fear, doubt, and anger.

Samie Down, 28, whose husband is with the elite 101st Airborne Division in Baghdad, voted for George Bush but now she has doubts. "My husband is a soldier and his job is to fight for freedom," she says. "But after so many months and so many deaths, no one has shown us any weapons of mass destruction or given us an explanation. So a lot of military wives are now asking: 'Why? Why did we go into Iraq?'"

Particularly distraught are the families of those serving in the National Guard and the Reserve, who now make up 40 percent of the 137,000 active troops in Iraq. Many have jobs and children and joined up expecting regular duties at home. Their long absence can bring major hardship to their families, on top of daily anguish that they might be killed or wounded. The death toll among reservists and Guard members is especially high, as most were trained in technical skills, not combat. They are supposedly in Iraq on security and support missions, but in reality there is no zone of safety for noncombat forces.

All troops were told they would come home after one year, but in April, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced a 90-day extension for 20,000 troops, including 6,000 Reservists and National Guardsmen. Some families accept Rumsfeld's explanation that "The country is at war. And we need to do what is necessary to succeed." But many now think the president lied about the reasons for going to war and are turning against it.

The Bush administration's cuts into veterans' benefits and its attempts to cut combat pay have further increased bitterness. A group of military families who oppose the war, Military Families Speak Out (MFSO; [www.mfso.org](http://www.mfso.org)), now has over a thousand member families. MFSO testified before Congress and has challenged the legality of the war in federal courts.

In mid-March, MFSO organized a march from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, where the bodies of U.S. soldiers come home, to Washington, D.C. The media are banned from Dover by a military order. The American people are not to see images of flag-draped coffins.

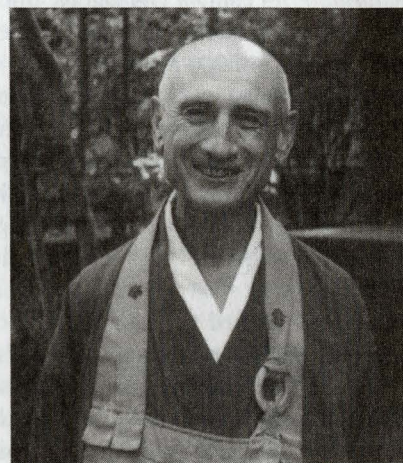
In Washington D.C., the marchers stopped at Walter Reed Hospital, where the most critically wounded troops are flown. Speakers there brought attention to the growing number of casualties—3,900 wounded in combat at April's end, and well over 7,000 evacuated for illnesses and injuries.

Finally, MFSO went to the White House to deliver two coffins to the president—one containing the names of U.S. war dead, the other the names of Iraqi citizens killed. They were stopped at an entrance by Secret Service agents. ❖

## IN MEMORIAM

### Roshi Philip Kapleau, 1912–2004

Philip Kapleau, author of *The Three Pillars of Zen* and founder of the Rochester Zen Center in upstate New York, died on May 6, 2004, from complications of Parkinson's disease. He died in the sunlit garden of the Zen Center surrounded by his students, family, and friends.



Philip Kapleau in 1975

Kapleau was born in 1912 to a working-class family in New Haven, Connecticut. As a young man he studied law and became a court reporter, serving for many years in the state and federal courts of Connecticut. In 1945, he was chief court reporter for the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and later covered the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. Months of recording the minutiae of the atrocities of World War II affected him deeply and awakened a spiritual longing that shaped the remainder of his life.

While in Japan he became interested in Zen Buddhism. Returning to New York in 1950, he studied Buddhist philosophy with D. T. Suzuki at Columbia University, but a purely intellectual approach did not satisfy his desire for a deeper understanding. In 1953 he sold his court reporting business and moved to a Zen Buddhist monastery in Japan.

Kapleau spent the next 13 years undergoing rigorous Zen training. In 1965 he was ordained by Hakuun Yasutani-roshi and given permission to teach. He was the first Westerner allowed to observe and record *dokusan*, the private interviews between a Zen teacher and student. The resulting book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, was published in 1965 and quickly became the standard introductory text on Zen practice. It is still in print and has been translated into 12 languages.

Kapleau founded the Rochester Zen Center in 1966, with the support of Dorris and Chester Carlson. Thirty years later, the Zen Center's country retreat, the Chapin Mill Retreat Center, was established, on land given by Ralph Chapin.

In addition to *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Kapleau's other books include *The Zen of Living and Dying*; *Zen: Merging of East and West*; *To Cherish All Life*; *Awakening to Zen*; and *Straight to the Heart of Zen*.

Kapleau is survived by his wife, deLancey Kapleau, and his daughter, Sudarshana Kapleau. ❖



## Fasting from Technology

by Stephanie Kaza

This spring at the University of Vermont I once again offered my course in “Unlearning Consumerism,” and again it apparently filled a big need. The students were both overwhelmed by the scale of the environmental impact of consumerism and also eager to examine their own consumer habits. Each week I invented a set of “lab” exercises as a way to “study the self” in modern terms. Food logs, property lists, and travel budgets were all helpful in giving students some idea of their ecological footprints. Two of the labs dealt with technology as a driver of consumption. In the first, I asked students to go on a technology fast, a sort of engaged renunciation, you might say. Each person had to commit to giving up one form of technology—phone, Internet, car, CD player—for three days and then consider its role in their consumer lives. The results were revealing: the students’ words express some of what they experienced:

“I tried to stay away from the Internet for a few days. I could do it but it was really inconvenient. I didn’t know the latest news, I couldn’t keep in touch with my family members and friends who live in faraway cities.... I felt like my social world had shrunk and I was a little bit sad.” For another student, her computer fast was “a very positive and reflective experience. Not using computers on a daily basis made me realize how subconsciously dependent I have become on them. Whether I’m doing homework, listening to music, chatting with friends, or just surfing the Web, computers have become an integral part of my life.”

Giving up music was perhaps the hardest challenge. “I realized...we really feel like something is missing if there is no background music in our lives. One MP3 player commercial once proclaimed that ‘every life has a soundtrack, what’s yours?’ It suggested that everyone should have a song playing at all times as part of a person’s identity creation. Do we really need this? Are our lives just movies that need background music?”

The other technology lab was a study of television and its omnipresent role as cultural medium. I asked students to spend time watching television without turning it on (that was a stretch) and to watch others watching TV. They also counted the number of camera cuts across five minutes of news and advertisements. They interviewed other students to see who owns a TV and how much TV they watch. It turned out that 6 out of 10 students own their own television set, and daily watching times ranged from none (21 percent) to six hours (1 percent), with most students watching one half to two hours per day (or night).

The television lab drew strong responses from this generation that has been raised with screens from day one. “As I sat watching the powerless television, I realized why I do not watch much TV at all anymore. It is a mindless activity in which the brain focuses upon a black box. We are fed

propaganda, lies, and bogus pretences that make us think we need certain material objects and fictitious desires. Overall it gives me a headache most of the time.”

“The black, eerie silence of the television set gave me the impression that it was the evil pupil of the corporate world. Then I realized that these ‘eyes’ exist in almost every household in the U.S.”

“I watched my eight-year-old brother watch TV; he watched some of the most annoying, loud, poorly drawn, poorly developed characters on cartoons. He sat just inches from the screen and didn’t move from his chair for 15 minutes.... No wonder so many kids these days have attention deficit disorder. The amount of speed and action thrust upon the viewer is overwhelming.”

“In my Mass Media Sociology class we talked a lot about how camera cuts tell stories and how we all ‘willingly suspend our disbelief’ when we watch movies or sitcoms. The danger with this, of course, is that news programs use the same kind of camera and storytelling tricks as prime-time TV. Therefore we ‘willingly suspend our disbelief’ during news programs because that is what we are trained to do.... This is dangerous because we rely on news programs to give us the ‘truth’ about what is going on around us.”

“My relationship with the TV is like a friend that usually brings you down but that you can’t seem to get rid of for some reason.”

“When I am done watching television, I feel like I have been doing drugs; my mind feels all goopy and running like an egg. I was once a brain-dead member of the zombified TV culture, too, and it worries me, because this is what some kids are being spoon-fed from a very young age.”

It seems to me that technology fasting can be a very good antidote to the overwhelming nature of consumer society. It may also be crucial to keeping your mind in healthy condition. The time-tested religious practice of fasting can help free the mind from the conditioning of technology habits. At the very least, taking a break from your favorite technology can reveal how much it has interpenetrated your life. ❖

*Stephanie Kaza is an associate professor of environmental studies at the University of Vermont.*



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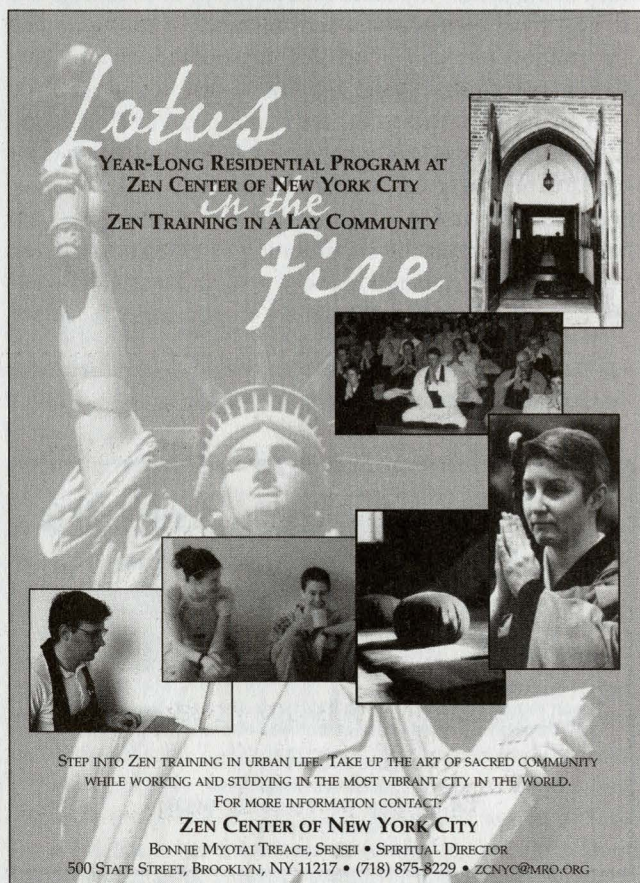
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## History

### Saicho, Founder of the Tendai School

by Diane Patenaude Ames

Eighth-century Japan was, even by contemporary Asian standards, an impoverished, technologically backward land. Its infant government had never heard of economic development and so neglected to build badly needed infrastructure. Instead, emperors built an endless succession of new palaces and Buddhist temples, and took away more and more of the peasants' crops to do it. Since this left the peasants without adequate food reserves, famines and civil disorders were frequent.

In 785 C.E., the emperor Kammu devastated the economy by trying to construct a new capital and suppress a frontier uprising by oppressed Japanese aborigines at the same time. Bands of destitute people roamed the roads. And a newly ordained young monk named Saicho, disgusted by the corrupt Buddhist establishment and despairing over a world of "suffering from which there is no respite," built himself a hut on what was then a remote mountain called Mount Hiei. Despite the arctic weather up there, he was to meditate in this hermitage for 12 years.

Saicho (767–822 C.E.) was born in Omi Province, into one of the Chinese families imported to bring Chinese crafts and learning to Japan. He became a monk at 12 and received final ordination at 18. From the start, he was drawn to the teachings of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school, which emphasized the Mahayana doctrines of emptiness and Buddha nature, the potential for enlightenment with which all sentient beings are endowed. When, in 797, he was called down from the mountain to serve as a priest at the imperial court (which had moved to Kyoto, near Mount Hiei), he began to seek official permission to study the T'ien-t'ai teachings in China. This finally came in 804. After a difficult journey to China, Saicho spent eight months of study on Mount T'ien-t'ai under the great teacher Hsing-man. On returning to Japan, he built a monastery, later called Enryakuji, on the site of his old mountain hut, and there founded the Japanese Tendai school.

Although Saicho decreed that his students should spend 12 years in strictly secluded study at Enryakuji, he did not advocate permanent withdrawal from society. On the contrary, he believed that following the bodhisattva path required practical action in this world. In his manual on priestly training, he stated that upon completing their studies and becoming temple priests, his students were not to confine themselves to performing their ritual duties but to do extensive social welfare work as well. In particular, they were to dig wells, ponds, and canals for irrigation; to build bridges; to plant useful trees; to raise food to be distributed in time of crop failure; set up free dispensaries for the poor; and in general to help ordinary people. This was scarcely standard practice for the official organized Buddhism of the day; the masses were not even allowed to enter most temples. But for Saicho, it was an integral part of Mahayana practice. ❖



## Family Practice

### Householder Dharma in the Digital Age: Electronic Devices & Family Life

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

Master your senses,  
What you taste and smell,  
What you see, what you hear.

...Be free.

—from *The Dhammapada*, trans. Thomas Byrom

"I'm writing a paper on race, class, and the Digital Divide," my 15-year-old son tells me.

"What's the Digital Divide?" I ask, innocently. By the pained look that my teenager shoots at me, I know I've once again revealed my status as a living fossil.

Joshua has been interning with OTX (Oakland Technology Xchange), a nonprofit that receives donations of old but working computers. OTX "rebuffs" (cleans) and "reghosts" them (wipes off old programs and installs new ones), then gives them to schools, elders, and low-income families in Oakland. The Digital Divide, Joshua explains to me, is the gap between those who can use computers and digital technology and those who can't. It's also the divide between those with access to computer technology and those without access.

My husband, son, and I appreciate our use of computers, e-mail, and the Internet at work, at school, and in our home. Computer technology is integral to our daily lives in numerous ways. Yet, having grown up in Ohio, where summer and winter storms often caused power outages that could last for days, I feel less anxious knowing that if "the grid" goes down temporarily, we're a family with camping and backpacking equipment, including a water filter, and a knowledge of California's edible wild plants. Chris, who built his own cabin in rural Oregon many years ago, is, as one family friend commented, "the sort of guy I wouldn't hesitate to follow into the wilderness." When I began dating him 14 years ago, he would show me photographs of the outhouse he had built in Oregon, and wax eloquent about its design.

In fact, between Chris's life experience and my own training in Zen temples, I'd say that our unspoken ethos as a family is that we like to know we're not absolutely dependent on cars, computers, and cell phones. This knowledge leaves us freer to appreciate such conveniences. I spent eight months in a monastery in South Korea in 1987–88, washing all my clothing by hand with limited or no hot water, and I have hauled my family's clothes to the laundromat for the past 14 years. Although we enjoy our urban lifestyle in Oakland, we know it's only one of many ways of living in this country.

For socially engaged Buddhist families like mine, the questions to ask about purchasing and using electronic

devices are the same as for anything else we buy: Is this something we really need? Will we use it wisely to help rather than to harm? Will it draw us closer together, or will it separate and isolate us?

Although the idea of "electronic intimacy" might sound ridiculous, it's been my experience that e-mail can be a god-send. When my mother was dying of cancer at her home in rural Virginia in late 1997, my brother took time off work to be with her. In her final six months of life, our mother had purchased her first computer, saying that she wanted to research the latest findings on her form of lymphoma. During the long nights, waiting for Mom to let go, my brother would e-mail me the report for the day. I'd sometimes get up at 3 AM, check for messages, and be immensely comforted by being able to communicate quickly, quietly, and inexpensively with my brother across the thousands of miles between us. We swapped stories from our childhood, too, and compared notes on our experiences of growing up with our eccentric father, who had died the year before.

I judge the overall impact of technology on my family's life by the quality of my relationships with them. I read quite a few arguments that life in the 21st century is more stressful for human beings than at any previous time, because of the proliferation of electronic gadgetry and our dependence on it. That's possible, but we do have choices. Every electronic device I know of has an "off" switch. People, plants, and animals do not. It's part of my practice to check in regularly with myself to reflect on whether I think that my marriage with Chris is going deeper instead of stagnating in daily routines, and whether I feel that my son and I are bridging (sometimes humorously, sometimes with irritation) the generation gap between us.

If I'm close enough to my family to know their smell, to feel the mammal warmth and bioelectricity of their bodies, to sense whether they are happy or sad, tired or hungry, I'm happy. If I'm apart from them, I'm grateful for our cell phones. What matters to me is that we are connected, across whatever distances may divide us. ♦

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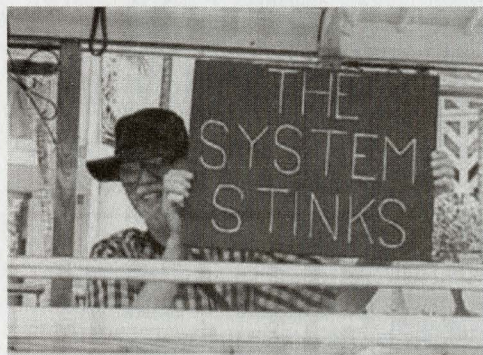
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# The Long View

by Robert Aitken



Robert Aitken

*Editor's Note: This talk was given at a rally at Mo'ohau Park, Hilo, Hawai'i, on October 25, 2003. The rally was held in protest of the war in Iraq, in conjunction with similar gatherings across the world on the same day. Peace and social justice groups in Hilo, on the Big Island of Hawai'i, including the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, East Hawai'i Island Chapter, were the sponsors. It was held in the bandstand of the park, on the Hilo bay front, and attended by about 200 people. The text is lightly edited for readers unfamiliar with Hawai'i.*

I sense that I stand before you simply to confirm in my own fashion what you already know. The only way I can be original and thus not just waste your time is to share what is in my heart. It is by sharing that we form community, and community is our crying need at this time.

In the fall of 2002 I stood here and declared that we're in it for the long haul. I still think so. At that time it seemed that a war on Iraq was inevitable in just a few months. Sure enough, it started the following March, and Iraq was ruined in a matter of weeks. Now we know that we were deliberately given false reasons for the invasion. There is no need to review that history, I think. You will agree that our government played fast and loose with the facts as it pursued an agenda of ruthless smash and grab.

It isn't a new agenda by any means. Our hero Christopher Columbus exploited the Arawak people

*There is just one thing new, and that's technology. ... Our weapons and our communication and our machines are more efficient. That's all. That's really all.*

of present-day Haiti, and eventually exterminated them. Everybody in an entire nation was wiped out—their language, their culture, their traditions, their family jokes, their very genes—all lost forever, impoverishing the rest of us. Cortez wiped out the Aztecs of Mexico, Pizarro the Incas of Peru. Ponce de Leon, Coronado, and de Soto belong in that same roster, as do the English settlers of New England.

Where are the Powatans and the Pequots today? In the French and Indian wars of the 18th century, an English officer, with the approval of his superiors, presented two blankets from a smallpox hospital to Indian friends. It is the first known case of biological warfare. An estimated 100,000 Indians died in the epidemic that followed. The Trail of Tears cleansed the state of Georgia of the Cherokee Nation in 1838 in a forced march of thousands of traditional people to the other side of the Mississippi, and some 50 other tribes were similarly forced from their traditional homes between 1815 and 1850. In Texas there was a bounty on Indian scalps until 1870. Any scalp—male, female, juvenile. And 1870 was not a long time ago. All four of my grandparents were born by then. Sterilization of Indian women and brainwashing of Indian children in BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] schools continued until our own times.

When I was young and living for a time in Southern California, I worked at a bookshop that specialized in Asian culture. We laid in a stock of books from the Philippines. Leafing through a history, I came upon chapter called "The American War." "What's that?" I wondered. It turns out that after the Spanish-American War that enabled the United States to acquire the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico, the Filipino people began a fight for their own independence, and they called it "the American War." I was completely ignorant of that war, and I learned for the first time that it had dragged on for three years, with Americans winning out only by sheer numbers and firepower, after horrendous losses on both sides.

We know the history of our own Hawai'i. After Captain Cook landed on Kauai in 1778, he sailed off to Alaska for a while. When he returned, he made landfall on the Big Island. There he found people infected with the syphilis that his men had introduced on Kauai just a few months earlier. It isn't quite as outrageous a story as the deliberate biological warfare that wiped out entire nations of Indians, but it was the beginning of the decimation of the Hawaiian people.

Castaways from early ships sailing to our islands and missionaries who came in 1820 very quickly rose to power in the Hawaiian government, and the land "reform" of 1848, known as the Great Mahele, instituted American land law and effectively cleansed



vast areas of land of traditional people and made sugar plantations possible. Now as an occupied country, with the American military controlling and exploiting as many of our assets as they can, we are faced with legislation in Washington that could effectively wipe out any thought of sovereignty of the Hawaiians by treating them as Native Americans.

Slaughtering and exploiting people and despoiling the land for power aren't practices that are confined to Stupid White Men. Columbus and his minions weren't the first. In far earlier history, we learn of territorial wars in China, for example, that left countless thousands dead and homeless. Southern planters in the American colonies weren't the first to make slaves of Africans. Arab rulers were busy in that industry many centuries earlier. Chief Kamehameha of the Big Island, who as a youth understood the significance of the ships of Captain Cook, ruthlessly made war on people of the other islands in order to organize Hawai'i as a nation and then as king betrayed his nation in countless ways. He clear-cut sandalwood forests here on the Big Island for his own corrupt ends, using conscript laborers who hated what they were doing and who suffered and died in their hard work. He bought a big yacht with the payoff, and it promptly sank. He set the scene for the sellout that continues to this day.

There is just one thing new, and that's technology. We human beings can now devise better ways to slaughter people and create slaves and despoil the land than we could earlier because our weapons and our communication and our machines are more efficient. That's all. That's really all.

So let's not point the finger. Exploitation is not the sole purview of men who justify their cruelty by claiming that Jesus enjoined them to convert the world. We must acknowledge four things: First, the human race and indeed all beings of the Earth are in grave peril. Second, we inherit a history of movements for decency and compassion that have brought about change for the better. Third, there is such a thing as human conscience that fuels these

movements. And the final point is that we can each of us access our inherent peace and harmony as a teaching for others, without waiting for social change. Let me enlarge on these four points.

First, with technology in the hands of criminally insane leaders today, we face the unprecedented danger of end-time. The apocalypse now. Quite literally. Nuclear poisons with a half-life of eternity can wipe us all out. Not just a nation but the human race itself, with all our cultures. Shakespeare, Buddha, Christ, Plato, Han-shan, Ba-sho, Confucius, and all the arts and wisdom of native elders—*poof*. All the joys of parenting, all the aspirations of children—*poof*. And not just the human race, but the race of all beings—animals and plants, humbly working out their destinies and evolution—*poof*.

Is there any hope? Yes, there is. For one thing, we can direct our technology to the problem of nuclear waste. I'm not a scientist, but I suspect that eventually the requisite technology can be worked out and the danger can be controlled. At least we can give the problem our very best push. In the context of this effort lies the second point: that we have a history of making change for the better in the face of

### Coast of Heart

We gather on the Coast of Heart,  
travelers from a village of marked roads  
and stone houses.

We pass through  
walls of blue coquina,  
space through space,  
where day dreams and night dreams  
spoon between sleep and waking.

Silence taps an ancient message.  
Hands bend light into earth.  
Eyes soften blame into water.  
Lips set names on fire.  
Lungs breathe ash into air.

We are not the last tribe of feeling.  
We are not the last tribe.  
We gather on the Coast of Heart.

—Michael Lehman

*Michael Lehman writes in binges, lives in Manhattan with his wife, Kathy, operates an art consulting business with his son, Cellan, and practices contemplative meditation under the guidance of Shambhala teachings.*

"Coast of Heart" was written for Pema Chödrön during a retreat at Omega in the Catskills of New York.



difficult odds. This work is likely to take a very long time and require endless patience.

The abolition movement to free the slaves in the United States is an excellent example from the past of a long, patient push. The movement began before our Declaration of Independence from Great

*Conscience is the sense we have in common,  
the sense that we can rest in the peace and  
harmony of the stars.*

Britain. In the minds of some Americans, the practice of bondage was clearly at odds with the freedom they sought in their new country. In 1790 the state government of Pennsylvania responded to this troubling of conscience and began a gradual program of emancipation. Here and there, slave owners freed their slaves in their wills. In his retirement, John Quincy Adams took a strong position for emancipation. Ministers held forth from their pulpits in the 1820s and 1830s, and *The Liberator*, published by the Reverend William Lloyd Garrison, was immensely influential. The movement attained critical mass with the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Frederick Douglass and other former slaves wrote passionate autobiographies that were widely read, and Douglass was much in demand as a speaker. In 1849, Abraham Lincoln voiced opposition to slavery in the District of Columbia as a legislator from Illinois. Finally, just after the Civil War, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments were ratified. The appeal to conscience was heard at last, after many decades of steady campaigning.

A similar history can be traced in the campaign for women's rights, beginning with convincing polemics by Margaret Fuller and others in the early 1800s. "Suffragettes" Lucretia Mott (a Quaker) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved the campaign along with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1849, which set forth many demands for equality among the sexes. To make a long and important story short, women were given the right to vote by constitutional amendment in 1919, 70 years after Seneca Falls. The Equal Rights Amendment was then introduced into Congress in 1923. Congress at last approved it in 1972, 49 years later, and it was promptly ratified by 35 states out of the required 38, and it is stuck there. Give us another generation of organized appeals to conscience.

Do we have another generation? This is a huge question, but here, too, I find hope, and here I set forth my third point. In many ways it seems that we human beings are becoming more aware of our-

selves and of our responsibilities to one another and to the world. There may be a natural evolution toward decency. Texas authorities came to realize that offering bounties for Indian scalps was over the top. What persuaded them? I suspect that they realized that to be human is to be humane. The same understanding is growing today with regard to capital punishment, it seems.

I spent my childhood in Honolulu in English Standard Schools. From 1923 to 1945, all children took a little test before they began school. Those who could respond in conventional English to a few simple verbal questions were sent to certain schools, and those who responded in dialect were sent to other schools. The entire system was in two parts, with McKinley High School for the dialect speakers and Roosevelt High School for those who spoke "California." Finally, the community woke up to the divisive nature of this benighted arrangement, and it was quietly phased out.

The possibility of a natural evolution in the direction of decency leads me directly back to my heart and yours in this very moment. This is my fourth and final point. I submit that it is vital to take the following slogans seriously and personally: "Peace Now." "Justice Now." "Protection of All Beings Now." One of my colleagues turned out for a demonstration with the sign, "Regime change begins at home." He didn't mean, "Impeach the rascals," he meant something more intimate.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship members sit in meditation each Friday afternoon across the avenue from the Federal Building in Hilo. We just sit there practicing inner quiet. We are showing original peace as best we can. We appeal to your conscience of original peace and harmony.

Our ancestors in the many peace and social justice movements were sometimes religious in a formal sense, or were sometimes simply humanist in their response to their conscience. Conscience is the sense we have in common, the sense that we can rest in the peace and harmony of the stars. To paraphrase A. J. Muste, "Original peace is the way."

It is time to turn to the traditional teachings, if you are so inclined, or simply to search on your own. Take heart. With the power of your own heart and mine we can weather this war that rages all around us, and together we can embody and present the Way. ❖

*Robert Aitken, retired founder and teacher of the Diamond Sangha, now lives and writes on the Big Island of Hawai'i. He is the cofounder of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the author of many books on Buddhism, the most recent of which is The Morning Star: New and Selected Zen Writings (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2003).*



## Winner of Turning Wheel's Old Writers Award

# The Information Revolution

## Conversations with My Favorite Son

by Martha Boesing

*Funded by a generous donor, our one-time "Old Writer's Award" honors an essay on technology by a person over 65 who has never before been published in Turning Wheel.*

*Award winner Martha Boesing is a longtime Buddhist practitioner, in both the Zen and Tibetan traditions. A playwright and director, she was the founder and artistic director of At the Foot of the Mountain Theater, a professional women's theater in Minnesota. She now lives in Oakland with her partner Sandy Boucher. Her current play The Witness, produced by The Faithful Fools, a street ministry in San Francisco, is now on tour. She is 68 years old.*



**O**n a cold and snowy Christmas night in Minneapolis 41 years ago, I went to the hospital so that my firstborn and I could carry out the business of birthing. Curtis was born facing up, his eyes wide open. Most babies are born facing down. Very few come out "sunny side up" as the nurses liked to call the position my son chose. "Why do some babies come out that way?" I asked. "Oh," said a nurse friend of mine, "They like to get a good look at things so they can find out quickly what's going on. They often turn out to be kids on the edge of change." So, that's how it was with Curtis, and it's been that way ever since.

I began studying Buddhism when this little boy was still bouncing on my knee, and although he didn't grow up in a Buddhist household per se, and although he does not consider himself to be a Buddhist today, I am sure that the aspirations I hold as a Buddhist are consonant with his own. So, you can imagine my surprise when this son of a hippie, civil rights activist, antiwar protester, ardent feminist, and practicing Buddhist, after an auspicious career start in the Greenpeace and People's Law offices of Chicago, ended up as one of the young turks of Silicon Valley, having become CEO of his own software company.

Over the course of the next couple of years, we began to talk—appropriately enough, mostly in cyberspace, by e-mail and sometimes by long-distance phone—about what he called the "information

revolution." Recently I cut, pasted, and re-created the following conversation with him.

\* \* \*

"What happened to your values, my favorite son?" I ask.

"I'm your *only* son, Mom."

"Right.... As I was saying, we have always been committed to changing the world, you and I, to making it a better place. How could you have deserted the revolution you were born into?"

He informs me that he hasn't come anywhere near to desertion, that in fact he is sitting right smack in the center of the most transformative revolution happening on the planet.

"This revolution is more important than the agrarian revolution, more important than the industrial revolution. It will democratize the world," he proclaims.

"Isn't that a bit overblown?" I protest. "The world of the new technology is ruled by greed. Everyone knows that. It's all about making money. And for a while there the new technocrats were making such vast amounts of money that the gap between the rich and the poor was looking like a return to Dickensian times. How is this working for 'democratizing the world?'"

"I believe that human beings are essentially good and will in the end react well when they know the truth," my son declares.

"You're such a romantic."

"It's in the genes... I think you call it our essential Buddha nature."

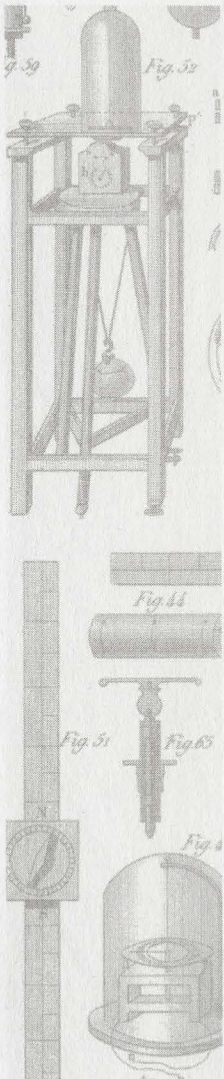
"True," I affirm. "And like the Buddha said, I do believe it is only our ignorance that keeps us from seeing our own awakened Buddha nature."

"So how can ignorance be combatted—world-wide?" he asks. "I think that most tyranny in the world is fundamentally rooted in imperfect communication, which leaves people in the dark. You agree?"

"Is communication really the problem?" I respond. "How about slowing down? How about just sitting by oneself, learning to turn toward all that arises inside ourselves, which some believe is the only place where real change can happen. We're all connected. If one of us changes, it will cause a domino effect, others around us will change, and the changes will ripple out."



**"What happened to lying in the grass doing nothing? How can a child care about the rain forest in Brazil if she has never fallen in love with the ants, the robins, the raccoons in her own backyard?"**



"And how did you learn about that, Mom?"  
 "Oh, right, it was 'communicated' to me—by teachers, books, a community of like-minded seekers. I've had the good fortune to be born in a time and a place where I was given the opportunity to hear the dharma."

"Exactly," Curtis says. "And we are coming close to developing such an effective system of communication that it will remove the problems of tyranny and allow everyone the world over to hear whatever 'dharma' they need to hear."

"That's a pretty big claim! Who's going to control what information is communicated?" I ask.

"No one!" exclaims Curtis, heatedly. He gets very passionate about the things he believes. "The Internet cannot be controlled. By definition."

"Oh?"

"It's about packet routing."

"I think we're going to have to dumb down a little here," I say. "This is your computer-illiterate mom talking, the Luddite of the family, remember? What's 'packet routing'?"

"OK," he explains. "With telephones, every bit of communication travels the same dedicated path. If you call someone in India there is literally a wire connecting you with the person you are talking to. It may go through several switches or even bounce off a satellite, but every electron between you and that person in India is going to travel the exact same route. The same is actually true of TV or radio or most cell phones, even though part of the signal is through the air."

"But the Internet is very different," he continues. "Every time I send a communication over the internet—an e-mail, for example—my computer breaks this communication up into thousands of little 'packets.' Each of these packets carries the address of the machine it's going to."

"One sentence to a packet?" I ask.

"Oh, even less," he says. "Words, phrases. So my e-mail to you breaks up into thousands of different pieces, and each one finds its own way to your address. There are millions, by now billions, of possible paths each packet could take, and they can all go in different directions. When they get to where they're going, the machine at the other end puts them all back together again."

"This was designed—way back when—by some Department of Defense scientists, to provide redundancy. If one route fails, because somebody took over the ISP [Internet Service Provider] for example, there are others which are instantly used as backup. It's called a packet-switched network. The old way, the way of televisions, telephones, and radios, is called a circuit-switched network. The side effect of packet-switched networks (which I assume was unintended)

is that, by definition, they cannot be owned, but with a telephone, radio, or TV system, a monopoly can own a circuit. And the Internet is cheap!"

"But you do always pay something, right?" I ask.

"The only reason it costs money here—in Europe it's already mostly free—is that in order to get into the house today it has to travel over a circuit-switched network, the telephone lines, for the last mile. It's called 'the last mile problem,' and it's being solved with DSL and broadband. Pretty cool, huh?"

"Actually yes," I feel compelled to reply. "Pretty cool—Indra's net sparkling over the whole world."

"What's Indra's Net?" he asks.

I get to be the professor—momentarily. "There's a Buddhist teaching about a network of jewels so arranged that if you look at one you see all the others reflected in it, and if you move to any part of it, you set off the sound of bells that ring through every part of the network, through every part of reality."

"That's just it."

I go on. "Teilhard de Chardin, the great Jesuit mystic, said that by the end of the 20th century we would realize Indra's net. The earth would grow itself a new skin. It would be a vast thinking membrane, encircling the entire world, which would one day contain all our thoughts, our dreams, and our experiences. Was he talking about the Internet, do you think? Way before its time?"

"Could be," Curtis responds. "Now, you can understand that because there's no way to control packet-switched networks, authoritarian governments hate them. They can ban computers. They can close down one ISP or another. But someone will start a new ISP in their basement. The information will get through. They tried to monitor these Internet connections in China. Didn't happen. They tried to do it in Russia by demanding that anyone with an ISP install a 'black box' so that Russian security could monitor all e-mail. Didn't happen. The Internet is free. Game's over."

"But poor countries don't have the same access to computers and Internet services that we do. Aren't we just furthering the distance between the haves and the have-nots?" I ask.

"No, poor countries *do* have access," Curtis argues. "When I was in Vietnam recently, I had more access to the Internet than I did to TV."

"Actually," I admit to him, "when I was in India five years ago, every little village I went to had a storefront with an ISP where anyone could go in and get on the Internet."

"If you look at some of the major technology shifts that have come in the last hundred and fifty years," Curtis continues, "—telephones, televisions, automobiles—you'd agree, wouldn't you, that all of these technologies have penetrated into the furthest corners



of the world? The Internet rate of penetration is exponentially greater than that of any of these other technologies."

"What about literacy?" I ask. "You have to know how to read in order to use the Internet. Penetration into all parts of the world won't make a difference if the gap between the literate and the illiterate continues to expand."

"Would it make a difference if we could send in a hundred thousand teachers to every poor country in the world?" says Curtis.

"Via the Internet?"

"Yes."

"If they're not eating or having clean water," I retort, "if they're dying before they reach the age of 15, who cares if there are teachers available to them over the Internet?"

"It's not black and white, Mom, it's a continuum. If we can fly in a hundred thousand teachers via internet into a poor country to teach them how to read, to write, to do math, over time students will also learn skills from these teachers and others who know about sustainable agriculture and appropriate technology that will enable them to put more food on their tables and clean up their water."

"But what about coercion? What will stop the forces of imperialism from sending in Internet teachers who are practiced at creating hegemony and who will help keep the citizens of that country under control? Multinational capital can use this tool, too." I protest.

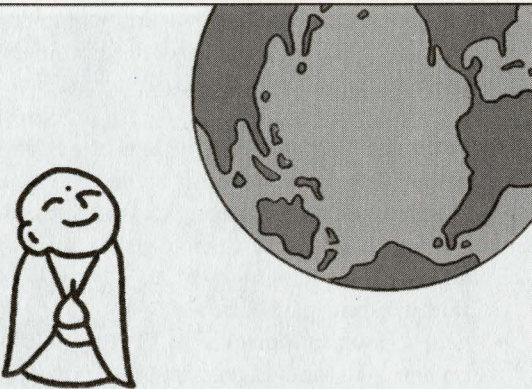
"True," Curtis responds. "However, when you've got a new tool that is essentially free and you introduce it into a world of disparity, who does it benefit more, the powerful or the powerless? If it were a costly tool, only the rich guys could buy it, and people who want to help people help themselves couldn't afford to use it. But it's not."

"OK," I interject. "I'm on board here; but just to push this a bit further, what about the problem of consumerism? On the Internet, as we all know too well from personal experience, we're bombarded with sales pitches daily. I press the delete button, but are kids the world over pressing their delete buttons, or are they becoming mesmerized by all this stuff? Doesn't the communication revolution advance consumption and greed?"

"Well," says Curtis, "the Internet is a tool. We can use it to build communities or we can use it to dig our own graves."

He argues well, my favorite son.

But suddenly I'm seeing disembodied little girls and boys hunched over their computer screens, only their fingers and eyeballs moving, living for hours every day in a "virtual" reality. "What happened to reading




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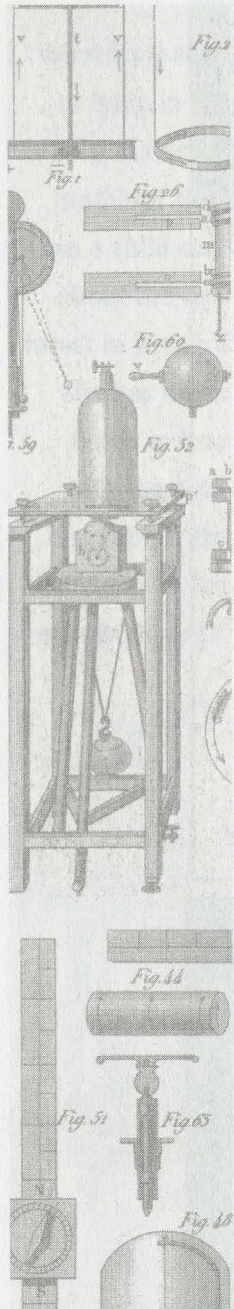
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books—remember them?—painting, cooking, playing baseball, lying in the grass doing nothing? What will happen to children's creative imaginations? How can a child care about the rain forest in Brazil if she has never fallen in love with the ants, the robins, the raccoons in her own backyard? Human beings need to be touched, smiled upon, sung to. Your 'information revolution' could create a whole generation of introverted, dronelike beings who do nothing but play Internet games, look at porno sites on the Web, and engage in online gambling."

Curtis does not, cannot disagree with me of course, being the doting father of my two adorable grandchildren. "It's about values," he retorts, "family values, love, care, and attention. Some things never change, Mom. Just like you didn't let us spend hours in front of the television when we were kids. If I remember correctly, you didn't even let a TV into the house until we were teenagers!"

"I was a hippie," I remind him.

"Don't think for a moment I've forgotten *that*," he says. "So we read to our kids, we play with them, we respect them, like you did for us. And we don't ever use the Internet as a babysitter. The Internet is, as I said, a tool. It is not inherently evil or good. It's value-free. All mechanical revolutions are value-free."

"True," I say, "but technologies can *appear* to offer value, ease our discomfort, bring pleasure. We're inundated with images and words promising this. And in our American culture we're addicted to comfort. We buy things, then we buy more things. We become greedy. The Buddha believed, and I happen to agree with him, that the cause of our suffering is in our own minds. It's created by our massive dissatisfaction with things as they are. Longing for something more than we already have corrupts us. We lose track of the light inside ourselves. We lose sight of our compassion for others who have less than we have. Absorbed by our own wants and needs, we lose connection. This information revolution is driven by the profit motive. Period. Isn't that a problem for you?"

"All these questions are a problem for me," Curtis says. "But I keep coming back to my fundamental economics training. To wit, the world's resources—water, trees, land—are becoming scarce. So how do

we allocate them? Do we have a centralized government controlling the allocation? Or a laissez-faire capitalism that goes relatively hand in hand with democracy? Personally I'd rather be cleaning up the messes of capitalism than those of centralized economies. To borrow from Winston Churchill, I think capitalism is the worst system in the world, excepting all others. I also happen to think it's possible that true compassion and amassed wealth can go hand in hand."

"Where's the compassion in this revolution?" I wonder.

"Actually, Mom, there's a bunch of wealthy companies and wealthy individuals out there who are doing a lot of good. You can look on the Web for the Open Source movement, Linux, Rain, Blue Tooth, and other cooperatively owned coalitions that are building the Internet without looking for profit. The only question is whether the good they are trying to do can get disseminated fast enough."

"Ah, the speed issue," I sigh.

"One of the core value differences I think you and I have, Mom, is around speed. I honestly believe that in today's world there is an inherent advantage in speed."

"Speed leads to short-term thinking, and short-term thinking is a breeding ground for greed. That's what I've come to think," I declare, perhaps a little pompously.

"Mom, like you, I think greed is a—perhaps *the*—deep cause of most of the world's ills. And, like you, I want to help make the world a better place. There are places where I might be able to do more hands-on good work than I can do in the world of technology, but the places that I know about (and I'm grateful for them, including the Buddhist Peace Fellowship) are not moving fast enough for me. They're not moving fast enough because they don't have the right infrastructure behind them. In my work, I'm trying to build the infrastructure to move things along faster."

"How are you building the infrastructure?" I ask.

"I'm advancing how the Internet democratizes the market. Because we provide software to small businesses that will make them work as well as larger ones do on the Internet, I'm making the market freer. I'm leveling the playing field."

## Guidance

Tell me again how my life has value and beauty. Be my phantom

city in the desert, refresh me, shimmer, then dissipate.

And I'll travel on, compassed by moon and sun.

—Elisabeth Carter

*Shakyamuni is said to have conjured up a city in the desert when his disciples became discouraged and exhausted. They feasted, drank, and rested. When they awoke the city had vanished, and they continued on their journey with renewed spirits.*

Elisabeth Carter has an MFA in creative writing from Emerson College, where she won the 2002 Evvy Award in Poetry. A freelance editor, she also teaches creative writing workshops. She has been following Daisaku Ikeda as a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism for over 20 years. She lives in Waltham, Massachusetts.





Photo by Meredith Stout

“And you feel this must be done quickly?”

“Yes, very quickly, if we’re going to save the world from the multinational corporations taking over. And as you point out, they have access to the very same tools we do.”

“OK,” I say. “In today’s world it seems clear that speed is of the essence. Businesses need to grow fast in order to survive—they go bankrupt if they don’t. Even protests against the war have to organize themselves speedily to catch the wars before they are officially over. And I know that the major protests of our time—against the war in Iraq, against the WTO, not to mention the meteoric rise of several presidential candidates—are attributable to the Internet, to huge e-mail campaigns staged by such organizations as MoveOn. So I am not without appreciation for this—”

“Good. You’re catching on.”

“On the other hand,” I press on, “most of the things that we value in any really deep way have taken a long time to develop—music, poetry, museums, universities, temples—the basic fabric of our culture that has developed over centuries. The rapid changes that are occurring now seem to have everyone stressed out. Aren’t we in danger of seeing the whole web of our lives unravel, just because we haven’t the time to ground ourselves and breathe?”

“Great sages,” I continue, “seem to agree that the most important thing we can be doing with our ‘one wild and precious life,’ to quote Mary Oliver, is to wake up—wake up to our own Buddhanatures. And they seem to think that the way to do this is to sit still, to become mindful of our doings in slow time. How are we going to accomplish this if you and your buddies are asking us to get on the fast track, perhaps the fastest track ever known to the human species?”

“These are important questions, Mom, and of course we have to stay very, very vigilant. And hopefully we can do both—we can sit still and be on the fast track at the same time by—as you often suggest—holding one truth in one hand and one in the other. Meanwhile, I do believe that building this communications infrastructure right now is participating in the most important thing that’s happening on the planet. It isn’t that the Internet itself will save the planet, it’s that the communication and democracy that is inherent in the Internet will—not might, not can, but *will*—save the planet.”

“I hope you’re right, my favorite son. Perhaps you’re a visionary. In any case, you’re very, very passionate.”

“I wonder where I got that from?” he ponders. ❖

*Meredith Stout, a long-time Berkeley resident and member of BPE, often takes time off from her work as codirector and photographer for the Sisters Project to study a favorite photographic theme of unending distance.*

*For more information about the Sisters Project go to [www.sistersproject.org](http://www.sistersproject.org).*



# Technodharmacology

by Tofu Roshi

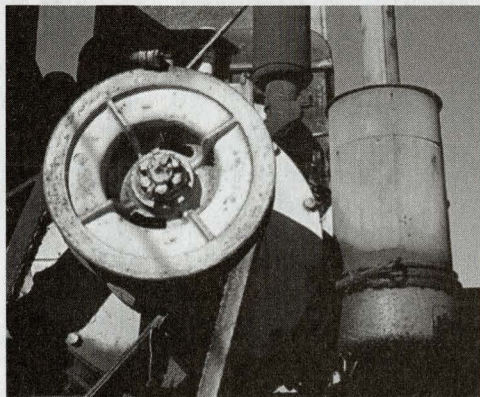


Fig. 7—Tofu Roshi's answering machine  
Photo by Susan Moon

I want to talk today about the four technologies I have found most essential to our practice here at the No Way Zen Center. Like everything else, from toothpicks to shoe horns, these technologies are neither good nor ill in and of themselves. It all depends on how you use them. If you don't use them appropriately—if, for example, you try to use a toothpick

for a shoe horn and a shoe horn for a toothpick—you will not have beneficial results. I will take up the Four Gates of Technodharmacology one at a time.

## I. The Answering Machine

If Old Master Zuigan lived today, instead of in ancient China, he'd utilize an answering machine.

You may know the old koan about Zuigan talking to himself. Every day he says, "Master!" "Yes," he answers himself, "What can I do for you this morning?" "Wake up! And don't be fooled by strangers," Zuigan says to Zuigan.

Inspired by Zuigan's example, I leave the No Way Zen Center every morning after breakfast and walk to the pay phone at the corner. I deposit 50 cents and call myself up. "Good day," says a familiar voice. "Please leave a message, with your telephone number, even if you think I already have it."

So I leave myself a message. "Hello, Tofu Roshi," I say. "This is Tofu Roshi. I'm calling from..." and I give the number of the pay phone, enunciating clearly, even though a sign on the phone says it doesn't take incoming calls. Then I say, "Tofu! Awaken!"

When I get home, I notice the little light blinking on the answering machine, indicating that I have a message. (I prefer the old-fashioned answering machine to voice mail, because I like to screen my calls. That way, if I'm home when Tofu Roshi calls, I don't have to talk to him if I'm not in the mood.) I study the instruction card my assistant has taped to the answering machine: "To listen to messages, inhale deeply while pressing second button from left. Release button with exhalation." I listen to the message, just in case somebody has called to tell me I won something. And there, every morning, is the voice of Tofu Roshi, telling me to *awaken!* And I find I appreciate the call. Not only am I grateful to Tofu Roshi for thinking of me, I'm grateful to the answering

machine for delivering the message. The wake-up call is more compelling coming out of an electronic device than if it was just the old Tofu talking to himself.

## II. The Tape Recorder

Like many Buddhist teachers, one of the technologies I'm most dependent on is the tape recorder. Even more essential than recording my dharma talks, we use it to record periods of *zazen* at the No Way Zen Center, and we sell these tapes over the Internet to students who can't make it to the *zendo*.

I doubt there's a Buddhist teacher alive today who hasn't experienced tape recorder *dukkha* (i.e. the persistent belief that you'd be much much happier with a different tape recorder). There are many things that can go wrong. For example, you can fail to notice that the poor little pause button is depressed, and the whole period of *zazen* goes unrecorded. Once I had an assistant who became so frustrated with the tape recorder that he took to selling *blank tapes* to our distant members, claiming they were recorded periods of *zazen*. A discerning listener blew the whistle on him, and he paid everybody back out of his allowance.

## III. The Vegetable Peeler

When Old Master Bush Wak was abbot on Lazy Man Mountain, vegetable peelers were not allowed. They had been prohibited a hundred years before by Bush Wak's dharma ancestor, who believed that they created a wedge between monks and their cucumbers. One day a monk from afar appeared at Bush Wak's gate, and in the folds of his robe he carried a vegetable peeler. He presented it as a gift to the *tenzo* (head chef), who didn't know what the long-forbidden object was. So the visitor taught him the art of peeling, and from then on they served cucumber peelings in the third bowl whenever the weather was hot. We keep up this tradition at No Way.

## IV. The Hair Dryer

You might wonder why I use one, as I shave my head smooth. But sometimes dust and pollen and little bits of plant matter from the trees overhead, or lint from the laundromat, collect on the scalp. I use the hair dryer like a leaf blower.

By the way, what I said about the shoe horn and the toothpick applies to the vegetable peeler and the hairdryer as well. I know from experience that they are not interchangeable either. Before I got my hairdryer, I decided to dry my scalp with the vegetable peeler, since it's more energy efficient than any hairdryer, but I found out that it just isn't absorbent enough. ❖

Tofu Roshi is the Abbot of the No Way Zen Center, in Berkeley, California, and for his day job he manages the Next-to-Godliness Laundromat.



# Dharmananda

## A Buddhist Biodynamic Farm in Australia

by Leigh Davison

The dry season comes on quickly here on the New South Wales far north coast. By mid-August the last frost is usually gone, and eyes scan the horizon for the patchy storms that make the difference between a good spring break and another bad 'un. It's a time to plant staples like potatoes and sweet corn, to irrigate pasture and watch the creek level drop. And it's a good time, while the grass is still short and the dung beetles dormant, to pick up manure from the paddocks to save for compost-making.

My wife, Ellen, and I live on Dharmananda, a 260-acre property north of Lismore that we share with 10 other adults, 7 children, 30 Jersey cows and heifers, a dozen or so chooks (fowl), and a forest full of wildlife. The property was progressively cleared for dairying starting about a century ago. By the late '30s the steep hills were fully cleared and supporting 100 dairy cows and 60 acres of bananas. But by 1970 the place had virtually no value in conventional agricultural terms. Dairying had gone out in the '50s, the banana slopes were degraded, eroded, and capable of supporting only weeds, and beef wasn't worth sending to town.

So when Carol and Dudley bought the place in 1972, they got it cheap. They and their son Adam were the first members of this community, which has grown slowly to its present size. Ray came in 1975, and Ellen and I in 1979. Others followed at regular intervals and we are still growing today. Our deliberate policy of slow growth and an extended trial period for prospective members has been an important factor in Dharmananda's stability. Other factors include our shared values and goals of mutual respect between members, and respect for the land and environment. In addition, we all share a desire to live as self-sufficiently as possible.

The farm is managed on a communal basis, largely with a view to subsistence production. Two gardens, one on the creek flats and another in a higher, frost-free location, along with the orchards and the dairy herd, provide most of the food consumed here. Vegetables, citrus, and avocados are harvested in season. Potatoes are the main staple. A spring and autumn crop of spuds gives an almost year-round supply, with sweet potato and pumpkin filling in the gaps. Sweet corn is harvested from late November to June, and bananas tend to crop year round. The cows provide milk, butter, yogurt, feta cheese, cottage

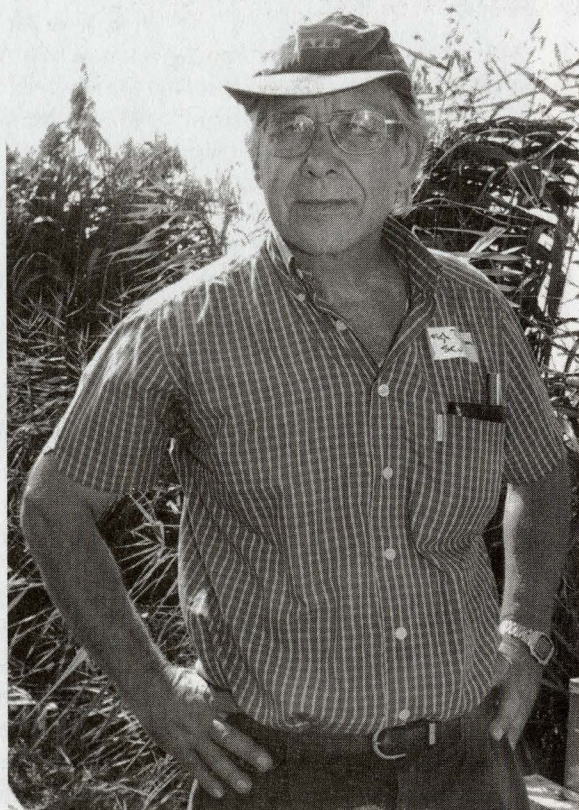
cheese, and hard cheese. They also provide manure for compost in the horticultural operations, and their pasture is slashed for mulch and compost.

A steady stream of WWOOFers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms, pronounced "woofers"), students, and visitors provide a variety of stimulating contacts. Even if financial necessity didn't force me off-farm for two or three days every week, I wouldn't feel socially isolated here. Each member is obligated to do one day's work a week on a community project, and Saturday morning is spent together in the community garden. Activities like these are an important part of team-building.

Our legal structure is a cooperative, with all members being directors. We have a weekly business meeting, where questions from "Who will feed the chooks tomorrow?" to "Should we spend \$10,000 on a road upgrade?" are discussed. Every month there is a meeting where more personal matters can be raised. These meetings also provide an opportunity for looking at conflicts, which have probably been the most important personal growth opportunities of the whole experience. Our policy is to deal with conflict as it arises. One of our members has become so adept in dealing with conflict that she has become a professional conflict-resolution consultant.

\* \* \*

Summer is the muggy season here. In our narrow valley, about 30 kilometers inland, we miss the sea breezes that make coastal life more bearable. We are fortunate to have a magnificent swimming hole here,



Leigh Davison in the reed bed



**Early ideals regarding the evils of technology have given way to perhaps a more pragmatic viewpoint.**

and it's a popular place to be in the heat of the day during the months from October through to the wet season, which starts around February. I learned early on to respect the debilitating heat. When the mercury goes over 35° C, I go inside.

Summertime is also the time for pasture growth, provided we get enough showers to maintain soil moisture levels. It's a time to slash back pasture and collect it for mulch and compost. For many years this task was done the hard way. I would slash the paddock with my walk-behind, 10-horsepower, sickle-bar mower. Whoever was handy would then be passed a rake, and the mulch would be raked into small piles, which would be transported to the garden or orchard where it was to be used. In recent years a combination of factors, not the least of which is the aging of both my body and the sickle-bar mower, have prompted the purchase of a 30-horsepower tractor and a mulch harvester. The whole operation—cutting, collecting and transport—can now be achieved in one pass. The tradeoff is capital for labor. Early ideals regarding the evils of technology have given way to perhaps a more pragmatic viewpoint.

My own call to this way of life was prompted by a personal desire to work with the land, and a philosophical belief that a simple lifestyle provides a better deal both for oneself and the planet. It was a call that first made itself evident in the early '70s. In many ways it was an inconvenient call because, at 30 years of age, I had no money, little understanding of agriculture, and even less of interpersonal dynamics. At that time I was a research student in the School of Mechanical Engineering at the University of New South Wales. I inhabited a 3-by-2-meter cell stacked high with boxes of computer cards and mathematics papers, and I spent my time solving large sets of interlocked, fourth-order differential equations. These equations modeled the behavior of the girders and plates of a ship's hull under various loading situations.

Like the society that had molded me, I was in a state of questioning and change. My first 25 years had been a conventional middle-class story. The pursuit of success, academically and in the sporting arena, had been at the top of my agenda. Values learned in those early days came from scoutmasters and rugby coaches: "Don't believe all that bullshit about playing the game for its own sake! We're here to beat these bastards!" Life in my early twenties was divided between the boozy camaraderie of the rugby scene and the self-imposed discipline of study.

In 1968, at the age of 24, I left what I perceived as the living death of Australian suburbia, and spent 18 months in India, slowing down, taking stock, looking at my life, and asking basic questions like, "What is human happiness and how does one achieve it?" I got

into yoga and meditation. In Kerala I went on an incredible weeklong pilgrimage through the jungle with a million fellow pilgrims. We carried offerings of coconuts and rice on our heads and chanted mantras all the way. I also spent some months traveling with a swami who gave dissertations on the Bhagavad Gita. All the while I wrote letters home to an increasingly perplexed family, saying things like "At last I have discovered the meaning of life." I'm told that Dad stopped talking about me to his mates at the bowling club.

When I had waddled out of Sydney in 1968 I was carrying 14 stone (196 pounds) of meat pies, T-bones, and Toohey's Ale on a frame that was calcifying from two decades of accumulated rugby injuries. Two years later I wafted back, a skeletal 10 stone (140 pounds) of mantra-chanting, teetotaling, vegetarian, pliable yogic sinew.

The problem of finding a niche in mainstream Australian society for my "reborn" self was not easily solved. Where did I fit in? Paramount was the need to earn money. But after a short stint in an engineering office, I decided to go back to university to do a Ph.D. It was while I was there that the call to the land came to me.

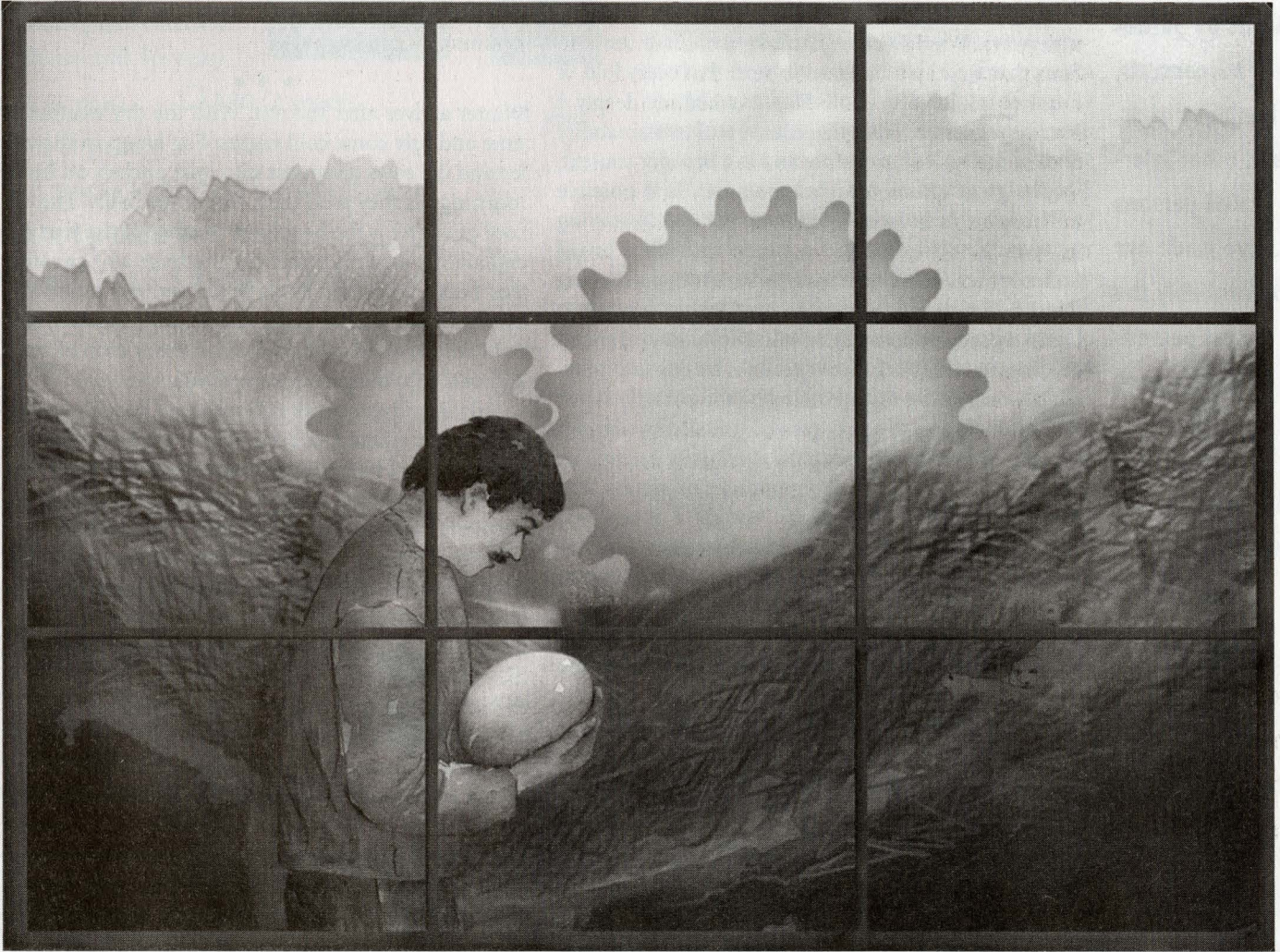
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The wet can start as early as December or as late as May. In the years when it doesn't come at all, we enjoy a pleasant autumn but pay for it the following spring when streams dry up and irrigation becomes more difficult. Typically, the autumn months from February to May see considerable rain and flood-swollen creeks.

In the wet, the sound of falling water fills the valleys and puts a smile on the face of ducks and leeches alike. Falling water creates energy. A Pelton wheel only six inches in diameter drives an alternator from a car, providing sufficient power for two of our houses. Falling water can also wreak havoc on the landscape. In April 1989, when 17 inches of rain fell in just over 24 hours, we experienced a couple of landslides on areas where we had planted trees ten years before. With five kilometers of road on the property, the maintenance of drains is a constant concern in the wet.

When Ellen and I arrived here in 1979, our first paying job was doing farm laboring and nursery work. It was hard going for low wages, but we learned a lot of basic practical skills that have stood us in good stead over the years. We have put in four dams for stock watering and irrigation. Fencing is an ongoing job, made easier by the fact that our Jersey cows can (usually) be contained by a single strand of electric fence. Sixteen years ago it was apparent that what pasture remained on the farm was disappearing under a growing jungle of lantana and camphor laurel. In this moist subtropical climate, weeds do well, and fertility





can leach from the soil, giving hardy weeds a further advantage. While my early agricultural interest had been in horticulture, I soon found myself getting involved in pasture improvement. One reason for this was the fact that the cows provide so much of our diet. Another was the connection, well documented in organic farming lore, between ruminant animals and soil fertility. And finally, a growing respect and affection for the Jersey cows themselves led to a resolution to do all that I could for their well-being.

Soil analyses revealed that our soil was extremely acid. Light applications of lime, regular slashing, and rotational grazing were implemented. To this end, 50 acres of pasture have been fenced into 15 paddocks. Improved pasture grasses and legumes have gradually been introduced. For the last 10 years I have been applying biodynamic (BD) preparations to the soil. No one really knows how the BD method works, but the most plausible explanation comes from BD's originator, Rudolf Steiner, who said that it is in the wintertime that life energies retreat from their aboveground activity and function actively in the earth itself. In any

case, the net result has been a steady improvement in pasture quality and quantity. Some of the old banana and passion fruit areas, which would not even grow weeds, are now shoulder-deep in high-quality grasses and legumes like setaria and maku lotus. In addition, thousands of trees have been planted, and some 200 acres of the property are being actively encouraged to return to their original, forested condition.

\* \* \*

Back in the early '70s, when I had my first intimations that I would live a self-sufficient lifestyle, I had no experience with growing anything, and had never really done any useful physical work. I was just sitting in my little cell at the university solving equations and worrying about the environment.

I had become an ecoactivist. With some friends I started a group on campus called the Society for Environmental Action. While researching an article for our newsletter one day I came across some information about the industrialization of agriculture. It said that pigs no longer rolled in the mud, chooks were penned up in cages, and their manure wasn't even

Jeannine Chappell,  
*Who Are You?*

Over the last few years Jeannine Chappell has developed a method in which she scans works on paper into the computer and edits them using image-editing computer software—moving them, changing size, color, opacity, and so on—to explore various possibilities for her images. Her artwork appears in two books: *Wheels, Wings, and Windows* and *Offspring*. She can be contacted at <jeannine@eastbay.com>.



**Visits by parties of bureaucrats, health officials, and other interested persons have made our loo probably the most peered-down (if not peed-in) in the nation.**

being put back on the soil. Instead, it was polluting waterways. Why? Because it made economic sense to farm that way. I was amazed to read that every loaf of bread cost kilos of topsoil. This touched me deeply. I became obsessed with the concept of sustainability both in the agricultural sense and in a broader context.

The great question for me became: "Is it possible for humans to live on the planet without destroying it?" I took this question on board in both a broad philosophical sense and in a personal way, believing that I had to live according to my ideals. I aspired to live in a geodesic dome in a beautiful valley and spend my time growing organic vegetables by day and playing classical guitar of an evening by the potbelly stove.

The obsession to live organically, fueled by a growing pile of books and journals, eventually became so strong that I left my cell, my computer programs, and the mathematics of ship hulls, bought a rotary hoe and a one-ton truck, and leased five acres of land on the northern outskirts of Sydney. I had to experience this organic growing thing for myself.

A year later I dropped back into the cell, older and wiser from the attempt to support myself from the land. I had learned a lot. Mostly I learned that the hardest part of farming is marketing the produce. I also learned that it can be difficult to do things alone. My old rugby coach used to say: "This is a team game,

you blokes!" So where was the team? My search for community had begun.

\* \* \*

Winter arrives after the wet. With the dry weather of June and July come cold nights. Fog hangs in the valley and the cows disappear into mist pockets on frosty mornings as they plod their way to the bails. The dry cool of winter is the healthiest weather of the year. We depend on its chill to kill off the bugs and parasites that hassle crops and cattle in the warmer months. It can be a good time to make cheese, slash lantana, chip out Crofton weed, and get that last cover crop of vetch and oats into the garden or orchard.

July is midyear break at Southern Cross University in Lismore, where I've been able to get part-time lecturing work. I have taught mathematics and statistics and now numerical analysis and water resource management. Farming has never been a lucrative pastime for me; it's more a labor of love. Having said that, when I look at what we as a community get from the farm, and add that to the dollars that come in the gate from primary production, we are growing something like \$30,000 worth of produce per year (according to the calculations of an agriculture student who did her research project here).

Unlike our noncommunal neighbors, by living in a group and pooling resources we have achieved the critical mass to make farming a viable and pleasant pursuit. My part-time university work and Ellen's job at the community college have brought in enough money to buy a tractor and enable me to spend time doing volunteer work for the organic and biodynamic agriculture movements. Whereas the first ten years here we were head down and tail up helping to get Dharmananda's infrastructure (roads, dams, pipelines, buildings, etc.) established, the past five have seen me get increasingly involved in sustainable agriculture in the larger community at the local, regional, and national levels.

Helping to organize a local permaculture group in the early '80s was a way to get around the district and see how other people were attacking the problem of agricultural sustainability. I am fascinated by the BD method. In keeping with Steiner's theory, winter is the time to make the BD "Preparation 500" by packing cow manure into cow horns and burying it in good, fertile loam. We have been making this preparation successfully for five years, and our farm has become something of a node on the North Coast biodynamic map. Although straight science has no way of explaining the action of the BD method, there is a growing number of scientific studies which show that BD farms do have measurably healthier soils, plants, and animals, while being as profitable as similar, conventional farms.

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Along with some New Zealand BD farmers, I am involved in an enterprise called BD Outreach, which is helping to establish the BD method in India and other developing countries. After receiving so much from India, it's nice to be able to give something back.

\* \* \*

One thing that Mother India gave me was the practice of Zen Buddhist meditation. I met a Japanese Zen monk at Bodh Gaya, the place of Buddha's enlightenment, in 1974, when I returned to India after completing my Ph.D. This monk offered some deceptively simple advice. He said, "Sit like Buddha and you become Buddha." It was the sort of practice that my overly active left-brain really needed. The idea of *shikantaza* (just sitting) without any other purpose than to sit has an irresistible appeal. The concept is extended into other activities like walking, eating, and writing, and eventually to every action in life. As we learn to "just act" each moment fully and totally, without distraction or fantasy, suffering falls away and, as a result, we do the job better. It is a philosophy that is summarized by the old saying: "When sitting, just sit! When walking, just walk! Don't wobble!" Trying to live my life with a minimum of wobble has been my practice since 1974.

The five years from 1974 to 1979 saw me sitting on cushions in India, England, Australia, and the United States, trying to become Buddha. It was on a trip to the States in 1977, in search of a roshi for the Sydney Zen Group, that I met Ellen. We were married in Vancouver in June 1979, bought an old VW van in Sydney in August, and by mid-September we had arrived at Dharmananda.

We spent our first four years living in the 3-by-4 meter creamery at the end of the old cow bails. Life was basic in many ways, and particularly hard for Ellen, who came from urban California. We decided to join Dharmananda after nine months here, began accumulating building materials, and after four years we had built a small two-room cottage with a large verandah.

With my background in engineering and mathematics, I became fascinated with certain aspects of building, and particularly with the geometrical challenges presented by the construction of curved roofs. I subsequently designed, and had a large part in building, a meditation hall and a bunkhouse for visitors to Dharmananda. Both structures have curved roofs, and both were built with community energy on our workdays. As a junior design engineer back in my early twenties, I had been a small cog in a big machine, drawing lines on paper and rarely seeing the finished product. Here at Dharmananda I have been able to participate in construction projects from conception to completion. When I look back on these communal

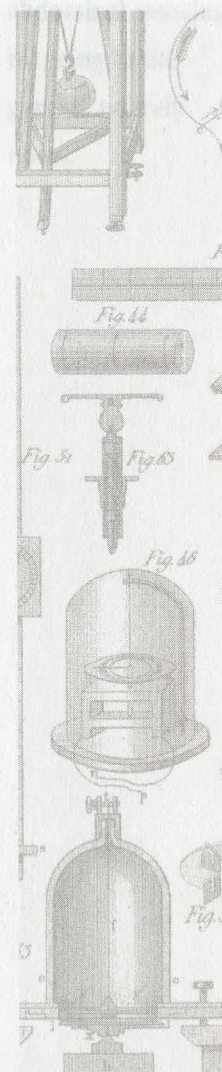
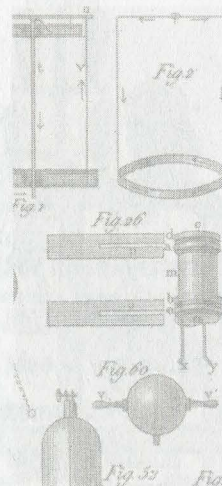
building projects, I am reminded of E. F. Schumacher's statement: "The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give a man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence."

While my major strivings have been in the field of alternative agriculture, I have also helped to pioneer affordable, rational sewage disposal. When our small cottage was complete, Ellen and I decided to build a composting toilet rather than the septic system required by the local council. Negotiations with the council revealed that state health authorities did not approve of the use of owner-built composting toilets.

*Although I understand well enough the scientific principles behind meteorology, I dance with the others for rain during times of drought.*

Nevertheless, the council health department bravely gave us the go-ahead and asked me to put together a little how-to booklet on building and maintaining the units, because they knew the demand was there, and even then there were doubts in their minds about the effect of septic tanks on surface and groundwater quality. There was some drama when the state authorities took the local council to court over the issue and threatened to knock down our toilet and "dispose of the contents in a suitable manner." The units now have tacit approval in this shire and have been found to be safe and effective by a scientific study. Over the years I have mailed out over 700 copies of the plans, and intermittent visits by parties of bureaucrats, health officials, and other interested persons have made our loo probably the most peered-down (if not peed-in) in the nation.

Having an off-farm income, I am fortunate to be able to work the land without the same financial pressures to which most farmers are subject. There is a strong aesthetic priority in what I try to achieve. "How would it look?" rather than "How much money will it make?" is usually the operative question. In working to blend the 50 acres of farmland with the 200 forested acres, my agricultural pursuit has assumed a cultural overtone. The juxtaposition of the agricultural and the natural landscape is a combination that fascinates me with its multitude of possibilities. No two paddocks are the same; each has a special quality. Each presents its own artistic challenges. Attempting to meet these challenges gives my life much of its meaning. The sight of six heifers sitting together under a tree in a small forest clearing one





morning was a perfect moment. Rock walls around paddocks give a sense of relative permanence, with humanity and nature in harmony—"agriculture in its place."

In his classic work on natural farming, *One Straw Revolution*, Masanobu Fukuoka says, "The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops but the cultivation and perfection of human beings." Though my initial interactions with this property were an attempt to impose my preconceived ideas onto the landscape, the paradigm has very much shifted to working with the spirit of natural regeneration, which is so obviously operating here. Somehow, there has been enough space in our endless activity and striving for that

spirit to be felt. When I can find the time I would like to build shrines here—shrines in special places, dedicated to the Spirit of Regeneration.

The noted ecologist Paul Ehrlich suggests that the Earth will only be saved if its human inhabitants develop (or rediscover) an earth-centered spirituality. It is difficult to see this happening in the agricultural context while farmers dance to a tune played by accountants and chemical companies. I am grateful that my communal farming experience in this beautiful natural setting has enabled me to make contact with my own inner artist and mystic. They now work together with the already familiar inner scientist.

Although I understand well enough the scientific principles behind meteorology, I dance with the others for rain during times of drought. In all humility, we acknowledge our own fragility and honor the mystery of processes incompletely understood...and we hope that our efforts will give El Niño a good kick in the butt. As the years go by, we reinvent ceremonies

and rituals that reflect our needs and our dependencies.

Today, my life is not the straightforward mix of simple work and contemplation of my early *Mother Earth News* fantasies, with their focus on personal self-sufficiency. Although I do spend several days a week working on the land like a peasant, often with hand tools, I also put in two or three days in a modern, air-conditioned university building. I commute from one life to the other in a Holden station wagon, and often fly interstate or overseas to attend meetings related to my agricultural interests. Despite increasingly frequent feelings of being overloaded, I think that I may have inadvertently stumbled onto the best of both worlds.

My original vision was to help create a sort of permaculture paradise cum Buddhist meditation center, independent of the evil industrial society that was destroying the natural world. It was a vision of an ecology of complementary relationships, where plants, animals, and humans would work together to mutual benefit. In retrospect, I had underestimated the importance of the human element and the value of using everyday life situations as opportunities for spiritual growth. Perhaps the greatest achievement of

Dharmananda has been to provide the opportunity for "everyday life Zen" as opposed to "monastery Zen."

\* \* \*

By mid-August the last frost is usually gone, and eyes scan the horizon for the patchy storms... ❖

*This article is an edited version of the chapter, "From Barbecues at Bondi to Bio-Dynamic Bananas," in the book From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality, edited by Bill Metcalf (UNSW Press, Australia, 1994).*

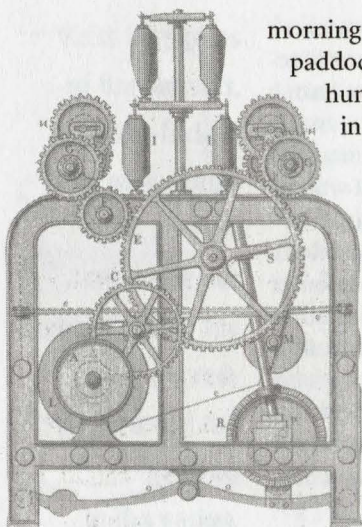
*Leigh Davison is head of the Centre for Ecotechnology at Southern Cross University, Lismore, in northern New South Wales, where his research interests are focused on integrated urban water management, waterless sanitation, natural treatment systems, and soil-solute interactions.*

### while the tea steeps

clear the wooden table and wipe its  
surface with a damp rag  
move the table to the window and  
raise the shade  
on the table spread a linen cloth  
clean, white, ironed  
in the center place some flowers  
a modest bouquet  
heat some water and  
brew some tea  
take the old tray with the faded ivy leaves  
and place upon it the teapot,  
honey, teacup, spoon  
sit at the table by the window  
rest your hands on the linen cloth  
and  
while the tea steeps  
remember  
things that should not be forgotten

—Andrea Ayzavian

*The Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayzavian is dean of religious life and Protestant chaplain at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. A lifelong activist for peace and social justice, she is also a mother, poet, antiracism educator, and war tax resister.*





# East Meets West

## Investigating the Mind

by Nancy Berezin

*It may seem odd that a religious leader is so involved with science, but Buddhist teachings stress the importance of understanding reality, and so we should pay attention to what scientists have learned about our world through experimentation and measurement.*

*Similarly, Buddhists have a 2,500-year history of investigating the workings of the mind. Over the millennia, many practitioners have carried out what we might call "experiments" in how to overcome our tendencies toward destructive emotions.*

—Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama

**O**n a rainy weekend last September, a historic event took place on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. Before a hushed crowd of over a thousand students, faculty, mental health professionals, and Buddhist practitioners, the Dalai Lama joined a panel of distinguished Western scientists and Buddhist scholars for two days of animated discussion on the workings of the human mind.

Titled "Investigating the Mind: Exchanges between Buddhism and the Biobehavioral Sciences on How the Mind Works," the program was cosponsored by the McGovern Institute for Brain Research at MIT and the Mind and Life Institute, a nonprofit group dedicated to fostering dialogue between the great Asian contemplative traditions and Western science.

While this was the first public Mind and Life conference, private exchanges between Buddhists and Western biobehavioral scientists have been taking place quietly for over 16 years, at His Holiness' residence in Dharamsala and elsewhere. Participants have explored topics ranging from brain development to altruism, Buddhist cosmology, and quantum mechanics. From the edited proceedings have come a total of seven books—most recently *The New Physics and Cosmology: Dialogues with the Dalai Lama*, by Arthur Zajonc (Oxford University Press, 2004).

### Two Traditions, One Ground

Where did the idea of seeking a common ground between Buddhism and neuroscience originate? Brought up to believe that the Earth was flat and the moon shone with its own light, the Dalai Lama developed an early, intense curiosity about the physical world. (He has been quoted as saying that if he had not become a monk, he would have enjoyed being an engi-

neer because of his desire to understand the way things work.) Peering through a telescope left by the 13th Dalai Lama, the young monk followed the changing patterns of the stars and observed that the mountains of the moon cast shadows—evidence, he realized, that its light originated elsewhere. He began to question other assumptions of Tibetan cosmology, applying to external phenomena the same systematic approach he had been trained to use for investigating mental processes. He taught himself English and pointedly sought the company of Western scientific researchers on his travels. It was one of these researchers—the late Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela—who, in collaboration with American entrepreneur R. Adam Engle, founded Mind and Life in 1987. They saw the institute as a bridge between the two disciplines, a way for Western scientists and Buddhist scholars to share insights and conduct collaborative work. "We are not promoting Buddhism per se," says Engle. "We seek to stimulate rigorous scientific research into the mind and how it operates so as to guide and inform medicine, neuroscience, psychology, education, and human development."

The Dalai Lama appears to see little conflict between the insights of science and those of contemplative practice. He has often remarked that if science should disprove any aspect of Buddhist cosmology, Buddhism must change. Rather than viewing technology with suspicion, His Holiness wants Buddhists to see it as a complement to their meditation practice—another set of tools for exploring the nature of reality. Like study of the Four Noble Truths, scientific experimentation inevitably leads to greater appreciation of the essential interconnectedness of all life, which is the source of compassion and ethical behavior. "Both have the same objective," he writes, "the achievement of happiness and satisfaction, which are the intimate concern of every human being."

### Mind and Life XI

The 2003 conference included sessions in three major areas: attention and cognitive control, mental imagery, and emotion. The Dalai Lama was present on every panel and showed no sign of tiring, however long—and occasionally obscure—the presentations. He listened intently to the speakers, injected frequent questions and comments, and chuckled heartily over the limitations of his own English. Here are a few of the things they talked about:

**For most Western psychologists, the idea of generating compassion through mental exercise—in the same way that one might develop a fancy set of abdominal muscles by going to the gym—is entirely novel.**



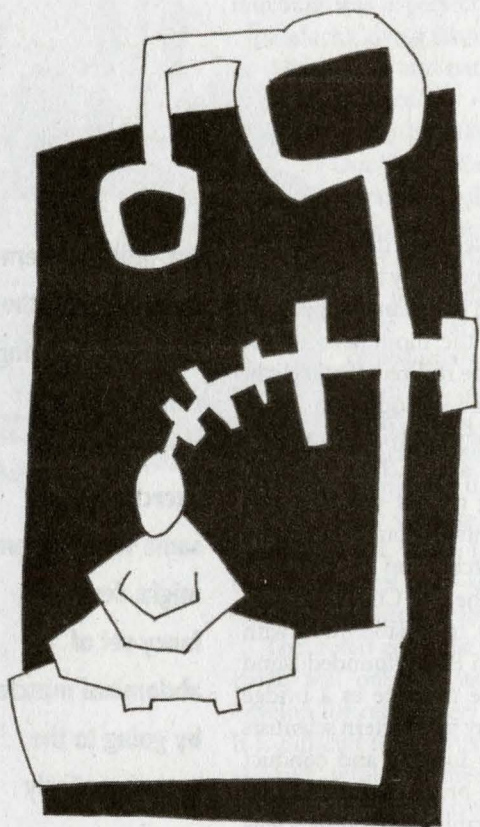


Illustration by  
Tiffany Sankary

*Tiffany Sankary is a visual artist, writer, and teacher who lives in Oakland, California. She is currently studying to become a Feldenkrais Practitioner. More of her work can be found at: [www.movement-building.org/tiffany](http://www.movement-building.org/tiffany).*

**Attention and cognitive control.** Using sophisticated brain-imaging equipment like positron emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), Western scientists are beginning to form a picture of the neural mechanisms responsible for attention and cognitive control. Meanwhile, Buddhist scholars have access to 2,500 years of detailed—if highly introspective—observations on the subject. Would Western researchers benefit from studying the work of ancient and contemporary Buddhist masters? If advanced meditators do in fact have special powers of attention, how did they develop them?

These questions fascinate Jonathan Cohen, director of the Center for the Study of Brain, Mind and Behavior at Princeton University. Most humans have difficulty focusing their attention on a single task for very long, he told the meeting. Jobs that demand prolonged attention, like air traffic control, are typically regarded as highly stressful. Yet advanced meditators like Matthieu Ricard report no difficulty in maintaining attention for hours, even within the noisy confines of an MRI chamber. Cohen asked the Buddhist scholars for help in designing studies to explore such abilities.

While some tasks demand prolonged attention, others require workers to switch rapidly from one activity to another. Mathematical psychologist David E. Meyer of the University of Michigan wanted to know whether the Buddhist scholars had any pointers for dealing with “multitasking addiction disorder” (MAD), a problem created by technology in which people pressured to perform competing tasks simultaneously end up accomplishing neither effectively. The demand to do too many things at once, said the Michigan researcher, has turned us into a society of individuals with shortened attention spans, who literally have become addicted to the stimulation provided by the flood of incoming data.

B. Alan Wallace, a former Tibetan monk who is president of the Santa Barbara Institute for the Interdisciplinary Study of Consciousness, noted that there is plenty of multitasking in Buddhism, such as chanting while engaging in visualizations. He said

that stability of attention develops gradually over time, beginning with the focused performance of very simple practices. Ajahn Amaro, co-abbot of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in Redwood Valley, California, added that concentration practice and mindfulness reinforce one another to the point where a great master can respond to the needs of many students as calmly as though he were responding to only a few. It is the addiction component of MAD that creates the problem, he said, not the multitasking.

**Mental imagery.** When a monk told Stephen Kosslyn, the John Lindsley Professor of Psychology at Harvard, that the Dalai Lama retains detailed images of hundreds of Tibetan gods in his memory, Kosslyn was skeptical. Having spent his career studying the relationship between imagery and perception, the psychologist knew how difficult it was for people to retain even simple images, let alone complex *thangkas* (Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings) accurately for more than ten seconds at a time. But since Tibetan monastics are the acknowledged superstars in this area, Kosslyn is eager to formally investigate their claims. He doubts he will find many monks with amazing powers but hopes to be proved wrong. The ability to train the mind to retain images would have a multitude of practical applications, from helping brain-injured people rebuild their memories to providing cancer patients with safe and inexpensive pain control.

**Emotion.** Can destructive emotions like anger and fear be defused by mind training? Can wholesome emotions like compassion be consciously cultivated? Buddhist practitioners take this as a given. Yet for most Western psychologists, the idea of generating compassion through mental exercise—in the same way that one might develop a fancy set of abdominal muscles by going to the gym—is entirely novel.

Richard Davidson, director of the W. M. Keck Laboratory for Functional Brain Imaging and Behavior at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, broke new ground when he started recruiting Buddhist monks for studies of the neural foundations of emotion. Using functional MRI and electroencephalography (EEG) to pinpoint areas of the brain involved in different affective states, Davidson found that when subjects were distressed, the circuitry around the amygdala and right prefrontal cortex became activated. When the same subjects were feeling peaceful and happy, activity shifted to the left prefrontal cortex. The monks recruited by Davidson showed a more consistent tilt toward the left than any other study subjects. In the case of one senior Indian monk, the results were so far to the left they were practically off the charts.

Much of Davidson’s work has been done in collaboration with French molecular biologist and monastic



Matthieu Ricard of the Shechen Monastery in Nepal. Ricard, who is also the Dalai Lama's French interpreter, gave a fascinating talk about his dual role as co-investigator and study subject. When contemplatives like himself are fitted with EEG caps and asked to meditate on compassion, they show greater left prefrontal activity than control subjects given the same instruction, suggesting expansion of neural networks in areas associated with emotional well being.

Projected on-screen, the sight of the immensely dignified Ricard with knobby electrodes protruding from his shaved head sent the audience and His Holiness into peals of laughter. But controlled studies showing that meditation practice can change the way our brains operate would provide important proof of neural plasticity—as well as confirm the Buddhist belief that the replacement of destructive emotions with wholesome ones remains possible throughout life.

However, you don't have to be a monastic—or even a Buddhist—to experience the benefits of practice. In a study recently published in the journal *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Davidson and Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester, compared the brain activity and mood of 25 biotech workers who had received two months of meditation training with those of co-workers waiting to receive such training. All described their jobs as stressful, but those who had learned to meditate reported feeling more energized and less anxious. Their prefrontal activity had shifted significantly from right to left. Their immune function also had improved, as shown by a heightened antibody response to flu vaccine.

The Dalai Lama firmly believes that cultivation of happiness and inner balance are crucial if humanity is to survive. In an editorial in *The New York Times* last year, he wrote: “The calamity of 9/11 demonstrated that modern technology and human intelligence guided by hatred can lead to immense destruction. Such terrible acts are a violent symptom of an afflicted mental state. To respond wisely and effectively, we need to be guided by more healthy states of mind, not just to avoid feeding the flames of hatred, but to respond skillfully. We would do well to remember that the war against hatred and terror can be waged on this, the internal front, too.” ❖

For more information on the Mind and Life Institute and its programs, visit [www.mindandlife.org](http://www.mindandlife.org). Books from Mind and Life may be purchased at [www.mindandlife.org/pubnpsc.html](http://www.mindandlife.org/pubnpsc.html). To learn about the Science for Monks Project, visit: [www.scienceformonks.org](http://www.scienceformonks.org).

*Nancy Berezin is a medical writer and Zen practitioner living in Mill Valley, California.*

## HARNESSING THE MIND FOR BENEVOLENT ENDS

### A Conversation with Dacher Keltner, Ph.D.

by Nancy Berezin

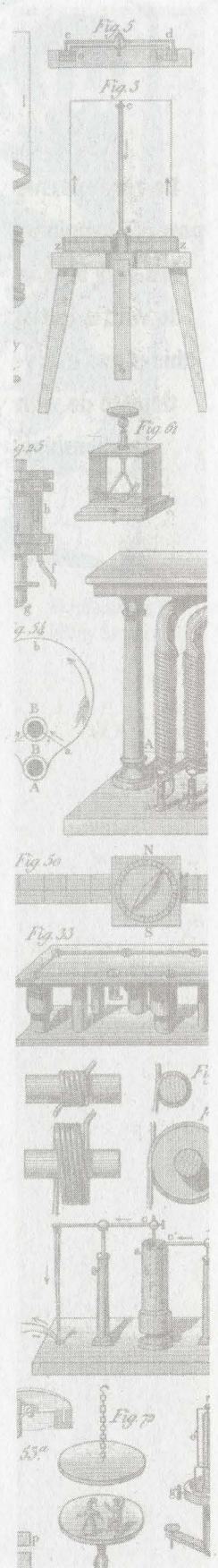
*Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and founding director of the Berkeley Center for the Development of Peace and Well-Being. He was part of the distinguished panel of Western experts who met with the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist scholars last September for “Investigating the Mind: Exchanges Between Buddhism and the Biobehavioral Sciences on How the Mind Works.” (See preceding article.) The following conversation took place a few months after the conference, in a Berkeley coffeehouse.*

**Nancy Berezin: You direct the Berkeley Center for the Development of Peace and Well-Being. How did that center get started, and what are your research goals?**

Dacher Keltner: The center was started with a grant from two generous UC Berkeley alumni, Tom and Ruth-Ann Hornaday, in memory of their 26-year-old daughter who died of cancer. Our research focuses on questions related to individual and group harmony, such as: How do people overcome barriers of race and class to form friendships? What makes for a stable marriage? What are the correlates of a good parent-child relationship? What role does touch play in strengthening human bonds? And how can we as a society foster positive emotions such as compassion, empathy, gratitude, and hope? Through our publications and website, we are attempting to create an interdisciplinary community of scholars to examine these questions and arrive at some generalizations about what benevolent emotions are and why they evolved.

**NB: So much of “Investigating the Mind” was devoted to discussion of the “mechanics” of meditation practice, for example, how long a trained meditator can focus on a specific mental image. But from a Buddhist perspective, it’s really the outcome that counts—the capacity of meditation to produce benevolent effects. Could you recast the meeting for us in that light?**

DK: The sessions on attention and imagery focused on the question, Do Buddhist practitioners have mental





**Barring extreme poverty, happiness has very little to do with material things and everything to do with relationships.**

capabilities that are not predicted by neuroscience? That would be very valuable to demonstrate, as Richie Davidson [director of the W. M. Keck Laboratory for Functional Brain Imaging and Behavior at the University of Wisconsin] and his team have begun to do. They found that if you startle a Buddhist monk while he is meditating, he won't show a typical response. His heart rate won't escalate, his face won't register shock. That in itself is astounding, because the startle response was always assumed to be a basic reflex—something we have no control over.

Similarly, when the researchers studied the brains of meditating monks, they found them to be qualitatively different from the brains of control subjects. There was greater activity in areas associated with feelings of happiness and contentment. So it seems pretty clear that the equanimity you sense when you are around trained meditators is biologically based. For me, that begs the question, How can we harness those capabilities to create a gentler and more peaceable world?

**NB: His Holiness the Dalai Lama has written extensively about compassion being the ground from which all positive actions spring, yet Western social scientists have never expressed much interest in it.**

DK: That's true. While everyone appreciates the value of compassion, hardly any research has been done on how it influences the behavior of individuals and groups. But that is starting to change. A number of recent papers have focused on the role of compassion in shaping attitudes toward the death penalty and other extreme forms of punishment. And after 9/11 there was a surge of interest in compassion as it relates to foreign policy issues: Should our response to terrorism be dictated simply by a desire for revenge, or should we seek a diplomatic solution focused on greater cross-cultural understanding? There is also a growing body of literature examining the role of compassion in children's relationships.

**NB: You have referred to compassion as a "foundational" emotion. What does that mean?**

DK: It's a revolutionary concept because, unlike the Buddhists, Western psychologists have traditionally viewed human beings as selfish by design. But there have been a spate of recent studies suggesting that we are just as hard-wired to be compassionate. Compassion helps to prevent conflict—thus, it serves a survival function. Studies in schoolchildren associate compassion with better peer relationships and greater cooperation in the classroom. There was even a paper linking it to improved academic performance.

It would not surprise me if future research found compassion—as well as other positive emotions like gratitude, empathy, optimism, and awe—to be associ-

ated with a stronger immune system and improved physical health. There is happiness in giving to others, and happy people seem to live longer.

**NB: Which brings us to laughter, which I know you regard as both benevolent and transformative.**

DK: Very definitely. Laughter provides a release of energy that might otherwise degenerate into anger or self-pity. The Dalai Lama is the best exemplar of that. Despite all the suffering he has seen, he is full of humor. His laughter is contagious.

In the late 1990s, we conducted a study of adjustment to the loss of a spouse with investigators from Columbia University. Men and women who had lost their partners within the past six months were interviewed in our laboratory, and their facial expressions were coded using a standard measurement scale. All of the stories were tragic, yet some surviving spouses remained capable of humor, while others stayed downcast for the duration of the interview. Four years later we re-interviewed the group, and it was the survivors who had managed to laugh at the injustice of the loss who fared the best psychologically. We have since replicated that finding with survivors of sexual abuse.

When destructive emotions are diffused by laughter, the individual immediately feels calmer. There actually is a physiological basis for this, because laughter is 90 percent exhalation, and when we exhale, our heart rate slows. Not only do we relax, but—because laughter signals the absence of danger—those around us relax. Which brings up another interesting facet of laughter: It tends to draw others into our circle. It fosters connection.

**NB: How does awe fit the definition of a positive emotion? I suspect that most people would regard it as fairly neutral.**

DK: At first glance, awe may not appear linked to compassion and the rest. But whether it's awe of God, or nature, or an inspiring work of art, awe is an emotion that we typically want to share with others. So it commits us to the collective in the same way that laughter does.

**NB: Chimpanzees are very close to us on the evolutionary ladder, and they appear capable of feeling nearly all of the positive emotions that we feel. But their interactions are also characterized by tremendous violence and cruelty. Do you believe that homo sapiens can rise above that?**

DK: Well, the bonobo [another primate species that shares over 98 percent of our genetic profile] have managed to do it! Frans de Waal's research shows that these apes are more cooperative, egalitarian, and peace-loving than either chimpanzees or humans.



Their culture, which is largely matriarchal, discourages violence in a way that chimp culture does not.

My sense is that all primates have a vast emotional range. The seeds of compassion, play, and other positive emotions are always present, but they are not always nourished by life experience. One of the fascinating things to emerge from the dialogue between Western science and Buddhism has been the recognition that positive emotions frequently do not come easily—they take work. The monks who participated in the recent studies have spent a lifetime cultivating compassion and selflessness, both in their thoughts and in their conduct. The monastic community provides social reinforcement for these benevolent states in a way that lay society does not, particularly in the West.

In contemporary Western culture, nearly everything is designed to appeal to individual self-interest. We go off to our high-pressure jobs in the morning and deposit our kids in daycare. Our closest friends and relatives may live thousands of miles away. If a problem arises, we are expected to handle it ourselves. Material success is prized—compassion often is not. In fact, people who give generously of themselves may be regarded as losers and penalized for their behavior.

That degree of isolation does not seem to work well for us as a species. In the hunter-gatherer societies from which we evolved, families lived in close proximity to one another. Babies were carried on their mothers' backs. Work was done collectively, with the understanding that what benefited the group as a whole benefited the individual. There was plenty of time in the day for laughter, touch, and intimate conversation. Those things are largely absent from our lives, yet they continue to exist in less developed parts of the world. The Dalai Lama has repeatedly observed that despite the poverty and hardship they endure, Tibetans are by and large happier than their materially wealthy Western counterparts.

**NB: So Western scientists have a lot to learn from cross-cultural exchanges like the Mind and Life series.**

DK: Absolutely. We need to understand what makes people happy and content with their lives. The well-being literature suggests that, barring extreme poverty, happiness has very little to do with material things and everything to do with relationships. For most of us, that represents quite an adjustment in our thinking.

But the good news is that the capacity for change is there. Neuroimaging studies, including some presented at this conference, show that the brain is a lot more plastic than scientists originally believed. Rather than going through life with a fixed number of neurons, we actually grow new neurons as we age in response to environmental stimuli.

In our department at Berkeley, David Krech, Mark Rosensweig, and others have shown that rats raised in enriched environments with other rats showed significant changes in brain structure. Other work by Michael Meany and colleagues at McGill University has demonstrated that interventions in older rats can reverse some of the negative brain changes associated with lack of maternal contact in infancy. And now Richie Davidson is telling us that positive emotions like compassion and gratitude originate in a part of the brain that appears to be particularly malleable. So the potential for transformation not only exists but remains with us as we age.

**NB: What lessons can policymakers draw from this research? As you were asking earlier, how can we harness experienced meditators' capabilities to create a gentler and more peaceable world?**

DK: Clearly, the findings have important implications for our educational and criminal justice systems. If meditation fosters individual and societal health, perhaps we should be teaching it to very young children. Maybe there should be less emphasis on conflict resolution in our schools, and more on the *prevention* of conflict. The Western model of criminal justice focuses almost exclusively on pathology—on bringing offenders to justice and keeping them off the streets. The Buddhist model is much more affirmative. It assumes rehabilitation is possible—that with enough encouragement, even the most hardened criminals are capable of benevolent thoughts and acts. The victimizer is viewed not as an enemy of society but as an object of compassion, because he or she so clearly suffers from deluded thoughts and destructive emotions such as anger and aggression.

The research presented at the conference also reminds us, as citizens of the world's leading superpower, that we have a collective responsibility to act mindfully rather than reflexively. We don't have to greet each new threat with a massive display of firepower. We can produce a more measured response, as the Buddhist monks did when the neuroscientists attempted to startle them. We can train ourselves to be less vengeful and more empathetic. ❖

For more information on the Berkeley Center for the Development of Peace and Well-Being, go to <http://ihd.berkeley.edu/newspeace.htm>.

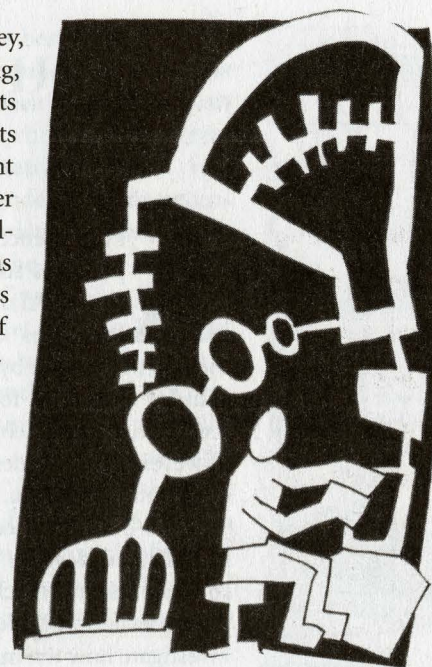
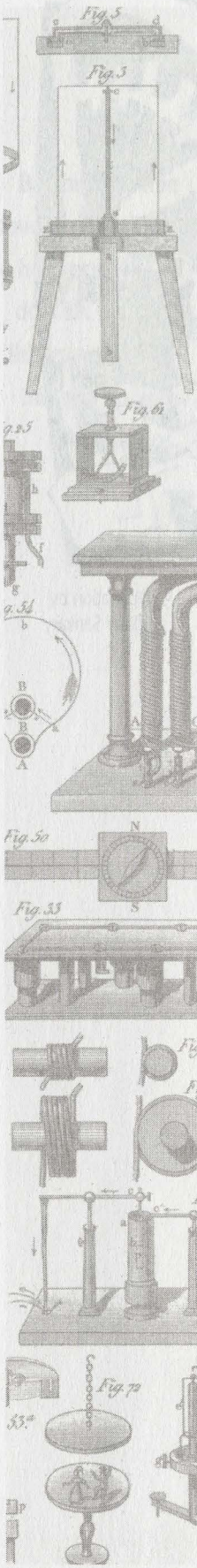


Illustration by  
Tiffany Sankary



# Hungry Ghosts of the West

by Annette Herskovits



At the science fiction end of research on computers is something called artificial intelligence (AI). This is “the science of making machines do things that would require intelligence if done by people,” in the words of Marvin Minsky, one of its founders—things like speaking a language, playing chess, or diagnosing disease. AI, however, also includes robotics and the simulation of vision, manipulation, and locomotion.

AI is both engineering and science. AI engineers have helped develop tools, some of them beneficial, such as reading machines for the blind, and others purely maleficent, like “smart” missiles. AI scientists investigate how the mind works by constructing computer programs that perform skills of a mental nature. This is not a new approach: building flying machines helped us understand how birds and insects fly. AI teams up with neuroscience, which uses imaging technology to link specified mental capabilities with brain structures and processes, and with cognitive science, which combines methods and insights from all disciplines that study the mind.

## Grand promises

From the first, AI researchers have been given to wild exaggerations about AI’s accomplishments and potential. As early as 1957, AI scientist and economist Herbert Simon, alluding to a computer program modestly called the General Problem Solver, said, “There are now in the world machines that think, that learn, and that create.” But the program proved able to solve very few problems indeed.

At the furthest extreme, one finds such grandiose nonsense as this by Professor Edward Fredkin from the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University:

There are three events of equal importance.... Event one is the creation of the universe.... Event two is the appearance of life.... And third, there’s the appearance of artificial intelligence.

Or Hans Moravec, who heads that Institute:

Today, our machines are still simple creations.... But within the next century they will mature into entities as complex as ourselves, and eventually into something transcending everything we know.... The children of our minds will be free to grow.... Sooner or later, like natural children, they will seek their own fortunes while we, their aged parents, silently fade away.

Compare these pronouncements with Einstein’s:

“The scientist’s religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, in comparison with it, the highest intelligence of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.”

## Investigating self and nature

As an observer of the AI scene—as a graduate student at MIT’s AI laboratory in the late 1960s, and later as a linguist—I have puzzled over what attracts people to AI and why some of them hold such bizarre convictions.

Most AI scientists are primarily motivated by intense curiosity about how the mind works, how the body obeys the mind’s commands, and how the senses pick up information and create “images” of the surrounding world in the mind. Here are a few of the questions Minsky raises about the mind:

- How do you know how to move your arm?
- How do you recognize what you see?
- How do you locate your memories?
- Why does seeing feel different from hearing?
- Why does red look different from green?
- What does “meaning” mean?
- Why do we like pleasure more than pain?

These point to mysteries hidden in abilities that most of us take for granted, in a way that has affinities with Shunryu Suzuki’s “beginner’s mind.” There is something sacred about true (disinterested, selfless) scientific curiosity. “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing,” said Einstein.

Questions such as “What is meaning?” and “What is thought?” eventually led me to MIT. For me, those questions accompanied a deep, anguished “Who am I?” From the age of 16, I read a lot about Buddhism. I started meditation practice ten years later while at MIT. I understood that the scientific answers to these questions differed from the flash of intuition Zen teachers seek to awaken in their students, but still, the two quests were related.

## Military funding

But scientific curiosity does not explain the exaggerated claims and grandiose fantasies. One of AI scientists’ purposes is to attract funds from granters with similar dreams, mostly the military: DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), the Defense Department’s research and development arm, has



always been the principal backer of AI research. What could be better than robot soldiers, whose death would go unmourned, commanded by computers better able to track battlefield complexities than any individual's mind? And how about automatic surveillance of the billions of messages criss-crossing the globe, to detect exchanges between "terrorists"? Or, the ultimate—ruling the world through "intelligent" weapons arrayed in space?

Little of this will work out as the military, indulged by AI scientists, fancy it will. The "missile defense shield" favored by Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, which relies on AI techniques, will never work, according to Computer Scientists for Social Responsibility. The 675 smart missiles fired in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, called a great "success" by the U.S. military, caused an uncounted number of "unplanned" civilian deaths.

It is not that civilian AI scientists are evil, but they must live with the contradiction at the heart of contemporary scientific research: pursuing scientific truth leads to the development of deadly technologies. Researchers who wish only to pursue truth cannot ward off how their work will be applied. And in fact, 60 percent of basic defense research funding in 2002 went to universities, much of it for AI and neuroscience.

But the genie of knowledge cannot be put back into the bottle, nor can we delay basic research. We must put our trust in the development of wisdom. It is encouraging that many eminent neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, even some AI scientists, are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the Dalai Lama (see page 27). The volumes that have come out of these exchanges show that many of these scientists have been touched by some truths found in Buddhism. Skillfully, the Dalai Lama always goes back to the yearning for "true" happiness, with its roots in compassion and kindness, thus reminding his interlocutors of their responsibility to life.

### Omnipotence

Another thread besides desire for funds runs through the most "visionary" AI pronouncements: hunger for power, over both the physical world and human conduct. AI scientists yearn to predict and control the world in and outside themselves. And they cling to the belief that their intellects coupled with computer power can do the trick.

Most of us harbored dreams of omnipotence as children. We imagined vaporizing a mean adult or being whisked away to Ali Baba's cave, filled with everything we desired. These magic feats would astonish our friends.

Many AI scientists still dream of omnipotence. They can summon up a technological solution to

every "problem." Morality? "The best way to solve a moral problem is to make it a technical problem. The moral problem of chastity has been relieved by birth control," writes John McCarthy, who coined the term "artificial intelligence." Meditative practice will become unnecessary: when we understand the neurological correlates of mental experiences—intellectual, emotional, or spiritual—we will be able "to call them up at will, and to enhance them," writes Ray Kurzweil in *The Age of Spiritual Machines*. All the Buddhist virtues—generosity, forbearance, zeal, wisdom, compassion—will also be available at the flick of a switch, and we will even be able to eliminate suffering itself.

These futurologists, almost all Americans, subscribe to the American view of "freedom"—the right to do as one "chooses." They fail to grasp theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's: "The demand for absolute liberty brings men to the depths of slavery." Think of flicking through states of mind like a TV channel-

*Is "consciousness" individually owned—mine here in my body, yours there in your body?*

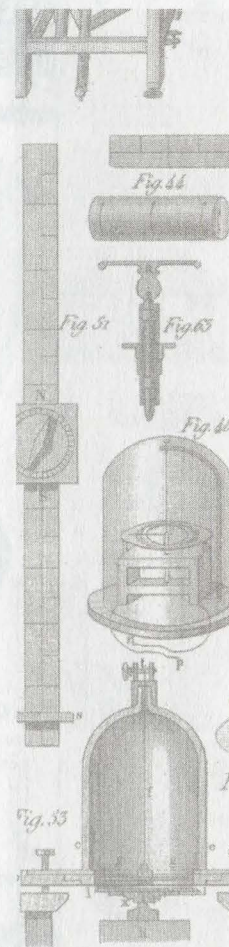
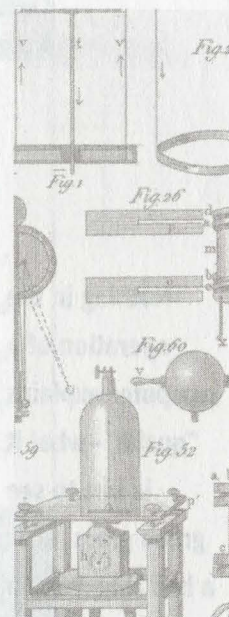
surfer: the very idea posits a separation between subject and states of mind that is intrinsically absurd—which state of mind guides the next choice? Will pursuing the most pleasant state of mind turn even more frantic, or shall we settle into some ecstatic quiescence? Minsky and Moravec have not thought through the consequences of their desires.

Some claim even death can be conquered. In a 1994 article entitled "Will Robots Inherit the Earth?" Minsky writes: "Eventually, using nanotechnology, we will entirely replace our brains. Once delivered from the limitations of biology, we will decide the length of our lives—with the option of immortality." ("Nanotechnology" refers to techniques—as yet unrealized—for manufacturing objects through molecular control of their structure, making possible, for example, microscopic computers.) Moravec says we will someday be able to download our consciousness into a computer and live forever—in fact, it might happen in time to rescue him from death. But if not, next best is for "his" descendants, the children of "his" intellect, to live forever.

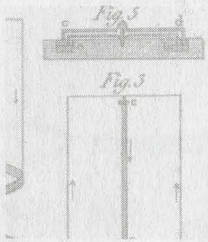
These delusions of omnipotence evince an odd view of the self, but, disturbingly, they also penetrate U.S. government and society.

### From personal omnipotence to world domination

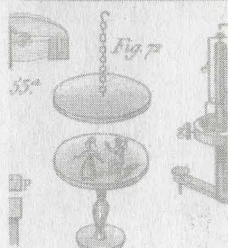
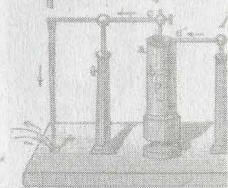
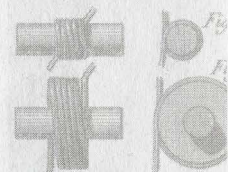
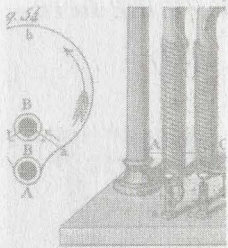
AI scientists' dreams are echoed in U.S. politicians' and military planners' fantasies of technology-based invincibility and ordained right to rule the world.







**Nothing in the operation of a computer explains "qualia"—what it is like to see green grass, hear a bell ring, have a headache.**



The Project for the New American Century, the organization credited with “inspiring” Bush’s policies, has stated that America, now without global rival, should aim to preserve and extend its hegemony “as far into the future as possible.” The means offered to maintain preeminence is military power. “Total information” and “total control” will be in U.S. hands, thanks to infowar, space war, electronic war, and cyberwar.

The “new warfare” is a pipe dream embraced by President Bush with the disastrous results now seen in Iraq: “We’ve applied the new powers of technology...to strike an enemy force with speed and incredible precision. By a combination of creative strategies and advanced technologies, we are redefining war on our terms.... We can target a regime, not a nation.”

More realistically, Chris Gray, author of *Postmodern War*, writes: “War, as a very complex and volatile system, cannot be controlled, it cannot be managed, it cannot be predicted.” Automation and information processing do not change this fact.

I doubt anyone in government reads philosopher and mystic Simone Weil: “As pitilessly as might crushes, so pitilessly it maddens whoever possesses, or believe he possesses it.” Yet, I do believe that an understanding of the true nature of might and war is slowly emerging, as shown by the massive world demonstrations against the war in Iraq before it started. I predict that growing numbers of scientists and military people will come to oppose total war.

### The self and the body

Moravec’s and Minsky’s statements reveal their views of the self. Moravec’s idea of “downloading one’s consciousness” onto a compact disk is certainly humbling. Were it true, we would have to give up attachment to part of our “self,” namely our body. Minsky is also primarily concerned with the brain and focuses on rescuing it from extinction.

Minsky and Moravec are telling us that their essence, the most precious thing about themselves, is not their body but their “mind,” which comes down to “intellect,” that which won them so much praise as children and throughout their lives.

All our body sensations and perceptions arise inside our brain, but the necessary data reach the brain on nerve pathways leading from every point in the body. How could there be sentient beings without a body, without the lavish branching structure of the nerves?

And what can possibly be stable and permanent enough to be described as “my consciousness”? Is “consciousness” individually owned—mine here in my body, yours there in your body? Is not consciousness in some ways interconnected with everything in the universe?

Buddhist teacher Steve Stucky said about the Buddha touching the earth just before enlightenment:

“We thirst deeply for healthy relationships to the earth. We are earth-beings, after all.... It is natural that we feel anxiety when we are frequently distracted by superficial televised fabrications and miss the humble source of our very cells....When extending one’s fingertips or tendrils of awareness toward the earth, it is essential to be in a state of deep listening. What is at the tip of these fingers? What is the image formed at the surface of the eye, at the retina, in the optic nerve, in the gray matter?”

Is this poetic fancy? The language is not that of science, but I see in these words a reality more solid than that of “nanotech” creatures.

### Consciousness

One major stumbling block stands in the way of AI scientists’ quest for unlimited power—namely consciousness. We experience ourselves first and foremost as sentient, conscious beings. Is a computer “conscious”? Or could it be programmed so we would attribute it consciousness?

In the early days, AI scientists identified “thinking,” or “consciousness,” with “problem-solving,” the ability to carry out certain intellectual or perceptual tasks just as computers do. From another angle, thinking was the pattern of activity in the integrated circuits of the computer as it carries out some problem-solving algorithm.

Then, in the 1980s, some philosophers and scientists pointed out that nothing in the operation of a computer explained “qualia”—what it is like to see green grass, taste sugar, hear a bell ring, have a headache, feel pain. Those are clear, powerful experiences. Sentience may arise from the activity of finite, physical brains, but it is a different “thing” from the electrochemical patterns in the brain. Buddhist texts frequently refer to “sentient beings”: only sentient beings experience *dukkha*, or suffering; it is only sentient beings that we vow to save.

Many AI scientists say that we do not see AI programs as exhibiting consciousness because existing programs are too simple. But an increase in the complexity of the pattern of electric currents in the computer’s integrated circuits will not make it conscious—it will only create more intricate electrical patterns. Like medieval alchemists, some AI scientists think they can transmute base metals into gold. More reasonably, philosopher Jerry Fodor writes: “Nobody has the slightest idea how anything could be conscious. Nobody even knows what it would be like to have the slightest idea about how anything material could be conscious.”

I was pleased to learn recently that other philosophers acknowledge the “mystery of consciousness” as a mystery. Colin McGill writes that the perennial puzzlement about consciousness and its relation to the body indicates that we have reached the limit of what we can



comprehend: "You can look into your mind until you burst, and you will not discover neurons and synapses and all the rest," and on the other hand, "you can stare at someone's brain from dawn until dusk and you will not perceive consciousness that is so apparent to the person whose brain you are so rudely eyeballing."

An analogy helps elucidate McGill's point. A person blind from birth can have no precise idea of the experience of color. Similarly, we lack the cognitive equipment to access what links mind and brain.

AI scientists, however, will not easily accept McGill's insight, because limits to the power of the intellect threaten their illusions of their own self as potentially free from causes and conditions.

### Forgetting the self

Dogen said: "That the self advances and confirms the ten thousand things is called delusion. That the ten thousand things advance and confirm the self is enlightenment." AI scientists dream of molding the universe to their own needs and desires—which, with unhesitating narcissism, they assume to be everyone else's too. But I, for one, would not want to live in a world they made in their own image.

Reading about these technological fantasies, I experience claustrophobia, not spaciousness. The range of possibilities offered is confining, not liberating. The world described is arrested, no more in flowing change; deathly, not alive.

Rather than a universe tailored to our every desire, what brings us delight is "the sheer alien pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones, and trees," as Iris Murdoch noted. This delight "clears our minds of selfish care," she adds, bringing about an "unselfing." I, with many others, feel strongly drawn to this unselfing, in which the walls of the small self/ego become porous, letting in the 10,000 things. This path seems to lead in the direction directly opposite from that chosen by the AI science fiction dreamers. I put my faith in the big Self and the 10,000 things that spring forth from it:

Self is everywhere, shining forth from all beings,  
Vaster than the vast, subtler than the most subtle,  
Unreachable, yet nearer than breath, than heartbeat.  
Eyes cannot see it, ear cannot hear it nor tongue utter it;  
Only in deep absorption can the mind,  
Grown pure and silent, merge with the formless truth.

—Mundaka Upanishad

Furthermore, I feel confident that this teaching will never contradict true science. ❖

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Katagiri Roshi, in gratitude for his great kindness and great laughter.

*Annette Herskovits lives in Berkeley, where she practices Buddhism, writes, tends her garden, and works with other peacemakers.*

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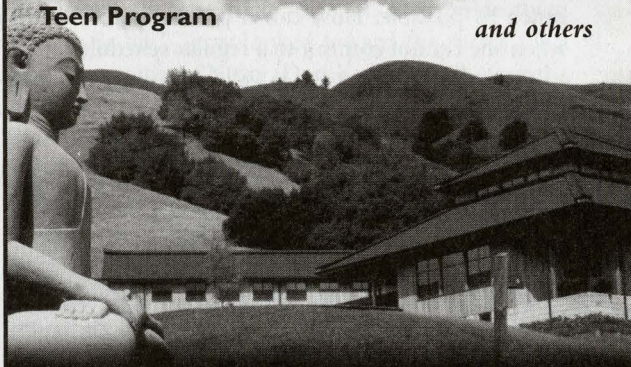
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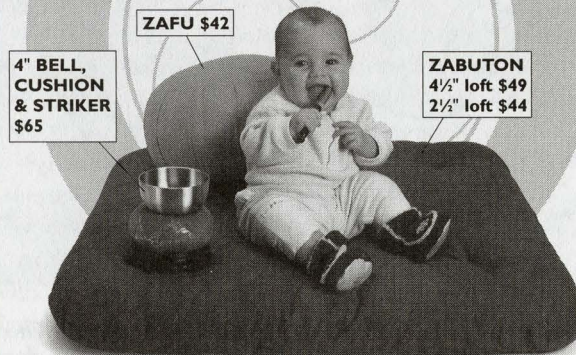
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# The Flowering of the Paper Sangha

by Nancy Lethcoe

As I left Deer Mountain Monastery in Southern California after a retreat, the nun said to me, “Nancy, you will benefit so much from a sangha. Please try to start one.” I tried, but it was difficult. Since retiring, my husband and I have become snowbirds migrating between Alaska and Arizona. We want to spend our last years outdoors, as much as possible. How can a person start a sangha when she cannot commit to a regular schedule?

Since the Buddhist Peace Fellowship had no representatives in Alaska, I volunteered to be an Alaskan con-

individuals at least once a month. The sangha newsletter includes passages from the prisoners’ letters, a general topic with quotes from dharma masters or the sutras, and news about prisons and prisoners. I add a handwritten note to each person at the end.

At first I wondered if Mark would feel hurt, now that he had to share my time. But he wrote enthusiastically, “Seems we have a small gathering of diverse traditions... Rather than confining us, this should help us by opening our hearts to the 84,000 dharma doors.” He suggested we see ourselves as a “paper sangha.”

“Thich Nhat Hanh in his commentary on the Heart Sutra uses a simple piece of paper to teach interdependence. Now when I see a paper with writing I attempt to do some deep listening!”

I had always thought of a sangha as a group of people who studied and practiced dharma together, under the guidance of a teacher, and who supported each other on the path. How could a group of inmates who could only communicate with each other through their letters to me be a sangha? (Prisoners are not allowed to write to other prisoners.) But Mark was appealing to a larger meaning of sangha: a community of people living in awareness, supporting each other and helping each other avoid obstacles. It doesn’t matter where they live. And the length of time it takes to communicate “doesn’t diminish the power” of the communication.

In the next group newsletter, I explained this enlarged idea of a sangha and asked if the others would like to join. Brian wanted contacts—information in the sangha letters—that would help him apply the dharma to real-

life situations, not just hugs and doctrines.

Robert wrote, “I love reading what everyone is experiencing. It makes it easier for me to deal with my situation.” He added, “I have to tell you that being able to write to you and tell about my experiences helps me to deal with my problems.”

Gary wrote back hoping that the sangha would be successful because “it embraces and stays connected, like the warmth of a family.” Others expressed the same appreciation of being part of a familylike group seeking spiritual growth together.

Writers started sharing their problems, and others responded. Frank, a self-taught Buddhist, found the



Paper Sangha logo  
by Moses

tact person, and my name was listed in *Turning Wheel*. Shortly thereafter I received a letter from Mark, a prisoner in lockdown, asking if I would be his pen pal. Quite frankly, the idea scared me. Was it safe? What did we have in common? I’d never thought much about prisoners. What could I say to him? How would my husband feel? For two weeks, I wavered, cradling my fears, and then I answered Mark’s letter. Thus began one of the most remarkable experiences of my life.

After a year of exchanging letters with Mark, I asked BPF for additional prisoner pen pals. Suddenly, we were a group. I now write a six-page group newsletter about every three weeks, plus postcards to



noise, confusion, and constant distractions hindrances to his meditation. "My meditation has been stolen by the high tides of confusion, not my own, but by people who create them through ignorance, biases and prejudices....When I am trying to practice, they hang out around me, make more noise, interrupt me...."

The Paper Sangha replied: "I hope Frank can find it within himself to gain or regain control of his meditation. You can let no one steal meditation by their biases or prejudices. Keep on practicing and focus on what is real." (Barry)

"Tell Frank to try to do like I did—put a sign on the door. It doesn't hurt to ask the other inmates to respect his sign when he meditates.... Once in a while someone may overlook the 'MEDITATING' sign on my door, but I don't let it bother me. Like Thich Nhat Hanh says, 'Be like a mountain.'" (Brian)

"Perhaps if you know why they 'hang out' you will find an answer. I'm sure they're not hanging out to grow spiritually, and if they are, you better keep them around because you're really going to be in for some great lessons." (Mark)

When Mark completed 100,000 prostrations in preparation for taking the bodhisattva vows with the Venerable Robina Courtien, he encountered both medical and spiritual difficulties. He experienced a letdown after completing his goal and uncertainty about his next steps. Again the sangha responded.

Moe wrote, "I think Mark would be a lot happier if he would relax. Let Mark and all the other brothers know that they're not alone. They're in my thoughts, prayers—I send my love."

Mark replied, "Thank you for making me aware of how distracted I've been recently. Often, we need outside help to break through the deluded thoughts.... Let me thank everyone who had me in their thoughts and prayers. Physically I'm feeling much better....spiritually the fog is lifting."

As this exchange shows, the Paper Sangha gives participants the opportunity to express emotions: frustration, concern for others, empathy, love, thanks. For Frank, this is an important part of the Paper Sangha, because, "It is lonely without family to share your pain and confusion. In prison you can't open up. Others feed on that. So I keep a lot bottled up."

Writing about difficult experiences helps one achieve a meditative distance. Mark was troubled by a misunderstanding he had had with another prisoner that nearly became a shouting match. He stopped himself and wrote about it instead, wondering if it would have been better to continue "defending himself" and "setting the record straight" (even though the other person clearly did not want to listen), or if turning away in silence, as he had done, was better. For weeks, they didn't speak to each other. Then in his

last letter, Mark wrote with a sense of understanding and, I think, joy: "The older guy who was so angry about the newspaper has begun speaking again. He's the guy mentioned earlier who has secretly been practicing yoga. He sent me some scuba magazines...so you can see Silence was the best remedy, rather than saying things that we would both later regret."

Like other Buddhist groups, we have had a lively discussion on possible names for our sangha. Although Mark's original "Paper Sangha" was a favorite, Cortez suggested "Compassionate Lotus Sangha" "because if you're reaching out to those in adverse conditions, they will know they have a resource who is understanding and willing to offer their experience to guide them along their life." Terry looked toward the sutras for a name, suggesting "Never Despise Sangha," after the story of the Bodhisattva "Never Despise," in the Lotus Sutra. Dwight proposed "Versions of Sangha" because "we are ethnically diversified." Felipe reflected on how we have come together and proposed the "Kusala Sangha Fellowship." He explained that *kusala* means good actions such as starting the paper sangha. "Sangha" is the community, and "Fellowship" refers to "our great respect for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, which has brought us all together." In the end, the group chose "Paper Sangha."

Moses contributed our first logo. "A logo is better [than just a name] because it stays in people's memory better than just words. Take for example the Yin Yang logo.... Lots of people know what it means." He included the dove of peace because he likes Buddhism's teachings on "peace of mind, meditation, and yoga exercises."

Our members represent Laotian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Tibetan, and Korean Buddhist traditions as well as those whose only contact with Buddhism has been through the prison books programs.

We are also ethnically diverse. Members describe themselves as Laotian, Mexican American, Black-Mexican, Black-Haitian, Black-Caucasian, Black, and Caucasian. Many participants are pressed to identify with ethnically defined prison gangs, but the Paper Sangha allows them to transcend prison gangs and see each other as individuals.

I'll let Frank make the closing remarks:

"It's close to dinner, but I'm regenerated. I did some mantras, then meditated. I feel great! In closing, I send my love to each and every one of you. Thank you for your support. Until we meet again—

A Lotus 2 You,

Frank" ❖

*Nancy Lethcoe and her husband, Jim, started an ecotourism business in Alaska 30 years ago. Now retired, they continue to write books about enjoying the outdoors nonviolently.*

**"Once in awhile someone may overlook the 'MEDITATING' sign on my door, but I don't let it bother me. Like Thich Nhat Hanh says, 'Be like a mountain.'"**



## Book Reviews

### **Daughters of Emptiness: Poems of Chinese Buddhist Nuns**

by Beata Grant

Wisdom Publications, 2003, 256 pp., \$16.95 (paper)

#### **Reviewed by Grace Schireson**

Nothing is more relevant for today's students of Buddhism than practice instructions for difficult times. This beautiful book, the poetry of 48 nuns, ranging over 16 centuries of imperial China, testifies to the power of Buddhist practice to nourish the human spirit even when war, physical hardship, class discrimination, and oppression seem insurmountable.

The poems are lovely in themselves, but they are also teachings on how to maintain a steady mind and steady practice while chaos reigns around us. The nuns' life stories remind us that oppression and cruelty are not unique to our times, while their poetry refreshes our spirit with the sweetness and clarity of awakening. The book helps reveal an important principle: Buddhist practice does not make hardship go away. Rather, the nuns' poems teach us how to radiate beauty within the hardship, how to continue looking after as many people as we can, for as long as there is suffering, without becoming bitter, angry, or disheartened.



Beata Grant, a leading researcher on the writings of women in imperial China, nimbly introduces us to the work and history of these Chinese Buddhist nuns. As a translator, she explores their original language, bringing us fresh material, and as a scholar, she helps us make sense of it. We learn of the ebb and flow of the nuns' spiritual rights within changing political conditions and Buddhist power struggles, and we even learn something about the individual writers, although I would have enjoyed more detail in the brief biographies that accompany each poem. The poems are also enlivened by the beautiful calligraphy for each nun's name and by the Chinese characters for each poem.

Consider the story of Jueqing, a 16th-century abbess. In 1537, during her tenure, a Confucian official offended by the number of convents within his jurisdiction took action to destroy all 70 nunneries and send their 500 nuns off to marriage, family, or charity houses. Jueqing wrote this poem on her temple wall as she gathered her disciples to flee the area and reestablish another convent:

*In haste and hurry we gather up our tattered robes,  
And pack up our traveling bags: not much to take.  
Sleeves brushing white clouds, we retreat to the cave's mouth,  
Carrying the moon on our shoulders, we circle the sky's edge.  
I feel such pity for the young cranes nesting on the pine tops,  
And for abandoning the flowers I planted at the foot of the  
fence.  
Again and again I admonish the cats and dogs  
Not to hang around the homes of laypeople!*

While full of feeling, the poem is without self-pity. Leaving the convent's shelter "to brush sleeves with the clouds," the nuns carry the moon of enlightened practice on their shoulders. Their sadness is reserved for those left behind, uncared for: cranes, flowers, cats, dogs.

The poem also reminds us that dependence on what the immediate culture provides—in the nuns' case, the food and shelter offered by laypeople—may become our undoing. As Jueqing implies, we, like the cats and dogs, must not be seduced by a false sense of security: we must find our own path to freedom. Her nuns disobeyed an imperial edict; guided by enlightenment, they followed the law of dharma.

The book's 48 nuns and their poems are a rich addition to Buddhist literature and teaching. They expose a hidden part of the practice, a feminine side that contrasts with the austere Chinese hermits and spare, dutiful, samurai-style Zen masters who may be more familiar to us. I gratefully await further publications from this talented and dedicated scholar. ❖

*Grace Schireson is a Zen priest, clinical psychologist, wife, mother, and proud grandmother. She was ordained at Berkeley Zen Center in Berkeley, California, and currently teaches Buddhism in a number of places, including Valley Heartland Zen in Modesto, Empty Nest Zendo in the Central Valley, and Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla.*



## Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age

by Peter D. Hershock

SUNY Press, 1999, 328 pp., \$29.95 (paper)

### Reviewed by Viki Sonntag

The wonder of Peter Hershock's thought-provoking inquiry into the effects of technology on our lives is that it opens new possibilities for living those lives consciously. Hershock reminds us that our awareness is conditioned by the technologies we use and that we must mindfully attend to their effects if we are to experience harmony in relation to the world. Western technologies, he repeatedly warns, mediate our experience in the direction of control and away from attention.

The first half of the book explores why the Western sense of identity has given rise to control-oriented technologies. In short, "self" confuses freedom with independence. Our technologies reflect our unease with dependence, our desire to "perfect the world," and to preserve our "freedom" from it. Yet what we fear, we re-create. Thus, we increasingly seek to bend the world to our will through technological progress that actually increases our dependence and limits our freedom.

As most any practicing Buddhist knows, such efforts at control are energy-intensive. Still, the book shocks us into realizing how this valorization of independence unleashes social and environmental chaos throughout the ecosphere. In trying to bring order to our experience of the world, we increase disorder (entropy) outside the boundaries of our sterile, controlled environments. Moreover, as Hershock points out, our technologies are also a practice, habituating us to the values embedded in them. With each successive technology, we attempt to exert perfection; with each mediated experience, we weaken our appreciative attention to the fullness of life as it is. In consequence, we become trapped in our own and the world's suffering.

The second half of the book delves into the ways particular technologies have "colonized our consciousness." For example, Hershock examines how the Internet commodifies knowledge, transforming our historically rich relationship with information into consumption of it as a product.

I have some quibbles with Hershock's interpretations of specific technological experiences. For example, not all workplace technologies increase specialization and commodification of work. I am also more hopeful than he about the possibility of reorienting the use of technology. Yet I always appreciate the process of his inquiry.

Moreover, insights abound on every page. Take again Hershock's analysis of the Internet. He rightly suggests that it is not the content of our Web experience that is addictive but the "structure" of it, the way the Internet reconfigures our awareness, making it hunger for the next fix of information.

Indeed, some days I think my brain has been digitized.

The book ends with Hershock's inverting the relationship between technology and practice. He invites us to consider meditation as a technology, but one in which we offer our attention to what he calls our "dramatic interrelatedness." He urges us to attend consciously to "the always unexpected and liberating renewal of our world that occurs when our horizons for relevance, responsibility, and readiness are continually relinquished." Here, and in related passages on improvisation, intimacy, and appreciative virtuosity, Hershock's practice shines through. As I read, I became more attentive to my own possibilities for appreciative contribution and responsiveness.

Be warned that this book is plainly academic: much as I appreciated it, I often found it a struggle. Much of what Hershock writes could, I think, be more simply put. But there are all too few applications of Buddhist thought to our modern experience, and I regard his insights as a treasure trove for engaged Buddhists. ♦

*Viki Sonntag is a core member of Buddhist Peace Fellowship—Seattle. The focus of her activist practice is economic justice/sustainability.*

## Further Reading in Buddhist Perspectives on Technology

♦ *Spiritual Responses to Technology: A Special Issue of ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness & Transformation*, edited by Jonathan Watts and David Loy (Spring 2002, available at [www.bpf.org/tsangha/tsj/tsj3.html](http://www.bpf.org/tsangha/tsj/tsj3.html)): Fascinating essays by Diana Winston ("A Buddhist Muses on the Internet"), Alan Senauke ("Right Speech in a World of Mirrors"), Gwen Gordon ("The Erotic Life of Electricity and Water"), and others.

♦ *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory*, by David Loy (Wisdom, 2003): Loy looks at biotechnology, globalization, and technology's ecological impact.

♦ *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, edited by Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft (Shambhala, 1999): Essays on technology's environmental impact.

♦ *Turtle Island*, by Gary Snyder (New Directions, 1974): The poetry and essays in this volume (which won a Pulitzer) are often cited as an implicit critique of technology's influence.

♦ *The Buddha in the Robot: A Robot Engineer's Thoughts on Science & Religion*, by Masahiro Mori (Tuttle, 1982): Mori, a Buddhist and noted Japanese engineer, makes the intriguing claim that "robots have the Buddha-nature within them—that is, the potential for attaining buddhahood."

♦ *Zen and the Art of Systems Analysis: Meditations on Computer Systems Development*, by Patrick McDermott (Writers Club, 2002).

♦ In "Resources on Socially Engaged Buddhism," compiled by Donald Rothberg (*Turning Wheel*, Spring 2004), see "Environmental Issues" and "Social and Economic Analysis."

—Shane Snowdon



## BOOKS IN BRIEF

Reviewed by Shane Snowdon

### At Last: A *Turning Wheel* Anthology!

Even if I weren't Book Review Editor of *Turning Wheel*, I would still love the new anthology of writing from this very publication, assembled by longtime *TW* editor Susan Moon: *Not Turning Away: The Practice of Engaged Buddhism* (Shambhala, 2004). Although it features valuable pieces by such notables as Thich Nhat Hanh, Gary Snyder, Jack Kornfield, and Robert Thurman, the heart of the anthology—and I do mean heart—is writing that Joanna Macy, in her foreword, calls “the kind of teaching I prefer nowadays...testimony from lives being lived in the crosscurrents of the world.”

And what testimony it is! Moon's avowed “bias for the personal narrative” and her “curiosity about how people meet suffering” bring us writing that is remarkably open and moving. For example, Lin Jensen's essay about his father—about the tenderness he felt when he at last had power over a man who had terribly abused him—left me literally breathless. Jenna Jordison, too, bears witness to the human capacity for cruelty and forgiveness in an achingly beautiful piece on meeting the man who murdered her father. Their essays appear in the book's section on “Practicing in the Home and in the Heart,” which also includes Sally Clay on healing (“I don't think I will ever recover from mental illness”), Michael Acutt on addiction and street life (“I was living in the realm of the hungry ghosts”), and Annette Herskovits on being adopted as an orphan of the Holocaust (“My adoptive parents never mentioned my birth parents or asked about my war experience”). Similarly brave writing fills the rest of the book, bringing new insights to the challenges of war, racism, classism, violence, disability, poverty, and much else.

The section on “Taking the Practice into the World” includes Melody Ermachild Chavis on her anti-death penalty activism and Maia Duerr on her work in a mental hospital, while the “Food for Thought” section includes BPFers Mushim Ikeda-Nash on parenting, Diana Winston

on the speed of daily life, Diana Lion's piece on prison life, “Imagine Living in Your Bathroom,” and Alan Senauke's “Vowing Peace in an Age of War.”

Donald Rothberg rounds out the book with a resource list that highlights primers on socially engaged Buddhism. But, in truth, there could be no finer introduction to the subject than *Not Turning Away*, whose inspiring contributors remind us that, in Helen Keller's words, “Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

### Books We Want You to Know About

Some of these titles will be reviewed in future issues, but we couldn't wait to tell you about them. For example, BPF cofounder **Robert Aitken**, a key figure in Zen's ascendance in the West, has published *The Morning Star: New and Selected Zen Writings* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2003). Many of its essays have never appeared in book form, and they are enriched by a compelling introduction in which Aitken Roshi gives an overview of Zen practice reflecting his 50 years of practice and teaching.

The powerful peace teachings of Tibetan master **Chagdud Tulku** are now available in *Change of Heart: The Bodhisattva Peace Training of Chagdud Tulku* (Padma Publishing, 2004). His work touched the lives of many, including San Quentin inmate and *Turning Wheel* contributor Jarvis Masters.

**Faith Adiele** has just published the memoir *Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun* (Norton, 2004). Adiele, now a university English professor, dropped out of Harvard to become, to her own surprise, “northern Thailand's first black Buddhist nun.” Her hindsight-enlightened narrative of the experience is framed in the book's margins by excerpts from journals she kept at the time, an approach that creates some confusion about time and place but gives a vivid sense of the changes she was undergoing.

**Darlene Cohen**, the San Francisco Zen Center priest known for her teaching and writing on chronic pain, has just released *The One Who Is Not Busy: Connecting with Work in a Deeply Satisfying Way* (Gibbs Smith, 2004). This accessible little volume offers tips on everyday work-life spiced with Cohen's wit (which can also be enjoyed in Zen Center's online publication, *sangha-e!*, where she serves as a Buddhist “Dear Abby”).

As Mushim Ikeda-Nash noted in a recent issue of *sangha-e!* ([www.sfzc.com/Pages/Newsletter/03-2004](http://www.sfzc.com/Pages/Newsletter/03-2004)), former BPF staffer **Tova Green** has published a memoir of her transition from lay practitioner in San Francisco to ordained priest at Zen Center's rural Tassajara monastery. In *Tassajara Moments* (Open Books, 2003), Green describes her struggles to adjust to a monastic schedule and a new community of practitioners, as well as her decision to remain at Tassajara rather than return to the BPF staff as a Buddhist activist. ❖

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## Manzanita Village

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[www.manzanitavillage.org](http://www.manzanitavillage.org) for other retreats



## Message from the National Office

### Freedom to Marry Is a Basic Civil Right

by Melanie Phoenix, Administrative Director

Our BPF national office is in the San Francisco Bay Area, which we recognize is an unusually progressive place, but we like to think that we are in the forefront of social change on the important civil rights issue of same-sex marriage, and we want to let you know what it looks like from here.

After 21 years in a committed relationship, my partner Terry Robinson and I were legally married in San Francisco on February 16, 2004. We waited for a day and a half in the rain for this historic opportunity. My brother Warren, a Lutheran pastor, performed the ceremony. Terry and I had been his “best persons” when he and his wife Erin were married last July. Erin and friends from our sangha were our joyful witnesses.

During 29 days in February and March, the city and county of San Francisco issued marriage licenses to 4,036 same-sex couples, before the California Supreme Court forced them to stop. Many of those couples have lived in devoted partnership for decades. Many are registered domestic partners, raising families together, owning homes together. Many have had personal and spiritual commitment ceremonies before this, complete with vows, rings, and celebrations. Many have had to go to considerable effort and expense to create legal documents—e.g., medical or financial powers of attorney—that safeguard a few of the basic rights that automatically accompany civil marriage.

Considering all of that, some of us thought civil marriage couldn't make that much difference to our lives, really. We had adjusted to the idea that legal marriage would never be an option for us. We've built good, strong lives together without the benefit of legal validation. How much difference could the law really make?

But when the opportunity suddenly presented itself—and it felt like the Berlin Wall coming down—of course we took the plunge. When we stood in the rotunda of San Francisco's City Hall getting *married*, and our resignation to second-class citizenship dropped away, it felt like a political act of extraordinary significance, and we wept.

I will tell you this: whatever happens in the courts after this, civil marriage has changed us forever. There's no going back. We won't be satisfied with second-class citizenship again.

I've told you a bit of my own story not because it's more important than anyone else's, but because it's the one I know by heart. There's a tide of change sweeping across the U.S. and the world. Same-sex marriage is about equal pro-

tection under the law for all people. Those of us working for marriage equality simply ask that exactly the same rights, responsibilities, and protections be extended to same-gender couples who choose to marry as are available to heterosexual married couples. Nothing more, nothing less.

Here are a few facts to consider:

◆ In 1967, when interracial marriage was legalized, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “marriage is one of the basic civil rights of man [sic], fundamental to our very existence and survival.”

◆ Civil marriage offers 1,049 federal protections and benefits. Hundreds more are offered by every state. These include rights that cover medical emergencies, taxes, financial issues, inheritance, burial decisions, adoption, family law, employment benefits, immigration, Social Security, housing, and veterans' benefits.

◆ In 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the ban on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, and the first state-sanctioned same-sex marriages began there on May 17, 2004.

◆ Some cities and states offer domestic partnership benefits, Vermont offers civil unions, and Hawaii has “reciprocal

beneficiaries.” However, these forms of partnership fall short of civil marriage, offering only a handful of state rights and responsibilities, which are not transferable to another state, and no federal rights.

◆ Same-gender couples already legally marry in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada. The U.S. does not recognize these marriages within its borders.

◆ If ratified, the proposed U.S. constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage would be the only constitutional amendment in history, with the exception of Prohibition (which was repealed), to *reduce* civil rights. Every other constitutional amendment has expanded civil rights.

◆ State-sanctioned marriage would not require any religious organization to perform any marriage. No legislative enactment will change the tenets of any religious faith.

**In the spirit of freedom, justice, civil rights, and equal protection under the law for all human beings, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship supports civil marriage for same-gender couples who choose to marry and to share fully and equally in the rights and responsibilities of marriage. We oppose a U.S. constitutional amendment to prohibit the basic civil right of marriage for same-gender couples. ❖**

For more information, see [www.marriageequality.org](http://www.marriageequality.org) (Marriage Equality USA), [www.qrd.org/qrd/religion/zen.buddhist.perspective.on.same.sex.marriage](http://www.qrd.org/qrd/religion/zen.buddhist.perspective.on.same.sex.marriage) (Robert Aitken Roshi's 1995 statement supporting same-sex marriage), and [www.iwgonline.org/marriage](http://www.iwgonline.org/marriage) (Interfaith Working Group).



Newlyweds Melanie Phoenix and Terry Robinson  
Photo by Siddheshwari Sullivan



## Welcome, Maia!

It is with joy and excitement that we announce the appointment of Maia Duerr to take on the tasks and responsibilities of Executive Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. She begins her work on the East Coast in June, and will start working in the National Office in Berkeley on September 1, 2004. After a careful process of discernment and consultation with staff and a wider circle of associates, friends, and supporters, the BPF Board of Directors passed a unanimous decision at its meeting on April 28, 2004, to invite Maia formally to this position of Executive Director, and she has accepted.

Many of us know Maia through her work with BPF. She served for three years as associate editor of *Turning Wheel*, and since then has been a member of the BPF Board. For the last two years she has been working as research director of the Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, in Northampton, Massachusetts, and while there she has been active with the Pioneer Valley BPF Chapter. She helped to organize the BPF New England Regional Conference, to be held this July in Amherst. Maia brings with her skills, talents, and personal gifts that we are highly confident will enable her to carry out the challenging tasks of BPF Executive Director. Furthermore, she brings with her a deep commitment to her Buddhist practice, geared toward personal as well as social and global transformation, the kind of commitment that our fellowship seeks to promote ever more widely.

Please join me and all the members of the Board of Directors and staff in welcoming Maia back to the BPF staff.

—Ruben L. F. Habito, Co-Chair, BPF Board of Directors

## BPF Chapter & Activist News

Welcome to new chapters in **Tallahassee, Florida** and **Barcelona, Spain!**

Members of the **East Bay, CA** chapter joined in the March 20 march and rally in San Francisco, on the first anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. During the rally they held a meditation vigil for peace and afterward repaired to the BASE house in the Mission District for a potluck spaghetti dinner. The next day East Bay chapter members were joined by representatives from the Sacramento and Green Gulch chapters, for a discussion of possible joint projects. We resolved to meet again as a regional group in late June, at Green Gulch. Members of the East Bay chapter are focusing efforts on electoral work, including local voter registration and holding house parties to raise money for voter registration in the swing states (organized locally by the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club and nationally by ACT—America Coming Together). Some chapter members will be attending the Democratic Convention in Boston at the end of July, and the Republican Convention in New York at the end of August, and will participate in a 225-mile, 22-day peace march

from Boston to New York, through Massachusetts and Connecticut, that will link the two conventions. For more information about convention organizing or the march, please contact Bob Lyons at 510/655-6555 or <dharma-work@yahoo.com>.

The **Green Gulch, CA** chapter completed a six-month project entitled “Researching Our Food Choices” which analyzes the social, environmental, nutritional, and economic implications of various foods and ingredients used in the Green Gulch kitchen. They concluded that of all the factors examined, buying locally produced food was the most significant—“Eating locally grown food reconnects us to our neighbors, communities, land, the seasons, and the cycles of life.... The more we consume food locally, the more we are able to replenish the ecosystems and economies that provide that food.”

From the **Sacramento, CA** chapter: “We are participating in the installation of a sustainable landscape for a local Habitat for Humanity building project. Construction on the home began in May and landscaping is expected to take place during the summer. Our Folsom Prison Pathways Sangha continues to be well attended, and several new volunteers have applied to assist us with the weekly Buddhist services. The chapter sent \$530 to the Jamyang Choling Foundation to support the education and leadership development of nuns in the remote Himalayan foothills, and \$150 to the International Campaign for Tibet, raised through *dana* for prayer flags brought back from Nepal and inspired by the film *Tibet: The Cry of the Snow Lion*. Several BPF members participated in a weekend of Non-Violent Communication workshops held locally in April.”

Members of the **Denver, CO** chapter are educating themselves and their community about the root causes of violence and injustice in our world, and taking action that encourages peace by being peace. With Priority Peace and the American Friends Service Committee, they sponsored a candlelight vigil on the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, at which the names of thousands of victims were read. In connection with helping in the resettlement of a Somali Bantu refugee family, an international dinner was held at a local Thai Buddhist temple, Wat Buddhawararum, in May. A book discussion group meets monthly, and is currently reading *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, by David Chappell. Planned fall projects include cosponsoring a weekend workshop on engaged spirituality, and participating in the second annual Adopt-a-Missile-Silo event.

The **Washington, D.C.** chapter held a “Party for Peace” on April 17—a fun-filled afternoon of poetry, music, raffles, food, and drink to raise funds for Change Your Mind Day. The event, part of the 11th annual Change Your Mind Day sponsored by *Tricycle* magazine, was held on Saturday, June 5, at the Ellipse on the Mall, and included meditation instruction, inspirational talks, contemplative practices, poetry, and music from a variety of traditions. Change Your Mind Day events take place in dozens of cities across the



U.S., and this year, for the first time, Washington participated, under the organizational leadership of the WBPF.

In February, WBPF held an Introduction to Non-Violent Communication workshop that gave an overview of basic NVC concepts and included hands-on practice demonstrating how to apply NVC to real-life situations.

The **Tampa Bay, FL** chapter sponsored its first public event on Valentine's Day: an Afternoon of Meditations for Peace. Teachers from Theravada, Tibetan, and Zen traditions led short meditations. The event began as scheduled at a waterfront park in St. Petersburg, but rain forced a move to a nearby yoga studio. Rain and confusion were transformed in a room full of about 85 enthusiastic meditators. All were pleased with the outcome. The group also took part in Change Your Mind Day, June 5 in St. Petersburg. More info is at [www.bpf-tampabay.org](http://www.bpf-tampabay.org) (including some event photos).

The **Atlanta, GA** chapter has been doing a weekly meditation session at Georgia State University for several months, and is still holding a monthly walking meditation ("peace walk") at the Carter Center. Members have been active in different areas of service and peace activism individually, and we're in a new phase of sorting out what we want to do together.

The **Boston, MA** chapter was joined at its March general meeting by Dr. Melanie Joy, a professor of psychology at U. Mass., who spoke about vegetarianism and the psychology of peace—which inspired a very lively and controversial debate. Chapter coordinator Craig Richards participated in the Walk for a New Spring/Toward a Nonviolent Future, a three-week peace walk through Massachusetts in March led by members of the Nipponzan Myohoji order of Buddhists.

In April, Tissa Hami, one of the few Muslim female comedians in this country, was guest speaker at the general meeting of the chapter. She spoke about how comedy informs her faith and activism, and participants reflected on what role humor plays in their own lives.

The **Pioneer Valley, MA** chapter is preparing for its historic "Sitting for Peace, Standing for Justice" conference in Amherst, MA, July 10–11. Presenters will include Rev. Hilda Ryumon Gutiérrez Baldoquín, Diana Lion, Hozan Alan Senauke, and Arinna Weisman. For more information, please visit the conference website at [www.glyff.com/CONF/index.html](http://www.glyff.com/CONF/index.html).

Cal Appleby, of the **Twin Cities, MN** chapter, was recently given an "unsung hero" award by the McKnight Foundation. Cal coordinates the Beverly White Community Outreach Project, which flies under the umbrella of the BPF chapter. The project leads meditation retreats at prisons, mental hospitals, and treatment centers in and around the Twin Cities. Congratulations, Cal!

The **New York, NY** chapter has been active in several letter-writing campaigns: a) asking our senators to convene an emergency joint session of Congress to change the course of U.S. action in Iraq; b) supporting HR 2574, the Federal Death

Penalty Abolition Act of 2003, a bill introduced by Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) that would put an immediate halt to executions and forbid the imposition of the death penalty for violations of federal law; c) supporting Amnesty International in writing to governments regarding cases of abuse and denial of human rights; and d) supporting HR 2037, a bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives that would establish a Peace Tax Fund for people who choose to put their taxes only toward nonmilitary purposes. Chapter members have also been supportive of three hunger strikers protesting outside the UN to bring attention to the situation in Tibet. The New York City chapter is also working with the BPF national office to connect people in prison with people on the outside who want to communicate about their dharma practice. And there have been discussions recently about starting a BASE program in New York City.

The **Portland, OR** chapter worked with several other Buddhist groups to organize Portland's first Change Your Mind Day on June 5 in Colonel Summers Park. Further details can be found on at [www.geocities.com/portlandbpf/cymd.html](http://www.geocities.com/portlandbpf/cymd.html).

In March, **Seattle, WA** chapter member David Berrian traveled to Sri Lanka to join the Nonviolent Peaceforce in monitoring elections there. The election monitoring team is being organized by PAFREL (People's Action for Free and Fair Elections), a Sri Lankan NGO. On May 9 the chapter had a small gathering with David Loy, Zen teacher and author of *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory*, to discuss his writings. On May 15, the chapter sponsored "Conditions for Peace: A Symposium, Conversation, and Cultural Evening Program," to discuss how the Seattle Buddhist Community can cultivate wisdom, compassion, and generosity on the path to world peace. The evening included reflections by Buddhist teachers, practitioners, and socially engaged activists, followed by small group discussion. Finally, the Seattle chapter is participating in the "Jizos for Peace" project, sponsored by Jan Chozen Bays of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Oregon; the goal is to make 270,000 Jizos (one for each Japanese person who was killed at Hiroshima or Nagasaki) to bring to Japan for the 60th anniversary commemoration in August 2005. ♦

—Compiled by Robert Lyons

## BASE ANNOUNCEMENTS

(Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement)

### Teen Meditation Retreats

June 15th – June 20th Sebastopol, CA  
July 3rd – July 7th Santa Cruz, CA

[www.bpf.org/teenretreat.html](http://www.bpf.org/teenretreat.html)

Fall '04 BASE Program Starting in August!

[www.bpf.org/base.html](http://www.bpf.org/base.html)



## Prison Page

### The Felon and the Ballot Box

by Diana Lion

*In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing and agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has sympathy for living beings.*

—The Buddha, Majjhima Nikaya 58, trans. Thanissaro Bhikku

A few nights ago I attended the Spirited Action event in Berkeley, California. This event focused on motivating dharma practitioners to take action around the upcoming U.S. federal election. Speakers included Daniel Ellsberg, Sylvia Boorstein, and James Baraz. James mentioned that people often tell Julia Butterfly Hill that they are very inspired by her. She responds to them appreciatively and asks, “Inspired to do what?”

Though Sylvia Boorstein wrote the book *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There*, it was she who emphasized that taking action around the upcoming elections is in no way separate from spiritual practice—indeed it is the practice.

As dharma practitioners, we can act to take back our democracy for ourselves and our children.

Strategists from both major parties predict a razor-thin margin of victory in November. Many people are focusing on the 17 swing states, the ones where the vote could go either way. The vote in these states will determine the election. Millions of people who could vote are not yet registered. Many sources predict that most people who are not currently registered would probably vote Democratic.

You might be wondering what this has to do with prison dharma. Here's what:

According to a study published in *American Sociological Review* in December 2002, an estimated 4.7 million Americans cannot vote currently or permanently because of a felony conviction. That means one in 43 adults in this country. Thirteen percent of African American men are disenfranchised in this way. Only two states, Maine and Vermont, allow prisoners to vote. Thirty-four states withhold the vote from parolees, and 30 of them disenfranchise those on probation as well. Seven states permanently bar ex-felons from voting; seven others will restore voting rights after a prisoner's release, but the process is so cumbersome that few ever complete it. People who are in jail for misdemeanors or are awaiting trial are technically allowed to vote, but they almost never have access to voting machines and seldom find a way to get absentee ballots.

Class and race play a large part in who gets incarcerated in the first place. Two people charged with the same felony might get completely different sentences. A good (read expensive) attorney may be able to get the charges reduced or win an acquittal. A Harvard University study reported that only 7 percent of African Americans use illegal drugs, similar to the rate among white Americans. However, African Americans are much more likely than whites to get

arrested or convicted on drug charges, and usually receive longer sentences. This affects who gets classed as a felon, and who gets disenfranchised.

The disenfranchisement of felons has serious implications for U.S. democracy. The trends in the last 25 years toward longer sentences, mandatory minimum sentences, and incarceration of greater numbers of people (disproportionately people of color and working class/poor people) is skewing who gets to vote. In the context of this country's racial history, this represents a meaningful reversal of the extension of voting rights.

The *American Sociological Review* study mentioned above estimated that if ex-felons could have voted in Florida in 2000, Al Gore would have won that state and therefore the presidency. Equally striking is the study's assertion that if rates of incarceration had been as high in 1960 as they are now, with the same rates of disenfranchisement, Richard Nixon would have beaten John Kennedy.

The Pali canon and other Buddhist writings did not discuss voter registration or felon disenfranchisement. However, in his instructions on wise speech, the Buddha repeatedly emphasized being factual, honest, beneficial, endearing, and agreeable. Elections are one of the principal ways that the voice of the people is heard. Therefore I turn to the Buddha's instructions, along with other skillful means, in considering how to approach these elections.

The acknowledged swing states are Arizona,\* Arkansas,\* Florida,\* Iowa, Maine, Michigan,\* Minnesota,\* Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire,\* New Mexico,\* Ohio,\* Oregon,\* Pennsylvania, Washington,\* West Virginia, and Wisconsin.\* Other states where the outcome is not completely certain are Colorado,\* Delaware, Louisiana, New Jersey,\* and North Carolina.\* States with BPF chapters or contacts have an asterisk beside them. (See page 46.)

The Buddha also mentioned timeliness in his criteria for wise speech. We have a diminishing number of weeks until the November elections. In the short term, those of us not living in swing states can help our friends and allies in the swing states mount voter registration drives. We can raise money at home, or travel to swing states to help with voter registration campaigns. All the states have active coalitions of concerned voters who care about democracy.

In the longer term, we can join coalitions to change the legislation that disenfranchises such a large percentage of our population. For more information, you can visit the ACLU website at [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org); the Sentencing Project at [www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org); or the Demos website at [www.demos-usa.org](http://www.demos-usa.org). Or you can call the VOICE project, at 503-335-8449, which works for ex-felon rights in Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington state.

Who knows? The Buddha might have been out in the streets himself working to include all citizens in the basic democratic right to vote. ❖

*Gratitude to the Sentencing Project for statistics for this essay.*



# Announcements & Classifieds

## ANNOUNCEMENTS/ CLASSIFIEDS

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

### Rental—Muir Beach, California

Spacious, sunny country home overlooking Muir Beach, 2 bedrooms, 1 bath, fireplace, w/d, parking, hiking, deck with a great view. Wonderful community. Short walk to Zen Center and beach. No smoking. \$2,500/mo. plus utilities. Available September 1st. Martha or Lee, 415/383-6764.

### The Conch-Us Times: Journal of the Grateful Buddhists of America

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

**Attention Prisoners:** Precious Dharma teachings on beautiful altar-sized cards: Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, The Four Immeasurables, and Eight Verses for Training the Mind. Mail request with 3 first-class stamps if possible. For Resource Directory, send 4 first-class stamps. Naljor Prison Dharma Service, P.O. Box 628, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067; 877/277-6075.

### The Faithful Fools Street Ministry

Presents *The Witness*, directed by Martha Boesing and performed by Rebecca Noon. *The Witness* tells the story of a young woman's journey through poverty and homelessness in search of compassion and enlightenment. The 50-minute presentation is available for touring and can be performed in your home, church, meeting hall, or school. Fees negotiable or by donation. For more information, call Martha Boesing at 510/530-6188.

**Texas Sangha Quarterly**, newsletter for and about Buddhist prisoners in Texas, is looking for submissions. Prisoners within the Texas system can send articles, sutra quotes, etc. for publication to: TSQ, P.O. Box 38064, Dallas, TX 75238-0064.

### New: BPF e-Newsletter

Want to stay up-to-date about BPF and the world of socially engaged Buddhism in between issues of *Turning Wheel*? Subscribe to BPF's new monthly e-newsletter. Visit [www.bpf.org/html/get\\_involved/mailling\\_list/maillinglist.html](http://www.bpf.org/html/get_involved/mailling_list/maillinglist.html) to sign up.

### Pema Chödrön Tape: Practicing

*Buddhism in Times of War*, a talk given in San Francisco in 2003. \$11 (includes postage), available from BPF, 510/655-6169; [bpf@bpf.org](mailto:bpf@bpf.org).

### BPF publications: Making the Invisible

*Visible*, writings by people of color and their white allies about healing racism in our Buddhist communities. \$6 plus postage; order directly from Sheridan Adams, <[metta108@sbcglobal.net](mailto:metta108@sbcglobal.net)>.

*Safe Harbor*, ethical guidelines, process, and resources for Buddhist communities. \$7 (includes postage), available from BPF, 510/655-6169; [bpf@bpf.org](mailto:bpf@bpf.org).

## GROUPS

### Green Sangha: Spiritually Based

**Environmental Activism.** Groups in Oakland and Marin County. Form a group in your home town. Call 415/459-8610; [www.greensangha.org](http://www.greensangha.org).

**Sangha for Buddhists of Color** meets monthly in the San Francisco Bay Area for meditation, dharma talks, and mutual support. For information, call 415/789-8359; <[boc\\_caretakers@hotmail.com](mailto:boc_caretakers@hotmail.com)>.

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

If you're interested in attending a **Buddhist Chaplaincy** training program in California's Bay Area, check out [www.sati.org](http://www.sati.org) for more details. Next training starts in September 2004.

## VOLUNTEER/DONATIONS/ SPONSORSHIP

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

**Prison Dharma Network (PDN)** needs your donations of dollars and used dharma books to continue making the dharma available to prisoners. If you are interested in forming local or regional chapters to facilitate contemplative prison ministry, contact: PDN, P.O. Box 4623, Boulder, CO 80306-4623, 303/544-5923; <[pdn@indra.com](mailto:pdn@indra.com)>.

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

## Sitting for Peace Standing for Justice

2004 Buddhist Peace Fellowship Conference  
New England Region, Amherst, Massachusetts  
July 10-11

**Speakers include: Hilda Gutierrez Baldoquin, Diana Lion,  
Alan Senauke, and Arinna Weisman**

\*

For more information, see [www.bpf.org/ne-conference.html](http://www.bpf.org/ne-conference.html)  
or call 413-563-5197



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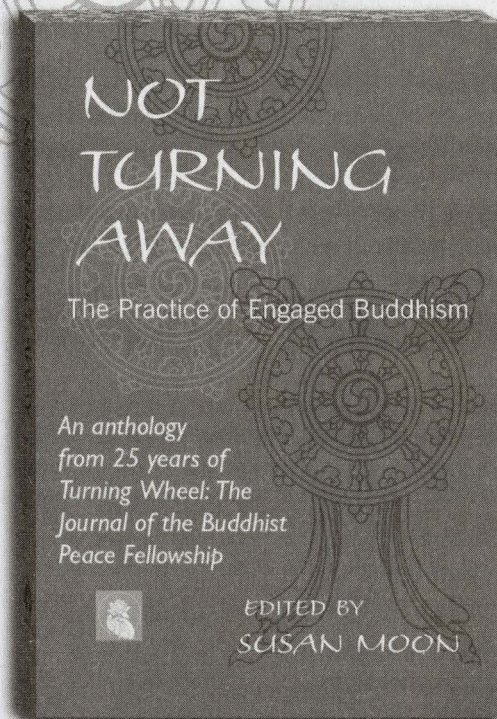


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