TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism

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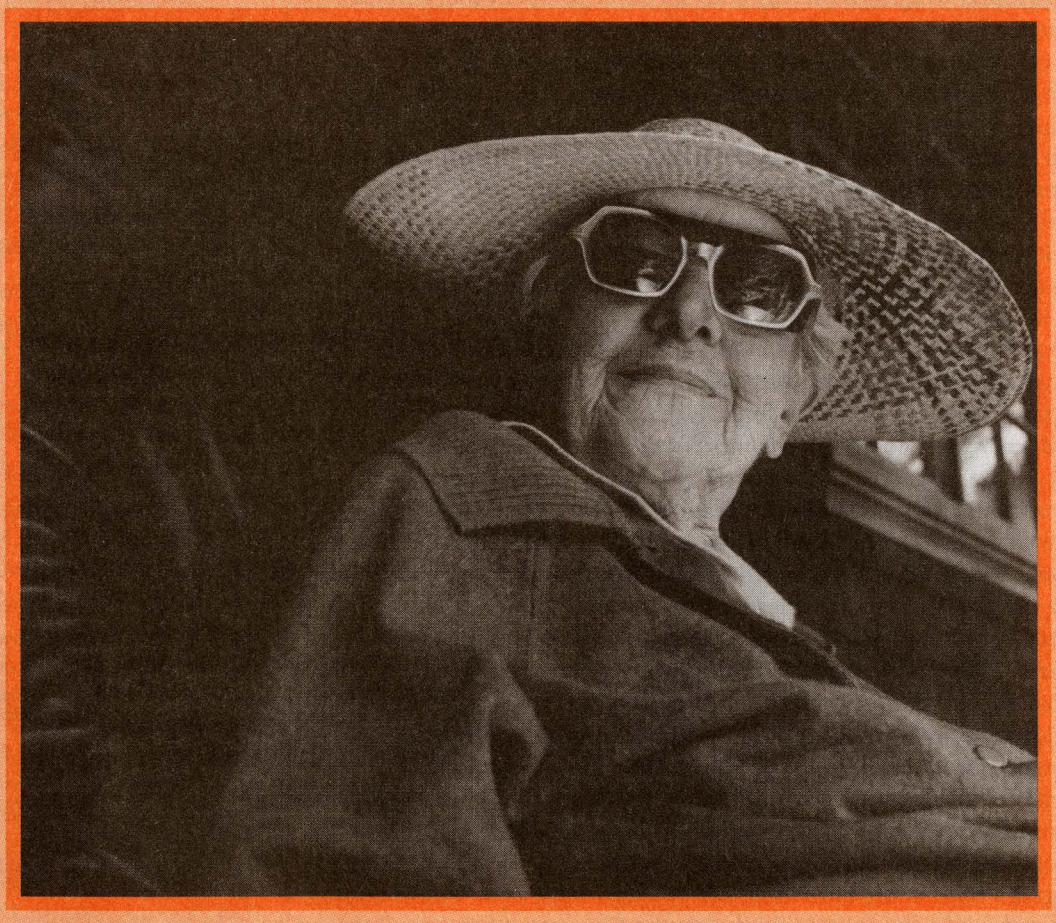

Getting Old

- INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT AITKEN ROSHI
- TAKING CARE OF AGING PARENTS, and more

Special Report: Sitting in the Dragon's Lair at Los Alamos

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From the Editor

It's hard to get old. Buddha must have thought so, too, because old age is on the list of the sad things he saw when he first left the shelter of the palace.

There are four different things about aging that make it scary for me. (I'll probably think of other things as I get older.) First, it hurts; second, nobody pays any attention to you; third, death looms; and fourth, you have to change your plans.

As to the first, aging brings various forms of infirmity. I used to feel as if it was lack of self-discipline that made old people say "What?" or tell me the same story over and over. As if you could just *will* yourself to stay young. Now that I repeat things by mistake, or forget to say them at all, I want to tell my children: "I'm not doing this on purpose to annoy you. The same thing may happen to you some day. Try to keep in mind my other good qualities."

These days I have to stretch when I get up in the morning. My hip joints grumble, my neck whines, and I have to respond to them. A positive way to look at this aspect of aging is that my body keeps me company more. At least I have somebody to take care of, even though that somebody happens to me.

Some of the physical signs of aging don't actually hurt. Gray hair and wrinkles don't hurt. But when you get them—and this is the second scary thing about aging—people don't take you as seriously, at least not in the dominant American culture. You become more and more shadowy, until people can see right through you. This, too, I'm trying to turn to my advantage. Here is an opportunity to detach myself from what people think of my hairstyle.

What if we started out our lives tired and wrinkled and forgetful, and then gradually our skin smoothed out and plumped up, and in the last few years of our lives we got very very small, and we refused to use words, and finally we waved good-bye and crawled up into our mothers' wombs? Then we'd think wrinkles were beautiful, and we'd wear special masks to bed to keep the creases in our faces, and we'd pretend to forget each other's phone numbers.

A third scary thing about aging comes from the fear of death. Our idea is that as we age we are getting closer and closer to death. But this is just an idea. Actually, we don't know how close our death is. The future is obscure, and we only know that we're somewhere in between birth and death. So in that sense we're *always* middle-aged. Even though I could die in the next moment, I'm not dying right now. I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

A fourth scary thing about getting older has to do with letting go of ambitions. There are so many things I haven't accomplished yet! What if I die before I have a best-selling novel, a happy marriage, spiritual enlightenment, grandchildren, an intentional community in the country, and world peace? So I'm working on letting go of my unfulfilled longings, though I'm not completely ready to give up on any of the above, except possibly world peace—the only one that's even less likely, in *my* life, than the best-selling novel. (But I'll keep on working on it, for other people's lifetimes.)

Old age is a stage of life unto itself. Zen master Dogen says, "Firewood is firewood and ash is ash. Do not think that the firewood is before and the ash is after. Firewood is a stage unto itself and ash is a stage unto itself." Old people are in the stage they (we) are in; let's stop thinking of old people as has-been young people, or as about-to-be-dead people. When we're old, we're old. Let's value oldness as oldness. Old means it's been around for a long time. Old knows about continuity and history. Old knows about waiting. Let's listen to old. ❖ —*Susan Moon*

Coming themes for *Turning Wheel:*
Summer '01: **Karma**. Deadline: April 1, '01
Fall '01: **Reconciliation**. Deadline: July 1, '01
Winter '02: **Medical Ethics**. Deadline: October 1, '01

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The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism

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Cover Photo: *Mary Marshall at 96,* by Deborah Craig (see article, page 12).

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Letters

We welcome your responses to what we print. When you think we are one-sided, or leave out important perspectives, let us and our readers know. Write to Turning Wheel, *PO Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704, or send e-mail to* <turningwheel@bpf.org>. *Letters may be edited.*

Asian American Buddhists

As a prisoner, I've always enjoyed reading every issue of *Turning Wheel,* but particularly the Fall 2000 issue. I grew up in a Buddhist family and came to the U.S. at an early age. Until about four years ago, I knew virtually nothing about Buddhism, so I can relate to some of the stories from "New Voices of Asian American Buddhism."

At first, as a Vietnamese, I found it strange to learn Buddhism from a Cuban American female monk who volunteered at Lancaster State Prison, and to meditate with non-Asians. I no longer hold that view. Although Asians have practiced Buddhism for thousands of years, we do not have a "copyright" on the Dharma, as it was a gift from Shakyamuni Buddha to all. Who knows? The next Buddha of Love (Maitreya Buddha) could be Anglo American.

—Ninh Nguyen, Lancaster, California

I find it painful and sad to read of designations such as non-Asian Buddhists, Asian Buddhists, Asian American Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists. This is man-created hubris; it does not exist except as an ego manifestation and causes rift and divisiveness. The Buddha that is in each one of us does not know this man-made separateness.

—Patrick Montgomery, Sagamore Hills, Ohio

I really liked the Fall *TW*, especially the very honest editorial, Mushim Ikeda-Nash's review about Asian American poets, and the inclusion of so many perspectives. It's too bad there weren't voices from the Tibetan and Thai Buddhist communities, but maybe this is a sign that we should devote another issue to the subject. It seems so important and has been so largely overlooked.

I appreciated Joe Parker's account of meeting with a Japanese Zen teacher who did not seem "authentic." There is sometimes an arrogance in our own judgments that is hard for us to see. The practice of Buddhism in the United States is still so new, and we have various ideas about what Buddhism is, along with our considerable attachments. It will take more generations to digest all this and we won't digest it well unless we are more inclusive.

—Maylie Scott, Arcata, California

Prisoners and Parole

At last, someone has spoken about the policy and procedures of parole boards being changed and toughened (*TW* Fall 2000 Prison Page). Here in Georgia, where we have unarguably the most powerful parole board in the nation, prisoners are retroactively having their punishments enhanced by recent policy and procedure changes. And there's nothing we prisoners can do about it because "statistics" are not allowed as evidence in courts. Even if they were, the parole board's records are not open to public scrutiny. I deserve time in prison—I did wrong and expect to pay. But I don't deserve to die in here because I exercised my right to a jury trial. There are thousands just like me across the nation.

—Arthur Weathers, Folkston, Georgia

Security and the Dalai Lama

I was shocked to read in Susan Moon's article about the security measures surrounding the Dalai Lama's visit to Spirit Rock. Why does the Dalai Lama permit such measures? If it is a condition of his visit to the States, could Spirit Rock not have insisted that such measures are impermissible in a religious place? Would they have brought dogs into a church? I would greatly appreciate your throwing some light on this matter, as I find it quite upsetting.

—Peter Broner, Salt Point, New York

We asked James Baraz, a teacher at Spirit Rock, to address this letter. Here is his response:

I can understand that it may seem shocking to hear about the security measures surrounding His Holiness's visit to Spirit Rock. Although it was something of an inconvenience, the Spirit Rock staff and teachers involved were not offended or put off by the measures. The safety of the Dalai Lama is jeopardized not only by political foes, but by some Tibetans from another religious sect that is thought to have assassinated four members of the Dalai Lama's inner circle in Dharamsala last year. The security measures at Spirit Rock were no more intense than those in Dharamsala or other places where His Holiness teaches. The security staff were friendly, and easy to work with, and they appreciated what we were doing at Spirit Rock. It was also reassuring to us that there would be minimal chance of any dangerous occurrence happening on our property during his visit. Thank you for your concern.

Corrections to Fall 2000 *Turning Wheel*

The photo of the Laotion temple mural on page 5 was taken by David Sanger, not Sanders. The photo on page 48 was taken by Martha Ley. ❖

Indra's Net

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. Our hope is that some item may help a reader find his or her own way to ease social suffering within or beyond the Buddhist Sangha.*

"Comfort Women" Tell Their Story

"Comfort women" is a euphemism for 100,000 to 200,000 women and girls who were held as sex slaves in Japanese military camps during World War II. They came from Korea, China, Indonesia, and other countries occupied by the Japanese Imperial Army, as well as Japan itself. After the war, those who returned home lived in poverty and shame, with permanent physical and emotional problems. Most lived in solitude with their painful past. Some of these women, now the age of grandmothers, have begun telling their stories.

In 1992, several former comfort women moved into the House of Sharing in South Korea, founded with help from Buddhist temples and social organizations. The House offers residence, community, and support to these elderly women, who are called "grandmothers," or *halmoni,* in Korean.

Today, eleven women and seven staff reside at the House. As therapy, the women received art instruction to express their feelings. The sketches and paintings quickly evolved into expressions of their shame, anger, bitterness, lost innocence, and quest for justice.

The artwork has now become an extension of their efforts to publicize their story in South Korea and abroad. This past fall, a traveling exhibit of artwork visited Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Toronto, and San Francisco. The tour, titled "The Quest for Justice," was sponsored by the House of Sharing and the Historical Museum on Sexual Slavery, also based in South Korea. Traveling with the exhibit were Soon-Duk Kim, a former comfort woman and resident of the House, and Hyejin Sunim, a Buddhist monk who is its executive director.

To learn more about comfort women, see *http://witness.peacenet.or.kr/kindex.htm.*

Scrimping on Elderly Health Care

"Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane," said Martin Luther King. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) study, the U.S. ranks 72nd in the financial fairness of its health system, and 24th in the overall health of its population.

About 44 million Americans lack health insurance. Even the elderly, covered by Medicare, often must choose between impoverishment and health, as Medicare does not cover prescription medicines. A New York State survey indicated that 25 percent of elderly patients skipped their medications because they could not afford them. Supplementary private insurance plans, too expensive for many, generally limit payments for drugs to little more than premiums.

Both Republicans and Democrats promise drug coverage to the elderly, but neither offers a satisfactory plan. According to the National Council on Aging, the Republican plan would benefit at most five percent of Medicare patients. An older couple with an $18,000 income would have to pay $582 of a $600 monthly drug bill. Moreover, coverage would depend on the voluntary participation of private insurers, who could drop "unprofitable" Medicare patients if they found federal subsidies too low, as many HMOs are now doing. Under the Democratic plan, a single senior with a $12,500 income would have to pay $258 of a $400 monthly drug bill—a quarter of her income.

The U.S. is the only industrialized country that does not guarantee health care to its citizens. France, for example, whose national health insurance system ranked first overall in the WHO study, covers 100 percent of all expenses for all elderly patients. Patients can see any doctor they choose and medicine is as technically sophisticated as in the U.S.

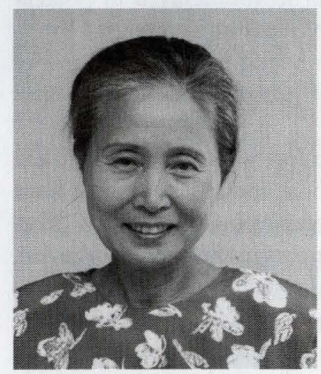
Medicare drug coverage, though important, should not obscure the main issue: the lack of universal and affordable health care. One reason for the current focus on prescription medicines is that prices in the U.S. are much higher than in other countries, and are rising about 20 percent a year. Any plan will quickly become inadequate without cost containment, which the pharmaceutical

industry is resisting with all its might. The industry has 297 lobbyists in Washington and spent $230 million on lobbying, campaign contributions, and advertising in this election cycle. It set up "Citizens for Better Medicare," an organization that produces TV spots featuring Flo, a senior who does not want "big government in her medicine cabinet."

◆ The campaign of the Universal Health Care Action Network, endorsed by more than 100 faith communities, can be reached at *www.uhcan.org* or 800/634-4442. See also Public Citizen for up-to-date political information on health care (*www.citizen.org*; 202/588-1000).

In Memoriam:

Ok-koo Kang Grosjean



Poet and Translator Ok-koo Kang Grosjean passed away on October 25, 2000, in her home in Albany, California. She had been diagnosed with liver cancer earlier this year.

Ok-koo is best known for introducing the work of leading English-language poets and Buddhist writers to Korean readers through her translations of several books, including the Dalai Lama's *Policy of Kindness* and *Ocean of Wisdom,* Thich Nhat Hanh's *Being Peace,* J. Krishnamurti's *Flame of Attention,* and Gary Snyder's *No Nature.* She also translated works from Korean into English, most notably *Selected Poems* by Park Nam Soo. Her own books of poetry, *Horizon* and *A Hummingbird's Dance* (Parallax Press), remain in print. A book of recent poems entitled *Delightful Encounters* is forthcoming. Most recently, *Turning Wheel* published her article "The Way of Translation" in our Fall 2000 issue.

Ok-koo Kang was born in Kwang-Ju, Korea, and immigrated to the United States in 1963. She attended Columbia University and San Francisco State University before receiving a master's degree in nutrition from U.C. Berkeley. She married Glen Grosjean in 1965. Ok-koo had been raised Presbyterian but was gradually drawn to Buddhism through her husband's interest—he had been a Zen monk for three years—and in response to the loss of her sister to cancer in 1968. Gardening and music were two of her passions.

Those of us who were privileged to know Ok-koo were deeply touched by her grace, dignity, and the joy that emanated from her whole being. About her poetry she once said, "I let myself flow in the mysterious stream of the heart."

Her husband survives her along with their son, Charles. ❖

Indra's Net is researched and written by Annette Herskovits and Maia Duerr.

What You Can Do

Aging

by Michael Trigilio

Aging is, in physical terms, a concrete manifestation of the law of impermanence. Like illness and death, aging gives us an opportunity to examine our practice with impermanence and non-self.

In a culture that glorifies affluent, physically ideal youthfulness (commonly personified by upper-class white professionals), it is impossible not to be simply "aged-out" of the mainstream. An entire greeting-card industry revolves around portraying the aging process as a negative and undesirable element of life. Those most marginalized by this ageist paradigm are middle- and working-class seniors, especially seniors of color. As the United States has not yet comprehensively addressed the need for adequate care for seniors through legislation, many seniors live in nonregulated retirement and nursing homes with inadequate facilities, and in environments which cause isolation. This situation impacts a second generation, those who care for elderly parents or grandparents, even as this second generation itself is making plans for retirement. One resource for learning more about the procedures and policies of nursing homes is provided by Medicare. The Web site, *www.medicare.gov/NHCompare/Home.asp,* provides visitors with a helpful step-by-step guide on what to look for in a home, for oneself or for one's aging relative.

One organization that addresses economic, social, and political issues around aging is the Gray Panthers. According to their Web site, the Gray Panthers advocate for "universal health care, jobs with a living wage and the right to organize, preservation of Social Security, affordable housing, access to quality education, economic justice...and challenging ageism, sexism, racism." Their approach is intergenerational, meaning they work with youth to challenge the culture of ageism that affects both the young and the elderly. You can contact the Gray Panthers at 733 15th Street NW, Suite 437, Washington, DC 20005, 800/280-5362, *www.graypanthers.org.*

Another excellent source of information about ageism and the ramifications of ageist thinking is the National Aging Information Center. The NAIC is part of the Department of Health and Human Services and is an excellent resource for lobbying efforts on behalf of the elderly. For instance, the NAIC offers extensive documentation about the treatment of older individuals in prison. More seniors than ever are doing time, primarily due to mandatory sentencing and stricter parole policies. According to the NAIC, the cost of caring for older inmates is around three times that of other inmates.

NAIC's Web site is *www.aoa.dhhs.gov/default.htm.* NAIC can also be reached at 330 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20201.

Issues around aging and ageism also affect young people. The co-counseling community has engaged in a great deal of consciousness-raising about "young adult oppression" which Ayana Raquel Morse describes in an article from *Present Time* magazine as a combination of classism and mistreatment based on age. Based on antiquated notions of Puritanical work traditions, young people are expected to work harder for less pay than their middle-aged counterparts. It is expected that college students, for instance, will work for very little money while older "professionals" may perform the same job for more pay—and with more respect. Additionally, like retired or elderly people, young people are often patronized or "talked down" to. ("You do that so well for being so young.") In some parts of the world, corporations exploit child labor in sweatshops and *maquiladoras.* In these situations, we can see the connections between ageism and classism (Sweatshop Watch, 310 Eighth Street, Suite 309, Oakland, CA 94607; *www.sweatshopwatch.org*). The flip side of child oppression is naturally the oppression of the elderly, which manifests itself in similar forms of condescension, classism, and dismissiveness.

One way to learn about aging and the actual experience of growing older is to interview an old person in the family about her life. Whether you yourself are young or old, you might learn surprising things by getting an elder to tell his story. Special attention could be paid to the ways in which each person approaches issues of impermanence and death. Young people can also learn a great deal about others, as well as themselves, by volunteering at a hospice or local senior center. Older people may not realize that local councils on aging and senior centers are rich resources of information about health care, transportation, and other basic needs. Senior centers are open to all seniors, regardless of income.

Suggested Reading:

Ageism, by Bill Bytheway (Open University Press, 1995).

The Fountain of Age, by Betty Friedan (Touchstone Books, 1994).

The Force of Character, by James Hillman (Ballantine Books, 2000).

Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders, by Bray Pipher (Riverhead Books, 2000).

America the Wise: The Longevity Revolution and the True Wealth of Nations, by Theodore Roszak (Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

From Age-ing to Sage-ing, by Zalman Schachter (Warner Books, 1995). ❖

Michael Trigilio is BPF's new administrative assistant. He practices in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition.

Yu-thog Yon-tan Gon-po

by Diane Patenaude Ames

In C.E. 710, the Chinese princess Chin-cheng learned to her horror that as part of the umpteenth peace agreement with the marauding Tibetan barbarians, she was to marry their king and move to Tibet. It was true that, thanks partly to another Chinese princess who had met a similar fate 70 years before, Tibetan aristocrats had stopped painting themselves red, started living in buildings instead of tents, and learned to write. But when Chin-cheng became queen, Tibet still seemed so backward. For one thing, the few Buddhist monks and physicians brought into Tibet by the first Chinese princess had died by then, leaving the Tibetans dependent on shamans in feathered headdresses for spiritual and medical counsel. Alarmed at this, Chin-cheng immediately sent to China and India for monks and doctors. It thus happened that when her son Trhisong Detsen took the throne in 755 (a momentous event, since he was to declare Buddhism the state religion of Tibet and conduct the country's first ordinations of Buddhist monks), there was a physician at court named Yu-thog Yon-tan Gon-po.

The only written account of the life of this famous physician-saint is heavily embellished with myth and legend. He lived, after all, in that misty time when Padmasambhava actually walked on Tibetan soil. However, it does seem clear that he was the son of a doctor trained in the Indian medical tradition, that he made the difficult and dangerous journey to India more than once in order to study medicine under Buddhist masters at Nalanda University, and that he brought important medical texts back to the Land of Snow. Yu-thog was undoubtedly encouraged to do this by the great king whom he served. But his biography also emphasizes that he was a devout and compassionate Buddhist practitioner who taught that the practice of medicine is part of the Bodhisattva path. This is quite plausible. Throughout Asia, Buddhism has always been closely associated with medical science and the relief of human suffering generally.

Interestingly, texts portray Yu-thog as espousing a sane attitude towards sex. On one occasion, he is said to have responded when a sick nun asked him to treat her even though her father had slandered him. The nun's problem turned out to be that she was so tormented by sexual desire that she had become ill and was having hallucinations of insects in her reproductive organs. When other treatments failed, Yu-thog advised his patient to renounce her monastic vows and get married. She was cured by this prescription and became an accomplished meditator.

Today, Yu-thog is known both as the founder of Tibetan medicine and as a great Buddhist teacher. Both titles seem to fit. ❖

Growing Up Together: Aging and Family Practice

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

With my arm in yours I have descended at least a million stairs,
and now that you aren't here, a void opens at each step.
Even so our long journey has been brief.

(Eugenio Montale, from "Xenia II," trans. G. Singh)

When my son Joshua was around three and a half, I enrolled him in a summer course at the Berkeley Child Art Institute. Josh had always stayed at home with me, and even though the class lasted only long enough for me to drive home, do a little housework, then zip back to pick him up, he dreaded the moment when I said good-bye. I would tell him to pick out his favorite-color marking pen, and then I'd draw a little design on the back of one of his hands.

"That's a kiss from Mommy," I'd say. "Whenever you feel lonely, just look at the back of your hand." I'd try to arrive at the art school a few minutes before the class let out, so that Josh wouldn't be anxious, waiting for me.

It's now eight years later, and when I'm late picking Josh up from his sixth-grade class he is unperturbed, having used the time to play a game of Magic cards with his buddies.

"How'd it go today? Do you have homework?" I ask, as usual.

Josh heaves a sigh and rolls his eyes, then gabbles, "Yes three pages of math it's really hard and I'm tired so why are they giving us so much we watched the movie *Geronimo* and we have to write something comparing the values of Geronimo's people and the white people and ask you about what you think." Then he apologizes, "Sorry for talking so fast, Mom, but with this much to do I have to multitask."

I stare at my son. He looks so world-weary that I'm secretly amused, and I say, playfully, "Josh, are you still my baby?"

"No," he says crisply. "I'm not. However, I am your child." He slides his hand into mine, and we walk slowly toward the car. We've always walked hand in hand to and from his school, morning and afternoon, since Josh was in kindergarten. There's something deeply satisfying to me about this ritual, and I never tire of it. Usually I try to take slow, quiet steps, following my breath, appreciating the moment when I release my son into the world beyond our home, and the moment when I welcome him back.

My husband, Chris, is 51, I'm 47, and Joshua is almost 12. Chris and I need reading glasses to make out the fine print these days. Josh recently brought home a parents' guide to a theater production his class was going to see, called *Nightmare on Puberty Street,* about peer pressure, drugs, AIDS, and sex. Not only are we each going through our own individual stages of growth, but, as a family, we've grown up a lot together. Year after year we've celebrated birthdays, anniversaries, the traditional champagne toast at the end of tax season (Chris is a CPA), and held hands as we've done the hard and sad things together, as well. Together we've scattered ashes of both my parents and together sat with Chris's father's body in the mortuary, a few hours after he died, chanting the name of Kwan Seum Bosal, the Korean Bodhisattva of Compassion. Together, Chris, Josh, and I have woven our various friends into a rich and diverse social life. Over the years, we've lost some old friends and made some new ones.

I don't want to get older without my husband and son. I suppose if something happened to them, my life would go on, but I hope we're always together—that we see Joshua often after he grows up and moves out—because I've never known a better support group than my family. I can count on them because they know me through and through, and when I'm with them I can relax completely, or be completely stressed out, or be completely silly. If I fart, they may scream loudly, but they won't run too far away.

"Zen is taking hands with others and walking through life and death together," Reb Anderson, a senior teacher at the San Francisco Zen Center, used to say. For those of us who have sometimes wondered when the duties and responsibilities of family life will ease up, allowing us to get back to the meditation cushion, this is good to keep in mind. I want to know Chris and Josh as they grow older and I grow older. And, although I know there is nothing about our being together that is permanent, I am clear about my intentions. When I look back at our life as a family, I hope I can say the following:

"We had fun. We learned things. We grew wiser. We were honest and we respected one another. We raised a child who loved and valued life. We didn't avoid anything." ❖

Getting Old Naturally

by Kathy Nolan

I have been told that elephants mourn. A mother elephant paws the earth and stays for days at the side of her dead calf, fending off predators and scavengers. Listless and lethargic, the elephant refuses to rejoin the herd and engage in normal life.

This is a description of grief. In grief, we mourn something that is absent. We grieve our losses.

A central pain of aging is grief. Aging becomes a cause for grief when what is lost is a sense of identity, when we want to be what we are not any longer, either personally or socially. Changing in capacity and roles but not in our own self-definition, we seek to remain what we were. We try to fix ourselves...and aging becomes awkward.

Animals often change roles and relationships dramatically as they age. After years of wise leadership, an old silverback gorilla may be challenged by a brash young ape. No longer able to physically dominate and thereby preserve his role within the group, the older gorilla often lopes off to seek a new group, where he takes on a new role as a follower.

Human beings rarely have to take such drastic steps to release themselves from their past and embrace the present moment. Yet how many of us age organically, as a whole being, at every point in our life cycle?

As embryos, we did it effortlessly, with masses of our cells growing, dividing, taking shape, and then within days simply melting away to allow organ and limb definition to take place. Our hands and feet began as broad paddles, and a delicate choreography of programmed cell death carved our fingers and toes. Our hearts began as a single curved tube that thickened and knotted itself before being hollowed out into chambers. Each fetus dies to its womb in order to become an air-breathing and "independent" infant.

Throughout childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, the changes of ongoing physical growth remain a well-accepted feature of healthy maturation. In aging, however, these physical changes cease to be welcome; in most instances, we regard them as illness.

Yet, the field of senescence [aging] biology tells us that the eventual death of various cells and tissues is programmed into their genetic makeup. In primitive creatures, cells may divide endlessly—a whole starfish regenerating from a separated arm, for example—but in humans, as in most animals, only reproductive cells can divide endlessly; all others are slated for finitude. Strands of genetic material called telomeres, residing in the DNA of each cell, dictate the number of cell divisions that can proceed without error. With each cell division, the telomeres shorten, increasing the probability of abnormal cell division and the initiation of the aging process.

How, then, does aging come to be viewed as unnatural? One problem is that different parts wear out at different times. Perhaps if "old age" came upon all our parts together, instead of affecting first one system and then another, it would be possible to accept the change more easily. Or do we simply resist giving up any capability once we have enjoyed it?

In truth, the difficulties of aging must lie in the realm of the cultural and spiritual, not in the realm of the physical, for physical decline, just like physical growth and maturation, is a value-neutral activity. Most, if not all, of the colors of aging come from our own choices and judgments. Aging as a cause of grief in our current culture reflects our preoccupation with the physical. We age painfully because we cling to physical powers and desired social roles, instead of holding them more lightly within the vastness of the spiritual realm.

An oak tree well into its second century graces a hillside path that I take frequently. I bow each time I pass it, knowing that although it is a baby compared to giant redwoods, its roots and canopy reach out in a way that envelops and enlarges all beings. As if deep in meditation, its presence is without edges. ❖

Guest columnist Kathy Nolan has studied Zen for the past decade. She is a physician and bioethicist living in Mount Tremper, New York.

Prison Page

Breaking the Barrier

by Eddy Zheng

"Inmate Zheng, you have a visit."

My name echoes over the P.A. system. Finally, my parents are here. A warm feeling floats in the air. Maybe it's because today is Valentine's Day, a special day for people to profess their love and appreciation for one another. I know this is going to be a special day for me.

As I walk toward the visiting room, I think about all the obstacles my parents must overcome each time they visit me. They can barely speak English, but that never stops them from coming. I love my parents, especially my mom. I don't know how I could have survived 13 years of confinement without her. She has showered me with unconditional love since the day I came into this world. Whenever she comes to visit me, I give her a big hug and tell her, "I love you, Mom." It feels natural for me to show affection to my mom.

When it comes to my dad, it's a whole different story. His presence demands respect. Maybe it's because he was an officer in the People's Liberation Army in China. Or it could be that he disciplined me whenever I got in trouble. I was escorted home by my teacher, Miss Yang, for disrupting the class one day in elementary school. Dad was infuriated, but he kept his composure in front of Miss Yang. After she left, I knew what I had coming—bamboo stick stew meat. Dad made me lie on the floor with my pants down to my ankles and he hit my buttocks with a bamboo stick.

I know my Dad loves me, and I love him, but he never hugs me, and I never hear him tell me, "I love you, Son." The most physical affection he has shown me was to hold my hand. I guess that was the way he was brought up by his parents. And I have never told Dad that I love him, either. I've been in an all-male prison for the past 13 years—not a place to learn about sharing emotions with other men. I know there's a barrier in many cultures against fathers and sons being demonstrative, but I have the power to break that barrier.

That's why I'm going to take this opportunity to tell my dad that I love him. Death is certain, life is not. I never know what could happen tomorrow.

I enter the visiting room eagerly. I see a sea of colorful people enjoying each other's company. I smell perfume and popcorn. Kids run around the room and sit on their fathers' laps, laughing and talking. Where are my parents? I spot Mom waving at me from a distance. I don't see Dad next to her. Where is he? Mom couldn't have come by herself because she doesn't drive. "Mom, Happy Valentine's Day. Where's Dad?"

"Oh, he's waiting in line to heat up some fried chicken for you in the microwave." Mom answers with a smile.

"Okay, I'll go say hi to him." I want to tell him how I feel right away before I lose my courage. It's now or never. As I walk slowly toward him, my heart pounds faster and faster. The short walk feels like a long journey. A voice in my mind repeats, "You have to do it. You have to do it."

Dad finally makes eye contact with me. He stands there like the Great Wall of China, and as I approach him he reaches for my hand. Without any hesitation, I push his hand away and smother him with a great big bear hug. Then I plant a loud kiss smack on his cheek and say those four words I have been longing to say: "*Ore oy lay, BaBa.*" ("I love you, Dad," in Cantonese.) I feel a sense of lightness all over my body, and as I look into Dad's gleaming eyes, I know that an ancient wall has been shaken.

Images flash through my mind: Dad picking me up and tickling my face with his stubby whiskers; Dad bringing me toys when he comes home from his military trips; Dad taking me to watch soccer games.

Dad is shocked by my unexpected behavior in front of other people. He puts his arm around my shoulder, massages my back and says, "Oh, you say that because today's Valentine's Day." I want him to give me a hug and say, "You're a good boy," or "I love you, too." But I'm feeling too good to think any negative thoughts.

"No, Dad, I just wanted to tell you that I love you. That's all," I reply. Ahh, what a wonderful feeling it is to express my love for my dad. I feel like a kid again. The way he touches me and that look in his eyes tells me all I need to know. I have broken through the wall that has stood between us for years. I'm free, at last. ❖

Eddy Zheng has been incarcerated in San Quentin for more than 14 years. He was granted parole at the close of former Governor Wilson's term, but this decision was reversed by the Parole Board under Governor Davis's administration. Zheng is currently appealing the decision.

I've been in an all-male prison for the past 13 years—not a place to learn about sharing emotions with other men.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Prison Project is sad to say good-bye to Heidi Strupp, who has left to direct her own prison project. We wish her well and will continue to stay in close touch with her. We are thrilled to announce that we now have a new assistant: Gayle Hanson. Welcome, Gayle!

We are thinking of renaming our Prison Project something less generic. We would like the new name to reflect our commitments to dharma, service and activism. Please feel free to mail in your suggestions.

Pulling The Plug

by Maylie Scott

Mother had always said that she didn't believe in elderly parents living with their children; her own mother had "ruined" her sister's marriage with her household presence. When Mother's companion of 20 years died on the East Coast, I invited her to come to Berkeley and live with me until we discovered a permanent living situation for her nearby.

Mother, 24 hours after her death. Photo by Deborah Craig

As the days and weeks passed without her mentioning a move, I realized it was her intention to stay. There was no obvious reason for her not to. My husband, Peter, and I were living in the five-bedroom house our children had grown up in. We were in the not unfriendly process of splitting up, living as housemates in a house that was too big.

Mother joined us naturally. A well-preserved 84, she took vigorous walks and was sharp enough to index two of Peter's quite technical books. The three of us were joined by long habit, in a relationship that had more past than future. Living with Mother seemed the right thing to do.

Then Peter moved out to live with the woman he would eventually marry, and Mother and I were on our own. I felt as if I had stumbled backwards into a devouring past. I had taken early retirement from a long mental-health career and had no particular plans for what I would do next. The old redwood-paneled house was dark and memory-ridden. Shortly before Mother's arrival, I had been ordained as a Buddhist priest and had taken the vow of "leaving home." At 53, I had imagined leaving the house and starting fresh in the world. Eating breakfast and dinner alone with Mother at the long dining room table was hardly a new start. But I realized that "leaving home" in this case meant making the situation workable.

There were favorable factors, principal of which were Mother's strong health and character. Coming from a long line of Maine families, she was a "lady" by lifelong profession. While a self-proclaimed atheist, she was devoted to the stoic cultivation of character, and her character held even as her memory and consciousness faded in her mid-nineties. She almost never complained or argued. Even when exposed—she was a lifetime liar and admitted it—she gave way gracefully; she did not hold a grudge. She expressed gratitude for every favor done. She had few demands, and occupied herself in her room with no interest in meeting other seniors, and no appetite for outings. She had always been a "homebody," and she cherished her independence.

Another favorable circumstance was money. Mother had enough to pay a healthy rent that helped considerably with my reduced income and later provided for extra helpers who mitigated family burnout. The large house, sad as it was, was also an old ally; what it needed was people. Three sympathetic and warmhearted housemates moved in. Jeanne, sensitive and attentive, cooked Mother's dinner and watched evening TV with her in exchange for reduced rent. Ken, who regularly shocked and thrilled Mother with a hearty breakfast-table kiss, installed a rose garden in the front yard. Lewis, a handsome young man who lit incense and chanted every morning, stole her heart. We became a household that centered, in a soft way, around Mother.

Healing can come in unexpected ways. My children's attentive stake in Mother's and my well-being came as a surprise and a sustaining gift. Mother's assumption that when life is hard you fall back alone—a test of character—had long ago penetrated into my bones. In my need to be independent and to have a career, I had been a "good enough" mother, not strong in warmth and closeness. But now the children, in their thirties, undoing the generational drift, more rooted in heart than in duty, were offering committed and loving support. Mother's 12-year presence, like a magnet at our center, drew us into a nourishing belonging.

"Why is it that grandchildren and grandparents get along so well?" Mother used to ask, a sly gleam in her old blue eye. "Because they have a common enemy!"

Her grandchildren could smile at her grumpiness and her need to have things just so. They tolerated the terrible TV programs turned up loud. They didn't mind

being told that their hair was messy and their shirt was untucked in back. (Some of the helpers did mind, and it became increasingly difficult to find the "right" people.)

One of my sons, Mika, lived a block away and dropped in nearly every day to take Mother on slow walks around the block, chat, and play songs on his guitar. My daughter, Cassie, who lived in San Francisco, adored her grandmother. Cassie touched a place of joyful intimacy in that restrained ladylike heart that no one else could. My youngest son, John, who also lived in San Francisco, married when Mother was 91 and had a daughter when she was 95. Mother found baby Marianna generically cute, but by that time had lost track of names and relationships and was not impressed with having a great-grandchild. The rest of us, however, took to being four generations, and we gathered in the family house most Sunday nights for food and music. (Both sons are musicians.)

The greatest challenge for me was my lack of affinity or lively affection for Mother. Although we never had a significant disruption and she unfailingly accepted the choices I made in life, we somehow passed one another by, familiar lifetime strangers. While proud of me, she seemed uninterested in who I was, and I was bored with who she was. In younger years, I had tried to address this sore space. After her death, I found a letter I'd written to her in my twenties, lamenting the lack of closeness. She had never even acknowledged receiving it, but she'd kept it all those years in her "treasure chest," like a broken, unmendable heirloom.

Closeness for her meant knowing where I was going and what I was doing, as well as a good dose of watching TV together. My grades in these areas were barely passing; I had a childish resistance to telling her what I was doing and a lifetime aversion to TV. There were times when I had to bully her. She got hooked into spending thousands of dollars on sweepstake contests that came in the mail and I began to cosign all her checks. She never took a bath without strong coaxing. But her affection, especially in the early mornings when her energy was high, was undaunted and unbounded. "There you are, the light of my life, the best thing that ever happened to me!" I appreciated her spirit and did my best to match her—at least to be kind—but felt separated by a resentful heaviness. She had never really been my friend, and now had turned around to become my responsibility.

The second challenge of the arrangement was her steady downhill course to dependency. When she was younger, Mother had had an enormous "need to be needed," but my appetite for such is slight. I bristle quickly and scan for escape routes. When was it healthy for her to struggle to cut the bread and when were her hands truly too weak and arthritic? How long was it all right for her to be alone in the house? When was it too risky for her to walk around the block by herself? to carry down her breakfast tray? to bathe? to use the stove? to dress? to go to the bathroom unattended? and finally, to eat? It all happened imperceptibly, inevitably, and I resented every advance of her helplessness.

In 1998 I received Dharma Transmission in a week-long ceremony at Tassajara, the remote monastery in the bottom of a canyon in the Los Padres forest, in California. It was a powerful and altering experience. In the course of the week, I realized it was time for change. I had been leading retreats every other month in Arcata, 300 miles north of my home in Berkeley, for 10 years. The community had been urging me to come as residential teacher. We had moved from shed to living room and had been looking for property, but unless I lived there, it was evident there would not be enough energy to develop a structural center.

"Why is it that grandchildren and grandparents get along so well?" Mother used to ask, a sly gleam in her old blue eye. "Because they have a common enemy!"

Mother's basic health seemed stable, and not to move would make me resentful. So I decided I would take Mother. When Cassie and Mika heard this, realizing how difficult the move would be for both of us, they said that they would be willing to move in and care for Mother. They meant it and gave me space that I craved more deeply than I had dared to admit. Cassie and Mika moved into the house with their respective partners. The huge transition was accomplished in July of 1999. Mother, at the center of it all, appeared fairly undisturbed, although the five-month dying process began soon after, with accelerated weakening and disorientation.

Rather than being resistant to Mother's dependency, Cassie, her partner, Helene, and Mika moved into it as a loving opportunity. She soon was attended, mainly by them, for nearly all her waking hours. This became necessary as she refused to call for help when she needed to get up and, if on her own, was likely to fall. As she ate less, Cassie began to feed her. Mother would sit, hands at her sides, and open her mouth, like an entitled baby bird. When she sat on the toilet, she was given back rubs. "Oh, oh, that feels so wonderful. Harder, harder. Marvelous. I am in ecstasy. Don't stop. Don't stop."

Helpers were carefully interviewed and handed a two-page, single-spaced set of instructions about how to keep in contact with Mother's increasingly nonverbal, eccentric ways.

When I returned from Arcata, as I did at least once a month, Mother greeted me coolly, like a young child who is angry with a parent who left, but she would warm up after a day or so. She relaxed, with unbridled enjoyment, into the unstinting attention that she had often given to others in her life, but never allowed for herself. The near absence of memory seemed to give

her the freedom to be, moment by moment, who she wanted to be—funny, loving, rude, extravagant, intuitive—even as the appreciative and uncomplaining roots of character held.

After the turn of the millennium she ate less, refusing the broccoli, sweet potato, fish, or tofu dinners that she had relished for years. As she weakened she stopped going downstairs and then stopped getting out of bed, ate nothing, and finally stopped drinking. The last time I saw her was about two weeks before her death. She was hardly speaking. I kissed her, and when I told her I'd be back in a month, she looked at me with a steady, reproachful eye. It was our last power struggle; we both knew I would not see her again.

I saw her next perhaps eight hours after her death. As I drove down to Berkeley that day, the hills and trees and sky were bright and full of her presence. The last words she spoke were "I love you" to Cassie. She died in her sleep in the night with Cassie asleep at her side.

When I arrived at the house, Cassie and Helene had bathed her and dressed her in a pink wool suit. They covered her with a green afghan that my great aunt had knitted, and strewed camellia blossoms from the bush outside her window over the bed. As Cassie and I sat zazen next to her, the near century of contained energy burst from the aged body, filling every cranny of the room.

My sister, abbess to an English convent of Anglican nuns, came for Mother's cremation. We composed a Buddhist-Christian service, and 20 of us watched Mother's body go into the flames. Every morning for the next 49 days, I chanted the *Enmei Juku Kannon Gyo* for protecting life, 21 times in front of her picture. Many wonderful thoughts and remembrances came from friends and helpers, and it was a time of warmhearted consideration of impermanence. I was advised that I would grieve, but I didn't—nor did my sister. Mother's death was a blessing, not merely because she was ready to go, but because it opened the lives it touched.

Two weeks after her death, Mother returned in a dream. I was sitting on a toilet in a bathroom, aware of not being alone. I realized that Mother was sitting on her commode, in the bathtub, behind the shower curtain. She and I both got up and she managed to step out of the tub by herself. As we stood, I noticed that the tub was half filled with water and had shit floating in it. I didn't relish the job of putting my hand into the water to pull the plug and start the cleanup, but I knew I would do it anyway. As I considered this, Mother reached down, took hold of the chain below the faucet, and smoothly pulled the plug herself. ❖

Maylie Scott is a Zen priest and community activist living in Arcata, California.

Photo: Raja Hornstein

Two Haibun on Old Age

by Ken Jones

Haibun blends haiku and haiku-like prose. The form originated in 17th century Japan with Basho's famous Narrow Road to the Deep North, *and is now being developed as a new Western literary genre.*

The Felling

A year older
the woodcutter
counting rings

The leaning ash, tall above the house, has been keenly observed for some time now—the line of free fall, the cutting stance. Looking up to its crown of branches against the February sky, I wonder: how long would its fallen length be? Here the trees we fell are usually near dead or else lean dangerously in their old age, ready for the hungry wood stoves.

Comes the first dry, still day, the chainsaw is stripped and adjusted.

Chainsaw oil
sticky pungent stuff
holding memories well

The blade is slid into its yellow plastic sheath, A coil of rope, crow bar, face mask, and other tackle are gathered up. With all this loving attention there's less danger of getting at odds with a big tree. Even when it's down, there can still be a lot of spring-loaded energy trapped in bent branches: teeth could be knocked out, ribs broken, friends put in the cottage hospital.

Once up at the tree, the deed is done, without haste—but quickly.

Tremor of topmost twigs
a groan, a creak, a crash
sawdust and silver bark

It wasn't hollow after all; could have stood fast for many years more. Among its broken tangle of twigs and branches are sprays of tiny green shoots.

Felled by the old woodsman
the old tree
sprawls
in dead bracken

The Last Move

Old letters; diaries; clippings
now a stranger
to myself

"His formidable intellect and massive enthusiasm." So, into which of the two plastic rubbish sacks is this to be crumpled: the gray one (recycling) or the black (the dump)?

House clearance. The last move. Almost.

Some people can only just be pulled back over the edge of memory; others are gone forever. A part of their fragmented past perishes with mine.

Picture postcard
tupenny ha'penny stamp
a dead woman's scrawl

Then there's the worn type of the old Olivetti; the smudgy carbons on quarto paper. Mistakes robustly obliterated with XXXXXs. This long-expired guarantee for a Bush wireless lies next to a card reminding me to renew my temporary membership in the Mombassa Club. Assorted oddments have sunk to the bottom:

That tortoiseshell comb
with the broken teeth—
fox terrier lady!

Clunk, clunk
father's medals
each in its square brown envelope

At the bottom of one drawer is a rounded yellow sandstone rock. No date or place on it. But, from the documentary stratum in which it occurs, it must have been around for the last 40 years of my life, as well as the two hundred and twenty-five million of its own. It lies as heavy in my hand now as it did all those years ago. Cold river stone. What does one do with a stone? Put it out in the rain.

Both plastic bags are now fit to burst. I try to rise but my legs have gone to sleep.

Endless life!
yet again
toe holes in my slippers

(continued on page 17)

Swallowing

by Lin Jensen

I would never again take result for granted.

The last of the unswallowed pudding drained in a smear down the front of her. She looked at me through eyes urgent with fear.

She couldn't swallow. She sat propped up in bed on the fourth floor of Saint Joseph's Hospital with a spoonful of pudding in her mouth that just wouldn't go down. And when she tried to wash it down with water, her hands shook so badly she could barely get the cup to her lips. She tilted her head back and dumped in a little water and all she succeeded in doing was to add to the volume of diluted pudding she was already holding in her mouth. She pinched her lips together to keep it in but most of it dribbled back out onto the towel I'd tucked under her chin.

I tried to persuade her to give up but she wouldn't. It was like asking her to stop breathing. She was 88 years old and she had always swallowed and now she couldn't. It was a bewildering and startling circumstance, like that of a bird with a broken wing that suddenly discovers it can't fly. It flaps its wings up and down as it has always done and is astonished to find itself still on the ground.

Try as she might, Mother couldn't trigger a swallow reflex. The medical staff was threatening to insert a tube into her stomach, but she didn't want life force-fed to her. She wanted to live of her own volition. "Don't let them do it, Linley," she implored. "I want to feed myself."

I sat on a chair at the foot of her bed. The second hand ticked interminably around the face of the wall clock. The towel under Mother's chin was soaked through to her nightgown. Every few minutes she'd put another spoonful of pudding in her mouth.

At length she quit. Defeated. Her mouth fell slack. The last of the unswallowed pudding drained in a smear down the front of her. She looked at me through eyes urgent with fear. Her hair was all askew, matted down by the pressure of the pillow. Her scalp showed through patches of gray that had once been a cascade of auburn reaching to the small of her back. Her face was gaunt. Skin hung from her in leathery folds. She cried when I brushed her hair. At the nurses' station, they were preparing a stomach tube.

Sometimes things fail us that shouldn't. And when they do, it can seem as if the sun has suddenly reversed its course. You can never know when this might happen or what form it might take. But its arrival can bring you to doubt your most unassailable certainties—things you never before thought to question.

* * * * *

My wife, Karen, and I once built a house for ourselves on 20 acres in a remote mountain valley in northeastern California. One hot August day at about three in the afternoon, I was standing at my workbench in the garage holding a window frame in my hands that wouldn't fit the window I'd made it for. Two others just like it lay on the bench before me. What with all the setups that had to be made, the cutting, gluing, clamping, and sanding that had to be done, the three frames represented the better part of two days' labor. Add on the expensive materials that had gone into their making and they represented a considerable cost as well. Yet they were useless, a complete waste.

I had 22 such frames to make, and thinking I ought to try out at least one prototype before committing myself to cutting all 22 of them, I'd put one together for a small laundry room window. It didn't fit. This threw me a little because it was something that had rarely occurred in all the years I had been building. But it didn't throw me nearly as much as not being able to discover where I'd gone wrong.

I went over the plans again—which I'd drawn up myself and of whose accuracy I was already convinced—and found no error. I carefully checked the math on the length of the rails and stiles. I subtracted once more the depth of shoulder cuts on the tenon joints. Everything was just as it should be, except that the resultant window frame was nearly an inch narrower than the space it was meant to occupy.

If the specifications were right, I must have made a mistake on the saw. I built a second prototype, which turned out as much too large for the space as the first had been too small. I recalculated everything. As before, I found no error. I built a third prototype, and by this time I was so unraveled that I didn't expect it to fit either, and it didn't. I had no idea where I'd gone wrong. I felt as if I had lost my mind, or had somehow lost the world in which a mind such as mine could properly function.

Besides the 22 window frames I still had to make, I had all the cabinets ahead of me. Weeks of labor, thousands of dollars of expensive hardwoods, 48 drawers and 39 cabinet doors yet to build, and I couldn't put together a single window frame.

The thermometer on the garage wall read a hundred degrees. Through the open door, I could see where heat waves distorted the fields, putting the whole landscape out of focus. I muddled about in the heat of the garage, aimlessly rearranging tools, straightening up the work-

bench, sweeping shavings into a little pile on the floor, and then leaving them there to be tracked around the garage again. A stack of clear kiln-dried redwood rested on a pair of sawhorses near the workbench. I lifted a board from the stack, set it down again. I couldn't bring myself to cut a single piece of it.

Then Ron McCaffrey was there. He'd come up the half mile of graveled driveway from the county road and was parked in front of the garage before I awakened to the fact that anyone was around. He was wearing the same old Wards coveralls he always wore regardless of the heat. He came into the garage carrying Dolly on his arm, a ratty little tan chihuahua that was as inevitable to his visits as were his coveralls. As unlikely a confidant as Ron McCaffrey might seem, I poured out the whole story to him. I told him everything, all the perplexity, the panic, the fear, everything. By the time I got it all out, I had somehow ended up holding Dolly, petting her and consoling her as if she were the one who couldn't build a window frame.

We were quiet for a while. Then Ron said, "You don't have to work alone." He means God, I thought. I should have known. But the truth was I liked hearing him say it. I recited it inwardly: "I don't have to work alone."

"Take the rest of the day off," Ron said.

I did. After Ron left I shut the garage doors and went up the wooded ridge west of the house and sat under some Jeffrey pines. In a clearing beyond the pines stood a single western juniper tree. It had grown in the thinnest of gravelly soils and yet its trunk was of a girth you'd find hard to get your arms around. It was an ancient specimen, rooted in soil that was eroding on all sides. Three huge boulders broken off from the cliffs above had come to rest within a few yards of its trunk. It looked as if its entire life had been lived in hazard.

The evening wind came up, the sound of it pushing its way through the surrounding woods. I saw the stiff grasses rattling against themselves at the base of the juniper, saw the dust rise from the bare patches of earth. I saw the nighthawks wheel overhead, and everywhere I heard the restless whistling of the wind among the rocks and brush. I would never again take result for granted.

In the morning, although my hands trembled to do it, I successfully cut the materials for the window frames.

* * * * *

We brought Mother home with a tube inserted in her stomach, a case of liquid nutrient, and a stand to set up by her bed with a machine mounted on it that delivered the nutrient to her in measured doses throughout the long days and nights. She submitted to this without any seeming interest or resistance. We were certain she was dying. For a few days it was all she could manage to respond to the call of her own name. Then by degrees, at a pace heartbreakingly slow, she began to strengthen. And one day, after weeks of being fed by tube, she asked for her supper. She wanted it served at the table. And so we got her into her wheelchair and wheeled her to the table and set a small plate of creamed peas and potatoes in front of her. But she had to spit out the few spoonfuls she managed to get into her mouth because she couldn't swallow.

Sometimes things fail us that shouldn't. And when they do, it can seem as if the sun has suddenly reversed its course.

Still, she insisted on being brought to the table for every meal. She pushed little bits of food around on her plate with a fork and every once in a while stuck some of it in her mouth. At times she would hold food in her mouth for 30 minutes or more trying to will it to go down. And then one morning at breakfast, she swallowed. She didn't repeat this feat again for nearly a week, but in increments you'd have to measure by weeks rather than hours or even days, she swallowed more and more.

Mother eats three times a day now. She lives by her own volition once more. But she knows her world too well to count on any outcome whatsoever. I see it in her eyes. I see that whenever she takes a spoonful of food into her mouth, she's never quite sure it will go down. ❖

Lin Jensen is a Zen Buddhist who writes and teaches at the Chico Zen Sangha in Chico, California. His latest book, Uncovering the Wisdom of the Heartmind *(Quest Books, 1999), is reviewed on page 40.*

Haibun, **continued from page 15**

I sit tall in my high-backed chair, the one with the reassuring leather upholstery. There was something in that postcard. About enjoying "the bearable lightness of other people's love."

The silence settles. The lawn is in twilight. And then I hear them...

Flying in low
over dusty fields
wild duck ❖

Ken Jones is secretary of the UK Network of Engaged Buddhists. His third book on engaged Buddhism, Liberation is Indivisible, *is currently in search of a publisher. A longtime Zen practitioner, he cultivates the Way of Haiku.* Pilgrim Foxes *is his latest collection of haiku and haibun.*

"On to the Next Project!"

Mushim Ikeda-Nash interviews Robert Aitken Roshi

I talked with Robert Aitken Roshi at Kaimu, his retirement home on the Big Island of Hawai'i, in July 2000. Kaimu reminds me of the Buddhist hermitages I saw in Korea, particularly those on the tropical volcanic island of Cheju-do. Time seems to ripen slowly in these places. There is time to look at the ants on the lava, to watch the green bananas turning yellow, to listen to the rain.

At Kaimu, everything–the luscious little tropical garden, the simple yet beautiful construction of the buildings, the books, the artwork–is a reminder of practice. The atmosphere is peaceful and concentrated. Roshi's house is literally anchored in the black lava next to the ocean, and you can see the smoking volcano from his back "yard"–which, of course, is lava. It's a dramatic and somewhat surreal landscape.

During our meetings, Roshi emphasized how precious time is to him now, at 83. He doesn't take any days off, but works steadily at the writing and other projects he wants to complete. He continues to teach his students and does his exercises and takes his walk every day. The little zendo is on the corner of his residence; he can get up in the morning, take a few steps, and sit right down on his meditation mat.

There are a couple of things about how Aitken Roshi has arranged his "retirement" (an odd way to describe a lifestyle that many younger people would find challenging) that may be significant to other Buddhist practitioners as they think about becoming old:

Community: Roshi has constructed his living situation so that he has his privacy and his own house, but he is part of a residential community, or sangha, consisting of his son Tom, his caretakers Lindsey and Joel, many cats, and visiting students and friends who come and go all the time. Kaimu was constructed so that it will accommodate a number of guests. Many elderly people fear living in isolation and becoming very lonely. Roshi has lots of people who love him around him, and they eat meals together, practice Zen together, and every evening after dinner everyone hugs him good-night. It's quite warm and familylike.

Discipline: Kaimu has a schedule, just like a Zen temple, and Roshi is very disciplined about keeping to the schedule. If lunch is at noon, he walks in the dining room door on the stroke of 12. He emphasized a number of times that it's important for him to do his exercises and take his walk every day, even if he doesn't feel very well. He stays physically and mentally active and very involved. This takes a lot of discipline and determination, but the payoff is that he is full of interesting news and fresh insights.

Aitken Roshi is currently at work on various writing projects, including a new translation, with commentary, of the *Blue Cliff Record* (perhaps the most famous and widely used collection of Zen koans, or teaching stories). In addition, he has been deeply involved in the restorative justice movement in Hawai'i, working with the group 'Ohana E Ho'opakele (Project Rescue Family), a group of mostly native Hawai'ian people interested in using traditional Hawai'ian reconciliation processes.

–Mushim Ikeda-Nash

Mushim: We are all aging—children, babies, everybody. But you are one of our venerable Zen teachers, so people have questions, myself included, about aging. How has aging affected your practice?

Aitken Roshi: Aging has given me a keener sense of time and its limitations. I have become aggressively jealous of my time. I have a number of projects that I've been working on or looking forward to. And I'm reluctant to take time out, go on vacations, or spend time in recreation or just reading, because I'd really like to get these projects done, and I know I don't have that much time.

Mushim: Part of growing older is loss. How does practice help you deal with loss?

Aitken Roshi: I am widowed and bereaved and I've lost my memory. I've lost the ability to walk in a straight line—to know, really, where my feet are—as a result of neuropathy. I've suffered losses of teeth and I've had lens replacements in both eyes. So, yes, I know about loss.

One of my inspirations is Jean Dominique Bauby, author of the book *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly.* Here's a guy who was editor of *Elle,* a writer, an editor, a talented person in his culture. He suffered a brain stem stroke in middle life—he was maybe 40 years old. He lost the use of everything, except one eyelid. With a code that he worked out with his caregivers, he wrote this wonderful book, letter by letter. He continued to be a writer, no matter what.

I continue to teach a little. Our zendo seats eight people, though we can crowd in eleven, and sometimes folks sit outside. Almost every morning, I have *dokusan* [a face-to-face meeting between Zen teacher and student] with people who live here or nearby. Every Sunday morning we have a meeting that brings in people from further away. And I continue to write. So I'm not as bad off as Monsieur Bauby. I just do it, and enjoy myself.

If this house were to burn down and I were to lose my books and my archives, it would be a terrible blow for me. I would not easily be able to say, "Well, everything is transient and I shouldn't be attached," and all that kind of rubbish. I would really suffer. So I want to put all that in perspective. I would continue to work, I would continue to teach, but I would feel the loss just as Monsieur Bauby felt the loss. Which is why I put my Zip drive in my pocket when I go for a walk, in case the house burns down while I'm gone.

Mushim: Do you pray, or do you consider that there even is prayer in the Buddhist sense?

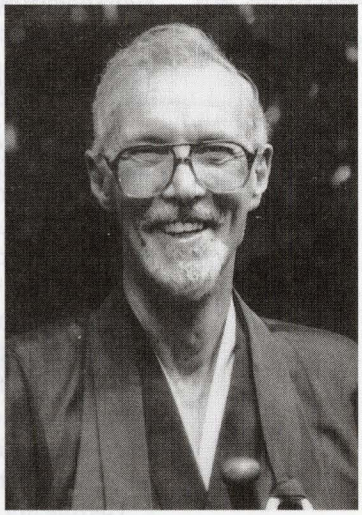
Aitken Roshi: Oh, I don't think so. Of course, I recite sutras, and I put myself wholeheartedly in the voice of the one chanting as she recites the dedication. There's a fine line between looking at Kannon [bodhisattva of compassion] as simply an archetype and as something reified. I remember visiting the great temple in Kamakura dedicated to Kannon. There's a big hall, a very old building, rather run-down, and a very dark Kannon carved out of a great cedar tree reaching two stories high, a magnificent figure. And here was a lone man standing in front of us, who recited the long Kannon Sutra. I had the most profound respect for this man and his faith. It's not my practice, but I certainly admire and venerate such people and such faith.

Mushim: What kind of teachings do you give to others who ask you about aging? What help or insight do others seem to need?

Aitken Roshi: One of my students is a young woman who is dying of a rare disease. She's not old at all, she's only in her mid-twenties, but she's facing her own death. I simply encourage her, and she doesn't really need my teaching. She's her own teacher and she's a teacher of her support group, but I encourage her to enjoy her life and to find ways that she can feel productive in her life and to look death straight in the eye. And she does. She loves that passage in Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" in *Leaves of Grass:*

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

I don't have any general way of teaching about it, and I don't have any students my age or even near my age, but I do work with people who have terminal illnesses, and it's kind of the same thing. I follow the usual way that my betters in the field of death and dying have laid out—listening and being there with them. And encouraging them that it's all right. Everything's really all right, to the very bottom.



Mushim: What if there's pain? Hard, physical pain?

Aitken Roshi: Yes. Of course, Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues are doing wonderful work in this field. His *Full Catastrophe Living* is a bible for caregivers. But you know, a lot of pain is the pain that fears pain. I don't hold myself up as a shining example, but I was able to lie in the chair at my dentist's office for four and a half hours of surgery, without complaining. The dentist marveled at this, but it was a very ordinary thing. I was just lying there breathing quietly, and checking out the people in the room. Soen Roshi once took me to a railroad station where we could look at people thundering through the concourse. Roshi told me, "Do dokusan with each one of those people." So, too, under the drill and pliers, I took part in the lives—to the extent I could—of the hygienists and the dentist who were fussing over me. It was very interesting for me to partake in their personalities and enjoy each one of them.

I put my Zip drive in my pocket when I go for a walk, in case my house burns down while I'm gone.

Robert Aitken is a retired Zen master of the Diamond Sangha, a Zen Buddhist society he founded in Honolulu in 1959 with his late wife, Anne Hopkins Aitken. In 1941, he was captured on Guam by invading Japanese forces, and interned in Japan for the duration of World War II. In the camp, he met the British scholar R.H. Blyth, who introduced him to Zen Buddhism. After the war, he practiced Zen with Senzaki Nyogen Sensei in Los Angeles, and traveled frequently to Japan to practice in monasteries and lay centers with Nakagawa Soen Roshi, Yasutani Haku'un Roshi, and Yamada Ko'un Roshi. Yamada Roshi gave him transmission as an independent master in 1985.

Aitken Roshi is the author of eight books on Zen Buddhism. In Hawai'i he was instrumental in founding the Koko An Zendo, the Palolo Zen Center, the Maui Zendo, and the Garden Island Sangha. Other centers around the world are part of the Diamond Sangha network.

Aitken Roshi is cofounder of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and serves on its international board of advisors. He has been active in the peace, social justice, and ecological movements, and his writing reflects his concern that Buddhists be engaged in social applications of their experience.

The next-to-the-last haiku that Basho wrote was about lying in the home of one of his friends while he was on pilgrimage. It turned out to be his death bed.

Our neighbor—
what does he do,
I wonder?

I regard dying the way Peter Pan did, as the last great adventure.

Here he was, suffering from chronic stomach pain. Probably some little sound from the neighbor came in and triggered his interest, led him to wonder, "What kind of person is that?" So if I can encourage a person to take that kind of joy in life, it's rewarding for the person who is aging or dying, and it's rewarding and instructive to other people.

Mushim: Do you feel that others look at you differently, or treat you differently as you get older?

Aitken Roshi: There's quite a spectrum that I experience. Some people instinctively know what it means to be old, so in a very straightforward way they'll take my arm and help me cross a rough place in the driveway. Others will just stand off and look at me and wonder if I need help. Others will pay no attention at all. I don't mind any of them. Of course, I'm grateful to the person who will step right up and take my hand, but I don't mind being left on my own. It's a kind of challenge.

Getting out of a car, for example, especially if I have bundles, is a big challenge for me. Although I stand up and sit down 20 times every morning to keep my legs in shape, I still don't do too well standing up on my own because my feet are asleep. So it takes me a couple of minutes to open the door, gather my bundles, and unhook the seat belt. I usually gather my bundles and then find that I'm still hooked up. But what is striking for me is that I am so old. My caregivers can remember when Ronald Reagan was president. I can remember when Calvin Coolidge was president. I was born when Woodrow Wilson was president.

Sometimes I get questions that throw me for a loss, from very young people. What is fascism? *What is fascism?* My god! And I realize that I'm using words differently. The word "underground," for example, in the political sense. Young people don't know what I mean, and I have to stop and explain.

Generally, I think there is a respect—that I may or may not have earned—simply due to the fact that I'm old. Oh, I know that there is a feeling of impatience sometimes. I'm not there with my memory and I'm not there with my responses.

Mushim: Have your relationships with your students changed over time?

Aitken Roshi: I think I'm a lot more decent, mellow, patient, and relaxed, a lot less stiff. I'm a lot more willing to let things go, just be patient, because I know that people who are going through stressful times may leave the zendo and even leave the dharma, and then might even show up again 20 years later.

Mushim: Are there any Buddhist teachings on aging that have meaning or resonance for you now?

Aitken Roshi: I don't know any Buddhist teachings about aging. In Japan, it's supposed that zazen teaches you how to die, so I would say two-thirds of the laypeople who come to sesshin at monasteries in Japan are elderly. I don't know what sesshin teaches you about how to die, but there is that belief. Lots of older people come to sesshin.

Mushim: I suppose the theory is that zazen will teach you not to be attached, so then you wouldn't be attached to this life. But I don't know.

Aitken Roshi: Oh, maybe.

Mushim: My *obaachan* [grandmother] practiced Jodo Shinshu Buddhism and lived on Oahu. My cousin interviewed her when she was old and asked, "What are your feelings about death?" And she instantly said, "I'm not afraid because I believe that when my time comes, *Ojiichan* ["Grandpa" in Japanese] will come to guide me to the Pure Land." She was quite certain of it. There's a Japanese word for the guiding spirit, your loved one who has preceded you. That was her faith, and she was quite relaxed. She died very peacefully after she ate her lunch one day, when she was quite old. So in that sense, I guess in Buddhism there is this faith, there is this context.

Aitken Roshi: I regard dying the way Peter Pan did, as the last great adventure. Let's see what happens. I really don't know.

Mushim: Looking back over your whole career as a Buddhist teacher, are there things that you feel particularly pleased with or proud of?

Aitken Roshi: Well, I'm pleased that by nature I'm a writer. There are some people who, from the age of five, are sketching. There are some people who, from the age of five, are picking out tunes on the piano. And there are some people who, from the age of five, are reading. I was one of those. Now it just so happens that my interest in Zen practice and my interest in writing come together. So I'm grateful that I spent years writing, in those days when I was just starting to take a leadership role in the zendo. I don't know where all those manuscripts are, although some of them are retained in the old Diamond Sangha journal. In those days I wrote reviews and essays and all kinds of things. So I've got a body of writing that's published in volumes and in print [including many articles published in *Turning Wheel* —Ed.]. That's satisfying for me. And there's more to come.

And I'm glad that I played some role in the process of maturity for different people. They're not hesitant to tell me this, and that's nice. I say these things because I'm asked, but I really don't think about them very much. On to the next project!

Mushim: I think that's about all the questions...

Aitken Roshi: I thought maybe you'd ask, "What annoys you as an old man?"

Mushim: Okay. What does?

Aitken Roshi: Well, I would say, elderproof packaging on pill bottles. That's annoying. Let's see. I don't know. I think that's about it.

Mushim: That's not too bad, if it's only elderproof packaging.

Aitken Roshi: The other things are the inevitable things about aging and just dealing with it. Problems with sleeping and digesting and remembering.

I also thought maybe you'd ask me, "When did you realize you were old?" That's a good question.

Mushim: When did you realize you were old?

Aitken Roshi: When my son was old enough to join the AARP [American Association for Retired People].

Mushim: Do you *feel* old?

Aitken Roshi: Sometimes I feel old. I often feel like a young person who has something wrong with me. But yes, I feel old, sometimes, and it's not only something physical that prompts it.

Mushim: Do you have friends who are your age?

Aitken Roshi: I have old friends, old connections. But, you know, as is true for anybody who's been in dharma work for a long time, old college friends sort of drop away and I may hear from them once in a while, but I conscientiously avoid college reunions. I went to one and it was an agonizing experience. I suppose I should be in better touch with people, old friends, some of whom were very important to me at one time.

Mushim: A couple of times over the phone you said, "Well, I'm an old duffer now."

Aitken Roshi: I say that to remind myself to take a nap in the afternoon. Fortunately, I don't need to remind myself to work, because I have this imperative to work.

Mushim: I think you enjoy it.

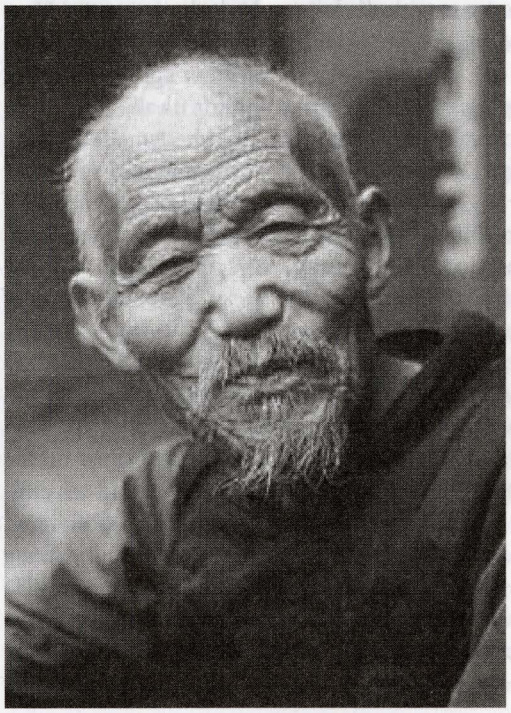
Aitken Roshi: Yes, I do.

Mushim: Well, thank you. Is it time for me to cook you some lunch?

Aitken Roshi: Oh, are you going to cook me some lunch? ❖

Mushim Ikeda-Nash is a mother, writer, and Buddhist peace activist living in Oakland, California.

Thanks to A.J. Kutchins for editing this interview.



Temple guardian, Bingling Si, China. Photo by Don Gurewitz

In her old age, a rickety Ms.
Took up learning the isness of is.
Since it's not what one does,
She just WAS and she WAS...
Now she's gone off to BE in Cadiz.

—*Alice Hayes*

Old Body, Old Teacher

by Allan Cooper, with Lisa Grinnell

Because I've been a hospice nurse for 15 years, people often ask me about how dignity can be maintained at the end of life. I sometimes get the impression that what they really want to know is how youthful they can be as they breathe their last, and how to look as good as Ali McGraw did when her time came in *Love Story;* they want me to help them deny that aging almost always includes pain, decay, and decrepitude.

When her aging body forced Grammy to let go of control, she discovered a vein of deep generosity in herself.

Too often, as a hospice nurse, I have seen people shattered, after a lifetime of believing: "I can do this myself; I have control over this." When it is our turn, or when a loved one is found on the floor of her home with a broken hip, fouled by feces, or in a confused mental condition unable to care for himself, or diagnosed with a life-threatening cancer, we are shaken awake to the understanding that turning our hearts and minds away from aging does not prevent aging from happening. From our aging bodies we can learn to open to the vulnerability and the grace of becoming an elder. As we learn from change and loss, we model the responsibilities and privileges of the aged to those who will follow.

I am a cofounder of a residential community for aging Buddhists in New Mexico, which we have named Kusinara, for the village in Nepal where the Buddha died and attained final liberation from the wheel of birth and death. Our Kusinara's outreach program, which serves groups, families, and individuals wishing to make sickness, old age, and death their friends, is underway, and our community residential center is in the final stages of planning. Kusinara will be a spiritual home for meditation practice in daily life, health care in which we take care of each other, and community life, woven together in a cooperative model. We will pool our resources, and serve each other and our neighbors. Old age, sickness, and death will be our teachers; becoming elders will be our goal.

When we hold onto the hope that our aging and dying should look a particular way, we leave no room for the lessons that can arise when we have lost control over bowel and bladder, when our bodies are oozing smelly fluids, when there is pain, and when, for the first time since childhood, we become totally dependent on other human beings for everything physical.

Grammy lived a life of striving and hardship: flight from Eastern Europe as a child, two world wars, the deaths of two husbands, the great depression. When I was a child and she was a middle-aged woman, she seemed hard and sometimes unapproachable. It wasn't until her eighties and nineties, when she was blind and unable to care for herself, that an amazing transformation took place. She became one of the most loving people I have ever known. When her aging body forced Grammy to let go of control, she discovered a vein of deep generosity in herself for her family and for those who cared for her. Her spirit, even as a feeble, blind, incontinent old woman, had a remarkable impact on all who came into contact with her. Until her death at 99, her favorite mantra, which she repeated over and over again with an uncompromising clarity, was, "I just want you to be happy!"

Along with our pell-mell embrace of youth culture in mainstream U.S. society, we have excised the role of the elder and sage from our collective consciousness. When old people trying to stay young turn away from their bodies and from the privileges and responsibilities of being elders, can we be surprised that young people react with disdain and a lack of respect? How can we expect the young to embrace their own future of old age if we as a society deny that aging, including its unpleasantness, has meaning for us all?

When we react with fear to the challenges of aging, we teach ourselves the habit of reacting with fear when any difficult change occurs in our lives. But if we can embrace the lessons of aging, we can also learn to embrace other changes and unknowns that we meet in our lives. We can model this acceptance of change for others.

When I was five, my grandparents would come visit and call together our tribe of cousins, aunts, and uncles. We would celebrate being a family with play, food, and stories. On stormy nights in front of the fireplace, Grampa Sam told his children and his children's children folk stories of ghosts and goblins. And he told us real stories, of fleeing pogroms and walking across Europe at night to find a ship to America. He told us never to go to sleep without knowing where your pants and shoes are, "in case of fire." The gather-

(continued on page 24)

Old and in the Way

by Darlene Cohen

My dad, while he was dying of colon cancer, told me during one particularly irksome procedure over the toilet, "Darlene, don't ever get old." This remark is poignant because of its unspoken aspect: In order not to age you'd have to die. My dad often held off the anguish of his difficult aging process with self-mockery.

Because I developed rheumatoid arthritis, a painful and crippling disease, at the age of 35, I figured I had already made the adjustment to the physical losses of old age ahead of my peers; it was just a matter of their catching up. So when they began bemoaning their new aches and stiffness, I felt more companionable, less marginalized. But now, at 58, I see that aging is not just a matter of stiff joints; it involves previously unimaginable losses: skin and teeth and internal organs—friends and financial security and relevance.

When I was 28 years old, I came to the San Francisco Zen Center with a definite goal in mind: entering the nirvana of my psychedelic drug raptures and never coming out. After achieving permanent bliss-mind, I planned to leave Zen Center, an irritatingly tedious place, and do something with my life: start a business, teach philosophy, give advice. In and out with a minimum of fuss. I never expected the tedium to give way to an exploration of consciousness so compelling that I didn't want to do anything else, and then to stay at Zen Center so long.

What I now realize is that in abandoning that early plan to hit and run, I've incidentally spent most of my adult life preparing for sickness, old age, and death. A few years ago I began to notice that each spring I have the same sweet, melancholy stirrings in my chest that I feel when golden light and turning leaves signal the death of summer. I now know there's a limit to how many more times these ardent bursts of pinks and yellows will halt me in my path. When I confided these musings to a dharma teacher recently, she nodded and said, "This is a body understanding of impermanence."

It feels okay to notice these things, feels good actually, to sink wholeheartedly into the teaching of impermanence. It's my intention to open the weave of my body to the experience of great pain and loss. When I practice awareness without judgment, the openings in my body grow large enough for enormous amounts of suffering to be registered and then to pass through, leaving no trace. The suffering is burned up completely in the moment it's felt. My weave is so wide—there's so much space between the fibers of my tissue—that my insides must resemble the imperfect potholders made at school by kindergarteners and brought home proudly to parents.

I wanted to hear about other people's experiences, so my friend Basya Petnick suggested that we begin bringing middle-aged people together at Zen Center for an afternoon of talk and play, meditation, and physical movement. It turned out people hadn't really been talking much about aging before, and so they spent most of our discussion time voicing their fears of the time ahead: physical, financial, social. At the end, though, as we sat together with our tea and cookies (baked specially for us by the Zen Center kitchen), we were all quiet and deeply aware of each other. We had grown close in that odd, workshop-specific way: feeling the intimacy that arises from spending the afternoon together moving in and out of intensely private space in the presence of others.

We talked for awhile about how the afternoon had reoriented many of us toward our deepest values. We also felt the stimulation of new perspectives, new ways to manifest old yearnings. One woman's final remarks caused an epiphany in me. She said, "Our generation has seen itself as a collective since we were young. We were focused then on community and developing new ways to live and to help each other. We'll do the same now as we age. We'll set up house-

My husband, Tony, got to 60 first. I asked him how it felt. He said, "It feels just like I'm young, except with a bad case of the flu."

Photo: Raja Hornstein

holds together, share our resources, go through it together just like we did decades ago."

Then someone else spoke up, "Yeah, and if we get desperate, we can always get into gangs and mug young people!"

"I'm so old," my Dad used to say, "I knew God's parents."

Since that illuminating afternoon, I have cofacilitated several more such workshops. We ask people by way of introducing themselves, "What was the event that made you realize you were getting older?" This part of the workshop is my favorite. I'm really engaged by people's accounts: resentment of the subtle ageism encountered at work, as middle-aged wage-earners adjust to having bosses much younger than they are; chagrin at the new anonymity on the street—nobody looks or flirts anymore; the shock upon the second parent's death of becoming simultaneously an orphan and the new matriarch/patriarch of the family—the next in line to die; irritation at being offered the senior citizen's discount without asking for it; the long struggle denying physical changes by people who have been athletic all their lives; and realizing that your dentist or the cop who pulls you over is younger than your children.

The fact is that everything we cherish, including our bodies and our way of life, is impermanent. That everything changes is Buddhism's most basic truth. Our basic nature, as well as the nature of everything around us, is nothing but change itself. We might start thinking about this more as we get older, but actually we already have a lifetime of experience with it. So we worry about losing everything as we age, but really we have been growing accustomed to this loss our whole lives, depending on how aware of it we have been.

And unlike young people who are (quite properly) in the process of inventing their identities and struggling to reify them in the world, we are in the process of giving up identifying with certain things and instead learning to become more fluid, more immediate. We have the liberty of asking ourselves: What habits do I have to change in order to live the rest of my life the way I want to? We challenge our old ways of thinking about "I"—what "I" must be like or what "I" should do—and begin to live more experientially.

A friend of mine, a psychiatrist in his sixties, working diligently with troubled people and continuing his lifelong habit of being careful with money, told me he wanted very much to see an art exhibit which was currently in Washington, D.C. He sighed, "Well, I should stop thinking about it; it'll probably come to San Francisco eventually." The days went by. Then he told me, "Maybe it won't come to San Francisco. I really want to see it." A week later he announced, "Guess what? I just bought a ticket to Washington, D.C., and reserved a hotel room for a three-day weekend! I'm not getting any younger, and what have I been working for? Just to keep on working?"

His example inspired and thrilled me. I remember reading a poem about the "sobriety of youth, the freedom of age." Another friend, a retired therapist and lifelong Buddhist, spends many of his days playing his flute in a neighborhood park. He says, "I have to be in the mood and it has to be warm outside...I've had little girls dancing, and couples relaxing on the grass while I play. It's music from the soul."

As for me, having raised my child and done my reproductive duty to my society as a female, I feel free to turn toward my Zen practice in the intensive way I couldn't do while earning a living and parenting a child. The last 10 years or so I have been studying Buddhism in a scholarly way, doing some practice periods, writing a meditation manual for people in pain, *Finding a Joyful Life in the Heart of Pain* [see review on page 41], and preparing for Dharma Transmission. All deeply satisfying endeavors in a way that they could never have been in a young and urgent body.

My husband, Tony, got to 60 first. I asked him how it felt. He said, "It feels just like I'm young, except with a bad case of the flu." He muses: "Impermanence. I guess whatever I'm thinking about, I'm also thinking about impermanence. Thinking about how it all goes away eventually, even your mind."

The only sanctuary I know of is the present moment. And as older people, we have more permission to fully exploit this truth. ❖

Darlene Cohen is a priest and dharma teacher at San Francisco Zen Center. Her new book, Finding A Joyful Life in the Heart of Pain, *is reviewed on page 41.*

Old Body, Old Teacher, continued from page 22

ing of the family, the celebration, and the stories were Grampa's responsibility; the respect of a five-year-old boy was his privilege.

When we embrace a moment-to-moment awareness of our aging, we have the opportunity to learn what our bodies are teaching. We learn to meet with equanimity what life offers us—the unpleasant with the pleasant, the bad with the good, the pain with the pleasure. Each moment of attention assists us in becoming elders, becoming friends to ourselves and models to those who will follow. Though our society does not now support the cultivation of wisdom in our aging population, we as individuals can still make a conscious choice to take sickness, old age, and death as our teachers, and to bring back the role of elder, crone, and sage. ❖

Allan Cooper and Lisa Grinnell are cofounders of Kusinara, Buddhist Community for Conscious Aging and Dying, in New Mexico. Web site: www.kusinara.org

Photo: Raja Hornstein

My Father's Umbrella

I liked to walk under my father's umbrella.
He held it high over both of us,
His head way above mine.
We stayed dry, side by side.

When my sisters and I cleared the clutter
from our parents' apartment, I took
my father's umbrella, long and black,
its smooth handle curled like a cane.

Now if he were by my side
I'd be the taller one. He'd hold
my arm to keep from stumbling.
I walk alone under my father's umbrella.

—Tova Green

I Am Old

by Lee Lipp

Shall I start off right away declaring that I AM OLD, and open myself up to comments like, "You're only as old as you feel," or "Age is relative, you know," or "But you're still so attractive, my dear"? Maybe if I don't write these words, you won't notice that I am old. If I tell you the "number" of my years, I'll be exposing something shameful that could damage me.

I feel caught in our cultural myth that aging is a failure, that if I only did it right I could avoid old age, even avoid death. What a peculiar notion! Do I believe deep down that aging is optional? That it's a disease that can be cured, if I only do it right?

How easy it is for me to succumb to our cultural imperative to look and act youthful by any means necessary. The person who cuts my hair says, "Oh, your new hairdo makes you look soooo young." Or my new friend says, "I'd never guess your age—you look so good."

"What kind of nonsense is this?" I ask myself as I plunk down cash for an expensive new face cream that promises to delay wrinkles. I notice that the years push me more and more out of the sex appeal arena. Do men grapple with this too? We have some ideas that as we age we are no longer sexy, vital, juicy.

Sometimes when I walk into a room I feel as if I'm invisible, or, even worse, an outcast. We co-create a myth that older people are fundamentally different than younger people, and that their aging is a personal failure. How can we talk to each other about getting old, when so many of us are in denial or shame about it?

Fifteen years ago, working as a psychotherapist, I offered a workshop for "The Aging Woman." No one signed up. In the last year, two teachers at Green Gulch offered a day for "Old Coots and Crones," and canceled it when only five people signed up. Can't we who speak of no birth and no death, no beginning and no end, also speak of the relative time in between?

I only know my intention to receive this gift of age as a pointer towards clarity and freedom. I vow to see old age as an advisor on how to take care of life as it is, in this wrinkly, lumpy, creaky, and cranky body. I vow to be curious and present as well to the joy still kicking in me. Perhaps these vows will dismantle the shame I feel with this exposure. With the intention to love aging, all of it, I call on kindness, respect, and patience, from myself and from you. And so in front of all of you I declare that "I AM OLD." ❖

Lee Lipp lives and works at San Francisco Zen Center.

"What kind of nonsense is this?" I ask myself as I plunk down cash for an expensive new face cream.

Bowing to the Elderly

by Diane Patenaude Ames

These patients need to be in a place where people know enough to bow back.

The elderly women on the couch look like they probably couldn't carry on a coherent conversation in any language anymore, yet decades of habit cause them to smile and bow when I walk into the room. They're *kibei nisei,* I decide. That means they were born in this country of Japanese immigrant parents, were brought up in Japan, and later returned to this country for some reason or other. Such people not infrequently suffer from lifelong culture shock and problems with English.

"Konnichi wa! (Hello!)" I say, grateful that I know that much Japanese, that I know how to bow back. As I tour the house, the patients bow and bow—from their chairs, from their beds, and in one embarrassing case, from the potty. *"Shitsurei!* (Excuse me!)" I exclaim as I bow back, trying to think of how to say, "It was pretty dumb of me not to knock," in Japanese. *"Daijobu!* (That's okay!)" says the smiling nurse, and being Japanese, she also bows. I gradually realize that these patients need something more than Japanese-speaking caretakers. They really need to be in a place where people know enough to bow back.

Nobody I know ever exactly *decided* to put his or her mother into some sort of care facility. At some point life made that decision for them. Life has a way of making decisions for us, including seemingly unthinkable ones. As Shin Buddhism keeps reminding us, we are more jerked around by the circumstances in which we find ourselves than we care to admit. According to the *Tannisho* (a record of Shinran's sayings), Shinran went so far as to say that it was solely because of his circumstances that his disciple Yuienbo had never killed anybody, whereas "it could happen that a person who does not want to hurt anybody could end up killing a hundred or a thousand people." While such extreme outcomes do not, fortunately, happen to most of us, circumstances do force our hands every day. And for sickness and old age to bring about a loved one's mental death long before that person's physical death is a very grim circumstance indeed.

One day you realize that your mother simply cannot be left alone anymore because she wanders away from home and gets lost like a toddler. And your wife points out that she can't quit her job to take care of her, at least not if you're going to keep your daughter in college. Besides, the cardiologist says your wife has got to get her blood pressure down. But every time she tries to clean your mother's room, your mother becomes hysterical and your wife's blood pressure soars. So there you are.

Is all this any different if your mother is a kibei nisei? In the misery you feel, no. But it makes a difference logistically. Alzheimer's disease may well have caused her to forget any English she ever knew, and few if any local nursing homes have any personnel who speak Japanese. Even in a relatively good facility, you may walk in to find that she has been asking for water for you don't know how long and nobody has understood. You may find that she is losing weight because she wants rice, not mashed potatoes. Even if you are able to get Japanese-language videos for her, her roommate may object to listening to movies in a foreign language.

Fortunately, there is the Channing Way House in Berkeley. And every now and then, there is actually a vacancy.

The facility is owned and in many ways aided (but not operated) by Japanese American Services of the East Bay (JASEB). Legally it is sort of like a co-op run by the families of the residents. That means that the families of current residents decide whether a proposed new resident will fit in. If they do, he or she moves into an admittedly crowded little residence in a visibly aging building, and does not mind because there are people there who speak Japanese and know enough to bow to a person when they say hello.

The cheerful (albeit cramped) living room has a large couch on which several of the seven residents can sit and watch a succession of Japanese movies. There are large rice cookers in the kitchen, and there is generally a pot of green tea brewing there. A volunteer comes around on Wednesdays to sing old Japanese songs with the residents, and every now and then a group of nisei (second-generation) ladies from some East Bay Buddhist temple come visiting with baskets of Japanese food. At intervals the dharma school children from the Berkeley Buddhist temple across the street show up to sing songs and present the residents with handmade gifts; the dharma school teachers think that Buddhist children should learn to do compassionate things.

Residents seem more cheerful than most nursing-home residents. Indeed, being in culturally familiar surroundings and being able to communicate with those around them may even slow the progression of their disease. One can see why JASEB has received several inquiries from other ethnic organizations about

how to start similar facilities for elders in need of culturally sensitive care.

Families are responsible for hiring caretakers and seeing that supplies are purchased. However, this is not as daunting as it sounds because they cooperate. They often make time-sharing arrangements with Japanese-speaking caretakers, though heaven knows such caretakers are getting hard to find. (I met a cheerful Japanese nurse, and the walls were all adorned with caregiving schedules in Japanese.) Families can take turns doing such things as purchasing food. In many cases, the families already knew each other, or else they both knew somebody who knew Uncle Tets, or else they all belonged to the same Buddhist temple; the local Japanese American community is very close-knit indeed.

The Japanese American community has always responded to its many trials by organizing. By the 1970s a new problem was becoming evident: the prewar *issei* (first generation immigrants) had grown old. Since racist immigration policies had limited the immigration of Japanese women, many issei were now aging bachelors living thousands of miles from their natal families. Those who did not have adult children to help them deal with the Social Security and Medicare bureaucracy faced a daunting language problem, and most were afraid of the government anyway because of wartime internment. Many had lost their farms or businesses during the internment years, exacerbating the economic problems that the elderly often have in any case. Besides, now that age and infirmity had forced most into retirement, linguistic and cultural barriers often left them in a state of painful social isolation relieved only by Sunday excursions to their church or Buddhist temple. This was most distressing to the community, as both Japanese and Japanese Americans generally believe strongly that the aged deserve respect and proper care.

In 1971, a group of about 50 *sansei* (third-generation) activists in the East Bay organized what would eventually become Japanese American Services of the East Bay to deal with this situation. Soon just about every Japanese American community organization in the East Bay, including five Shin Buddhist temples (and some predominantly Japanese-American Christian churches as well), were on JASEB's board of directors. Today, besides having its complicated relationship to the Channing Way House, JASEB operates a similar facility in Hayward called the JASEB Home–Hayward; the Eden Issei Terrace, a housing project in Hayward for Japanese American senior citizens living independently; the JASEB Senior Center and Lunch Program in Berkeley, which offers a variety of classes, field trips, discussions of Japanese culture, Japanese lunches four times a week, and deliveries of Japanese meals to homebound seniors; and various social services for elderly Japanese Americans in need of help with language barriers, referrals to social services, caregiver referrals, caregiver support, and advice generally.

Buddhist temples help out with donations, volunteers, and assistance with fundraising activities. I can testify that no one who belongs to any Shin temple in the East Bay escapes being asked to attend the annual JASEB benefit crab feed or to pass out bingo cards at the JASEB bingo games held at the South Alameda Buddhist Church. (Yes, I used to hand out bingo cards, but had to quit because I couldn't tolerate the secondary smoke, then a major hazard of bingo games. The smoking policy may have changed; I do not know.)

Back at the Channing Way House, the residents in the living room are all agog over the nurse's two-year-old grandson. Imitating the residents, the tot bows. Some of the old ladies seem to be drinking tea and eating rice crackers. A volunteer from some Buddhist temple has just shown up to take the ambulatory on a very brief walk. And as I leave, everyone, of course, bows and bows. ❖

Diane Patenaude Ames has belonged to the Buddhist Churches of America since 1978.

For more information about JASEB, contact:
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Entering Tibet

by Joanna Macy

[Following is an excerpt from Joanna Macy's newly published autobiography, Widening Circles *(New Society, $17.95), reprinted by permission. We have purposely chosen a section of the book that offers a narrative quite different from most of Joanna's writing—a rip-roaring adventure story! And you'll have to buy the book to find out what happens next...*

In the chapter called "Tibet," Joanna explains that her friend and dharma teacher Choegyal Rinpoche, who lives in Tashi Jong, a Tibetan exile community in India, has been allowed to return for the summer to Kham, his native region of Tibet. She recalls the time he invites Joanna, her husband, Fran, and their daughter, Peggy, to visit him there.]

No sooner did we lie down... than the heavy sacks of barley landed on top of us, weighing us down in airless darkness.

I could think of nothing I desired more than to set my feet on the homeland of my friends and teachers and to behold the scenes I'd come to love through the paintings of my dharma brother Choegyal Rinpoche. Before I died I wanted to walk with him in the high wild places from which the teachings of wisdom came that had blessed my life. I could hardly believe it might be possible. A letter from Choegyal in early 1987: "I will be in Kham for the summer months. Meet me there."

"We'll be there in August," I wrote back from the house in Berkeley we were just moving into. I was 58 years old then, and our daughter would be turning 26 on the trip.

Taking over the dining room, Peggy and I assembled oxygen tablets, water filters, rolls of film, vitamins, Band-Aids, belly medicines, trail mix, high altitude lip gels, sunglasses, and gifts for our Tibetan hosts. We each bought lightweight mountain boots—in beige and navy for Peg and Fran, aqua for me.

The route we planned to take approached Tibet from the east through Sechuan. We secured our Chinese visas, but papers allowing us to enter the Autonomous Region of Tibet were unavailable in San Francisco. The agent assured us that we could obtain these Alien Travel Permits after we landed in Beijing. We banked on this hope as the three of us checked our bulging backpacks and sleeping bags and settled into our seats on the Air China plane. Fortunately, we had no idea then just how hard it would be to get into Tibet.

At each successive stop—Beijing, Chengdu, then the towns farther west, where we pressed on for days by bus and hired car—we beseeched every Chinese authority we could find to issue the permits for travel in Tibet. Our last hope was Derge, the town closest to the Yangtse River, which marked the border itself. But there, the police not only refused us the permits, but ordered us to leave the entire area within two days. A high lama, well known in the West, was overnighting in Derge on his way out of Tibet. He was Akong Rinpoche, who had established the Samye teaching center in Scotland with Chogyam Trungpa. When we called on him in his lodgings, he received us graciously and wanted to help; he had good relations with Chinese border officials. Two of them actually dropped by for tea while we were there, coming straight from their day's duties at the Yangtse checkpoint. But when the rinpoche, in courteous, fluent Chinese, sounded them out on our behalf, their answer was curt and final. Someone else, however, was in the room, quietly listening. He was Tenzin, a young Tibetan from Derge about to return to his studies in Europe. He overheard me say at one point, "I will do anything to get in. Anything."

Tenzin repeated those words when he tracked us down that night. "If that is so," he said, "you must love your lama very much. I have a plan to propose, if you are willing to try it."

Early the next morning, we followed Tenzin to the town's large open marketplace. There we were delivered into the hands of a local Tibetan who was hitching a long, narrow wagon to his tractor. That's what Fran, Peg, and I came to call him among ourselves—"Tractor." It was best not to know his real name; and having no common language, we communicated only by gestures anyway. His face was rough and impassive, business-like. Soon some eight other locals, including a couple of monks, climbed onto the wagon, pulled us aboard to sit beside them on the narrow side planks, and off we slowly rumbled, westward out of Derge.

The morning was beautiful: fields of barley stubble shone golden under a spanking blue sky. Our wagonmates' smiles and chatter made it seem as if we were all heading off on a picnic. Even Peggy relaxed now; the night before, as we sorted our gear, it was she who had hesitated the longest, enumerating the risks we were running—like never being seen again.

At the farm vehicle's speed and with frequent stops, it took three hours to cover the 30 kilometers to the Yangtse. By the time we pulled up on a ridge to look down at the glinting river, all but one of our traveling companions had jumped off to proceed on foot across the fields, turning to wave to us. In their place were large,

heavy bags of barley, which had been heaved aboard at recent stops. The view was magnificent. Peering down from the shoulder of the road, we could see the far end of the bridge, sentry boxes, figures moving. Tractor yanked us back and sprang into action: swiftly he gestured us onto the wagon's narrow floor, hushing us into silence. No sooner did we lie down—we could only manage it on our sides, spoon-fashion, with Fran curled around my back and me around Peggy's—than the heavy sacks of barley landed on top of us, weighing us down in airless darkness. I had only time to cup my hand above Peggy's face, to try to make room for her to breathe; and Fran did the same for me, but it didn't seem to help much. I learned later that Tractor's companion was sitting on us, atop the bags.

The struggle to breathe—the fear of suffocation—was the hardest thing. As we jolted down the road headfirst, my chest heaved and hammered for air. I prayed to my lungs: be still. I prayed to pass out before exploding in panic. I prayed that Peggy not be smothered. We stopped, started, stopped again. The shrill shouts in Chinese sounded very close, within arm's reach, if I *could* reach. Surely the border guards could hear the thunder of my laboring lungs. Over and over in my mind I repeated the Green Tara mantra for protection, *Om Tare Tutt' Tare Ture Svaha*—as Peggy was doing too, she told me later.

At last the wagon moved again, rumbled forward, made a turn and then another, and now sheer gratitude eased the breathing. "Tibet?" I said thankfully when at last we were uncovered. No, not Tibet. We were back in Sechuan. In pantomime Tractor explained what had happened: the rifles aimed at his head; the sacks at the end of the wagon pulled away; then—Tractor pointed at our feet—the three pairs of American-made mountain boots, in beige and navy and aqua, that had given us away. Why, once detected, had we not been hauled out and arrested on the spot, thrown in some local jail? For that providence we could probably thank the two border officials who took tea with Akong Rinpoche and knew that three American friends of his were attempting to cross the border.

After such a close call, teetering on the likelihood of imprisonment or worse, Tractor could well have abandoned us right there on the road. Instead, he doggedly persisted in trying to get us across the Yangtse. Now he drove southward on the high road above the river's eastern bank, stopping once to buy tins of processed meat that he opened for us, insisting, quite firmly, that we eat it. We shared with him our granola. Fifteen kilometers downriver from the bridge he turned down a dirt track, switched off the motor, walked us with our gear to a glade where a rowboat was hidden. As daylight began to dim, he ferried us across.

The skiff was shallow, the current strong and swift. It took two hair-raising trips to get our bodies and packs to the farther shore—all the while in full view of the high Sechuan road we had just been driving. On the rocks below a steep wooded bank, we turned to say good-bye to Tractor. He was coatless now and shivering. He knew, as we did, that we had to move fast if we were to find our way north to where the road came off the bridge, and then head on inland before dawn. He pointed to the river, the sky. Yes, we understood, keep the river on our right, follow the stars. I touched his arm, trying uselessly to thank him, trying to memorize the face of this man, whose name we didn't even know. I wanted to be able to recognize that face someday, on a street, in a crowd.

We could hear the river roaring far below. "Back, let's go back!" I cried. "In daylight we'll find a better route."

Atop the embankment, a thin path through the trees led us northward. Before dark we came upon the campfire of a Khampa man whose long hair was tied up with red tassels. With him were his son and two horses. Drawing numbers in the dirt, we agreed on a price and set off together, putting our packs on his mounts and our bodies too, trading off to ride, two at a time. Up ahead to the east, beyond the river, we beheld the snow peaks of the High Corrugations—glowing in such sweet majesty that I began to sing. Behind me on foot, Fran joined in—which always helps me stay on key. Soon the stars poured out in brilliance because it was, providentially, the dark of the moon.

For a good hour, the path cut along the rock face of cliffs we could not see, though we could hear the river roaring far below. "Back, let's go back!" I cried. "In daylight we'll find a better route." But there was no way to turn around. Only the ponies were skittish; the Khampa father and son, sure-footed as cats, hardly slowed their pace. The tiny ledge sloped outwards, loose with pebbles and shale, no wider than the man who led his pony with me astride it, shining my flashlight over his shoulder to help him see the way. Each time the pony slipped and scrambled, I breathed a prayer; I repeatedly prepared to die. Although I blamed myself for the extreme danger I had brought us into, the terror was different than that under the suffocating barley sacks. This was huge, like the vast bowl of stars; and my prayers for not falling were also prayers of thanks for having lived.

By midnight we reached the spot where the road came off the bridge near the sentry points. Speaking

in whispers, we shouldered our packs and headed into Kham. The way was black—for miles it seemed to be a gorge, lying directly below a river of stars. Weak with gratitude that we had made it this far, I meandered a bit on the incline of the road. Now Peggy moved into the lead, striding out steadily, as if she had actually slept in the last 48 hours. As a teenager, she had not shown as much physical endurance as her brothers, but now, with two tired parents in tow—parents no longer young, trudging uphill in the pitch dark—she came into her own. Her will summoned mine. I let her energy carry me forward. Her jokes shook the aching from my limbs. Yes, of course we would reach the village we had seen on the map; together we would make it.

On a broad, gently sloping expanse of turf, scores of white tents, bright in the sun's last rays, looked as jaunty as medieval pavilions.

But what to do should a jeep or truck come down the road? Word was surely out that three Westerners were trying to enter Tibet illegally. Where could we hide, with a slope to our right and a river to our left and bushes too low to scramble under? This concerned me greatly. I came up with a plan. We would pull out one of our olive-colored ponchos and squat under it; we would look, in the night, like a large rock. I persuaded Fran and Peggy to agree to this procedure, and soon, sure enough, the hillside up ahead danced in the beams of an approaching truck. Hastily we scurried to the side, pulled out a poncho, cowered under it. With a mounting roar the truck drew nearer and nearer, came abreast of us, continued on. But why were its headlights red? As we stood up with immense relief, we shone a flashlight on our camouflage. We had grabbed Peggy's red poncho; we had been a bright red rock. We could hardly walk for laughing, but we made it to Jomdu by sunrise.

There our exhilaration petered out. We were marooned for day after desperate day—three, to be exact, but time passes slowly when you're swatting fleas at night and wading by day through mud, oil, and excrement to try to finagle a way out. Without the Chinese dictionary I stupidly had left in Derge, it took us a while to learn that trucks were forbidden to take hitchhikers, especially round-eyed ones. Now my spirits and Peggy's failed. The vision of meeting Choegyal Rinpoche in his beautiful Tibetan uplands—a hope that had been so compelling till now—drowned in this filth and noise and nauseating food. The two of us talked of finding a way back, since we couldn't go forward. Fran was unswayed by our complaints and arguments, and in the face of all futility, he kept venturing out, talking with truckers and villagers as best he could. Eventually, he returned with a Tibetan whom he had managed to persuade to drive us in his open truck some thirty miles west to the next town. Everyone was nervous about Chinese soldiers, and we were told to lie down in the back of the truck whenever vehicles approached us. From that town, the next day, we followed a stream and found a spot to wash our mud-caked clothes. We spread them on the grassy bank to dry, lounged against rocks in the sun, and dipped into our remaining trail mix.

That was when we were found. A handsome, well-dressed Tibetan, hard to recognize from the young monk we had known in Tashi Jong, strode up and greeted us without a trace of surprise: "I am Kunga. Choegyal Tulku told me to find you here; I will bring you to him. Would you like to come now? Everything is ready."

Within a matter of minutes, we were ensconced in his jeep with thermoses of hot milk tea, riding off on fleece-covered seats into a mountain land so green it dazzled. To my eyes now everything dazzled—the rooftop racks of golden barley straw, the white sheep and black yaks on emerald inclines, the turquoise pendant on Kunga's silk shirt. He brought us by sunset to a large encampment above the tree line.

On a broad, gently sloping expanse of turf, scores of white tents, bright in the sun's last rays, looked as jaunty as medieval pavilions. Among them moved figures in Khampa dress—on the men fedoras and long-sleeved coats tied at the waist, and on the women and in their hair hunks of amber and turquoise that looked as big as your fist. One particular tent, on the uphill side, was festooned with a yellow roof. There we were received at last on his native soil by Choegyal Rinpoche. He stood quite still in the doorway of his tent and smiled as we approached.

Peg and Fran and I mused about the change we sensed in Choegyal, as we blew out our candles and nestled down in our own capacious tent that night. The tulku's features looked stronger here, less vulnerable. The new authority in his bearing was surely in response to the avid devotion of his people—and they *were* his people, having awaited him for so long.

One night Choegyal brought a watercolor sketch—a new one, clearly, because it showed uniformed figures pointing rifles at a wagon heaped with bags, from which a number of feet protruded. Below Choegyal had written the caption: "O, very bad! Six foreigner boots!" ❖

Joanna Macy, author, teacher, and trainer in socially engaged Buddhism, is one of the founders of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, and is on the Advisory Board.

Sitting in the Dragon's Lair

An Interfaith Retreat at Los Alamos National Laboratory

by Trena Cleland and Diana Winston

A large blue tarp lies on the grounds of Los Alamos National Laboratory. On it sit several rows of silent, unmoving figures, all wearing wide-brimmed sun hats and facing fire-scarred mountains. Three chimes of a meditation bell ring in counterpoint with the beep-beep-beep of a Caterpillar tractor up the street that is breaking ground for the world's largest computer.

Forty minutes pass and no one moves. The bell sounds again. The people stand up, bow to their cushions, and slowly walk together in a silent line around the blue tarp. Then they sit back down.

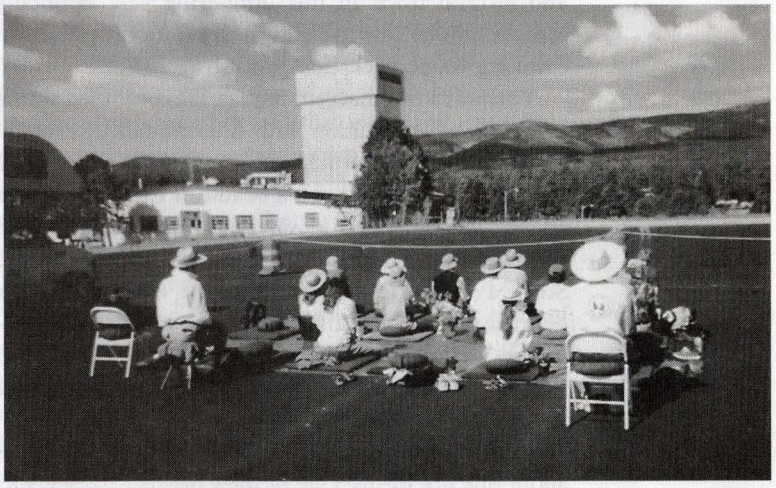
The two of us were among those sun-hatted meditators who traveled to New Mexico in September for a five-day interfaith witness and meditation retreat at the lab, the cornerstone of the nuclear weapons industry in the U.S. Most of us had participated in anti-nuclear marches and demonstrated at weapons facilities, but none of us had ever brought our spiritual practice directly "into the lair of the dragon." The brochure prepared by the retreat's organizers, the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG), promised an opportunity to do just that:

> We will sit and pray in solidarity with each other, with laboratory workers caught in a destructive system, with the surrounding communities and tribes, with generations born and yet to be born. In an age of cynicism and despair, caught between irresponsible power and the futile politics of blame, we will demonstrate another way. Each person's powerful presence—dignified, profoundly introspective, and deep—will have consequences that cannot be fully foreseen, affecting visible and invisible worlds.

The retreat was planned by former BPF board member Greg Mello and his colleague Vilma Ruiz, who run the LASG. BPF also helped organize the retreat. It was originally planned for May but had to be rescheduled to September due to the fires that ravaged the Los Alamos area.

Loose pre-planning made the event frustrating at times but also magically spontaneous. The low attendance (about 20 core participants) was somewhat disappointing, but it also meant that the retreat had a beautiful, low-key, community feel, and participants grew quite close. Many of us were from California, almost all BPF members, while other Buddhists came from sanghas in New Mexico. We came from different traditions: Vipassana, Soka Gakkai, and a couple of flavors of Zen. There were a number of progressive Christians present, representing the Sisters of Loretto, the Nevada Desert Experience (which organizes witnesses at the Nevada nuclear test site), and the Center for Contemplation and Action in Albuquerque.

Our typical day consisted of an early-morning sitting and breakfast at our campground at Bandelier National Monument, after which we shuttled to our "zendo" at the lab for more sitting and walking meditation. We took a break for lunch and resumed sitting for two or three hours in the afternoon. At the end of the day, some of us took showers at the local public pool. Eventually, we all gathered back at the campground for a soup supper—provided daily by the supportive members of the Mountain Cloud Zen Center in Santa Fe—and an informal evening program.



The Parking Lot Zendo at Los Alamos

Our hearts sank when we first saw the area assigned to us by lab officials for our meditation retreat: a newly blacktopped parking lot next to a uranium handling building—blazing hot, unshaded, and completely unnatural. Back in May, when our retreat was supposed to happen, the place was still a grassy knoll. By the time September rolled around, it had been paved over and turned into a parking lot. (There's a song in there somewhere.)

The lot was located at the margin of the 43-acre lab

property, separated from the road by lines of parked cars and out of sight of most of the 12,000 workers. The proportions of the place began to sink in. We were a tiny group with an enormous project: to take on the nuclear weapons industry. Our "zendo" consisted of a giant blue tarp topped with many brown zabutons and zafus, surrounded by ominous "No Trespassing: Nuclear Facility" signs and safety cones. Nearby, a pleasant lab guard kept tabs on us—while enjoying the air conditioning generated by his idling vehicle. This had to have been the world's most uneventful security gig.

Over time, we came to feel empathy for this tortured patch of property that reflected the disrespect for nature demonstrated by the lab's existence. Our zendo was surrounded by buildings devoted to nuclear and biological weapons research and plutonium storage. Below the oily blacktop was the living, beating pulse of the earth. Sitting on it strengthened our witness more than sitting on a comfortable tree-shaded lawn might have.

Our little train had a dignified air, but a couple of us couldn't help wondering whether we looked like nuts to the lab employees.

The lab refused to provide toilet facilities and requested that we bring only one vehicle per day. So Greg and Vilma rented an RV—shuttle and toilet in one! The RV served us in another way by casting much-needed shade when carefully positioned next to our meditation tarp.

We shuttled back and forth from our campground and around town in this lumbering van, bouncing around among piles of zafus and zabutons, gallons of drinking water, backpacks, and straw hats.

This was a multifaceted retreat. We combined sitting and walking meditation with dharma talks, powerful chanting led by a participant who practices with Soka Gakkai International, and a beautiful Christian prayer service that included a water healing ceremony and readings from Dorothy Day's autobiography. Maylie Scott, a Zen priest and BPF board member, gave a dharma talk that had us inquire into "who" was participating in this vigil. Longtime BPF associate Donald Rothberg gave a talk on "Ten Reasons Why It's Difficult to Confront Structural Violence" (see page 34).

Our spiritual diversity raised inevitable questions about practice forms. One of the Christian participants was confused by the practice of bowing to zafus. Some of the Buddhists, at home with silence, had to accept that dialogue and social bonding are an important part of Christian peacemaking. So we improvised: one morning we did Christian prayer; another, *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation; another, zazen. At one point, artist Kaz Tanahashi led us in using paints and brushes to illustrate and describe our visions of the future. One night we held a Native American–style council to talk—with tears, laughter, and prayers—about our experience.

In our RV, nicknamed the "Protestmobile," Greg took us sightseeing around the Lab. He showed us where plutonium was stored, where the original bombs had been tested before they exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where pueblos had been destroyed to set up the lab, and where genetic research was being done. We drove through neighborhoods flattened by the recent fire, through charred remains of ranch houses that echoed a post-atomic Hiroshima.

A high (low?) point was a trip to the Bradbury Science Museum. There, we watched a videotape about the history of Los Alamos, learned about the beneficial effects of radiation, and "played" with interactive exhibits. ("Press here and watch a bomb go off!") Diana took the Plutonium Quiz and scored 60 percent correct. ("Is it worse to touch, swallow, or inhale plutonium?")

Each day at lunch time, we walked slowly in single file to the lab's main cafeteria, half a mile from our parking lot. Our little train had a dignified air, but a couple of us couldn't help wondering whether we looked like nuts to the lab employees. It was painful to admit they might dismiss entirely our mindful pilgrimage.

Los Alamos National Lab is technically a "campus" of the University of California, and it does have a college feel. The employees like to think of themselves as academics, computer nerds, and pure scientists; although 80 percent of the work of the lab involves the design and manufacture of nuclear weapons, few employees perceive themselves to be "bomb-makers."

Nowhere was this collegelike ambiance more in evidence than in the company cafeteria. Since there is no dress code at LANL, shorts and tee-shirts prevailed. Some of the men had long hair and pierced ears. One had a copy of *Mother Jones* on his tray. There were about equal numbers of women and men. Although most employees were white, there were quite a few Asian Americans and Latinos (the latter seemed to be blue-collar workers), and a handful of African Americans. Most of the people were friendly and approachable.

On the one hand, we found this comforting; it broke down distinctions in our minds between "us" and "them." On the other hand, the apparent normalcy was chilling. There was a surreal sense of business-as-usual, while all around were the tools and materials of poison, fire, and death.

Our group pondered the level of delusion needed to maintain this facade of normalcy. How did people live with the disconnection between their values and their work?

One day at lunch, two of us approached a woman in her forties, Tracy, and asked if we could join her. She was willing, and immediately began to talk nonstop about her life, her dog, her friends, her book club, the restau-

rants and shops we should visit, the aftermath of the Los Alamos fire—everything but her work as a computer programmer. Efforts to steer the conversation to her lab work and our retreat were mostly unsuccessful.

However, we did learn that Tracy and her coworkers feel defensive when anti-nuclear protesters come with their signs and chants; the employees feel slandered and unfairly attacked. She and her friends consider themselves liberal, and they believe strongly in the freedoms that U.S. citizens have (for example, to demonstrate). They see their work at the lab as a way to protect these freedoms. Tracy expressed the opinion that our group might fruitfully work on something "more important," like violence in children's TV.

Listening to a stranger like Tracy chat about her personal life—"bearing witness" to her experience and her perspective—is a different kind of activism than most of us are used to. Our challenge was to give her our time and attention, not a piece of our minds. But of course, thoughts interrupted. Is this activism? Wouldn't our time be better spent with that other employee sitting over there? Maybe he'd be willing to talk about the Real Issues. Maybe we should excuse ourselves and go over...No, come back to the present. Be here with this human being, this conversation, this moment.

After a few minutes, Tracy waved a couple of fellow computer scientists over to our table. One of the men asked questions about Buddhist history and politics. He said, "I used to be idealistic. I was an antiwar protester back in the '60s. But now I think we need to be strong. Look at evolution; it's all about survival of the fittest."

Actually, current understanding of evolution suggests that it is not strength but creativity, flexibility, cooperation, and response to feedback that characterize survivability. We talked about this and about new-paradigm thinking, systems theory, and "emotional intelligence." Something must have resonated, because at the end of the meal, he asked us to recommend a good introductory book about Buddhism. (Our suggestion was Jack Kornfield's *A Path with Heart.*)

Greg Mello, the eloquent and respected director of the LASG, gave our group several excellent mini-teach-ins on the lab's history and culture. He said, "The primary function of nuclear weapons is in the mind. They are meant to detonate in the imagination. As such, they are in use all the time.

"They can't be used in the real world, but the threat of them, the thought of them, the fear of them, is what makes them so effective. Perception is everything. The lab's essential work is the construction of ideology."

Greg has good relations with people on the lab staff. His opinion is that the lab is quite weak and vulnerable, and that our presence was—well—disarming. "The best-kept secret of Los Alamos Lab is the mediocrity of its thinking," he said. According to Greg, the lab's right hand doesn't know what its left is doing, and the whole organization wobbles on a foundation of deception and incompetence.

Did our presence make a difference to the lab workers? It's hard to say. They were informed of our presence through a posting on their intranet, the in-house computer bulletin board. Those we talked to seemed somewhat confused by us, as we didn't fit the classical mode of protester—we weren't shouting, we didn't have signs, and no police were detaining us. And because our meditation site was very isolated, far from most of the workers, we often wondered whether we were having any impact at all.

On the first morning, however, one employee of the lab, ID badge hanging from her neck, drove up in her car, walked quickly over to where we were meditating, put her hands together and bowed deeply to us several times, and then was gone. It was a poignant moment. Her courage led us to think that there were probably others on the workforce, too timid to show their support, for whom our presence was significant. The next day she came back with another gift of encouragement: a bunch of wildflowers in a jar.

Did our presence make a difference to us as individuals participating? Yes. We learned a lot not only about nuclear issues but about what it means to sit in solidarity for our beliefs, even when it seems absurd to do so. We saw that both we and the people who create nuclear weapons fear that we lack power, and we all seek ways to control the world we live in.

One group member said that when she was sitting on the tarmac in the beating-down sun, as silly as it felt, in that moment there was nothing else she wished she could be doing. Sitting there represented the perfect synthesis of her dharma practice and her wish for peace.

Did our presence make a difference to each other? Yes, unquestionably. This was a tremendous time of community-building. We worked together, strategized together, spent hours in logistical debates, created art together, and talked about the deeper issues together. Everyone agreed that we wanted to hold a similar retreat again next year, and many people volunteered to help arrange it.

Did our presence make a difference to socially engaged Buddhism? Definitely. To sit in meditation for our beliefs is an unusual form of Buddhist/interfaith protest. It has real potential as a way to demonstrate our concerns about a variety of issues, and as an offering to the whole (primarily secular) activist community. We were required to bring our spiritual principles into every moment of the retreat, even when we were scoffing at the absurd museum dioramas or eat-

(continued on page 37)

"The primary function of nuclear weapons is in the mind. They are meant to detonate in the imagination. As such, they are in use all the time."

The Parking Lot Sutra

Ten Reasons Why It's Hard to Respond to Structural Violence

by Donald Rothberg

[The following article is based on a talk given at the interfaith vigil and retreat at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico in September 2000.]

This entire world is disturbed with insanity, due to the exertions of those who are confused about themselves.
—Santideva, *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Life*

We sit together at this parking lot at Los Alamos, as nuclear weapons continue to be researched, developed, and used as the background for foreign policy, even though the Cold War has long been over. Such weapons are the manifestations of our society's institutions, policies, and broad cultural assumptions. Particularly through their use as tools of threat and coercion, as well as through radioactive contamination, they represent a kind of ongoing violence. Yet the use of these weapons and the many effects of such use, including the vast expenditures that take resources away from meeting basic social needs, are largely hidden, or, when they are recognized, are seen as normal and acceptable rather than as examples of violence.

The concept of structural violence, developed by Johan Galtung and others, can help us identify clearly the violence of nuclear weapons. Galtung, a pioneer in the field of Peace Studies, claims that the opposite of peace is not war but violence. Yet we typically have a rather narrow view of violence as the direct and intentional infliction of physical harm on human beings. Galtung and others have proposed a much wider understanding of violence as that which violates basic human needs and rights, for instance, the rights enumerated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Galtung distinguishes three forms of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. Direct violence is the deliberate attempt to cause injury to a person's physical and psychological integrity through brutal treatment, homicide, imprisonment, forced labor, etc. Structural violence has to do with the everyday and "normal" functioning of institutions and policies. For example, when African American women are twice as likely to die from breast cancer as European American women because of inferior medical care, this is a form of structural violence. Indeed the "normal" workings of our economic institutions cause many poor people to have significantly increased risks for cancer, heart disease, AIDS, depression, environmental threats, and premature death. Our use of automobiles, to give a third example, involves the "acceptable" deaths of 50,000 persons per year.

Cultural violence includes racism, sexism, and homophobia, and the devaluation of particular groups and cultures. It may justify and inform structural and direct violence.

Sulak Sivaraksa remarked, at the BPF Summer Institute of 1992, that responding to structural violence is at the core of socially engaged Buddhism. He pointed to how greed, hatred, and delusion—the roots of suffering—are manifest not just in individual attitudes and actions but also in our institutions, social structures, and policies.

Yet responding to structural violence as a spiritual activist is often difficult, for many reasons. I'd like to identify ten reasons, and particularly make connections with our experience here at Los Alamos.

1. Structural violence is usually hidden from us.

Structural violence is typically hidden, whether in the "normality" of automobile accidents or cigarette deaths, or the marginality of the suffering of the poor. Those who know of such violence usually have little voice; those with voice and access to public speech usually do not know.

The Los Alamos Laboratory, for example, was itself deliberately hidden from the view of the world during its founding period in World War II. The introductory film on Los Alamos that we saw at the Bradbury Science Museum (a museum used for new-employee orientation) is entitled, "The Town That Never Was." In fact, the original staff of the wartime Manhattan Project at Los Alamos had Santa Fe postal box addresses, and the city of Los Alamos was closed to the public until 1957. The violence of nuclear weapons has also been hidden, and even denied. The film strangely makes no mention at all of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but instead shows the end of the war in images of cheering crowds, kissing in the streets, and the newspaper headline, "Atom bombs drop." The museum exhibit shows nothing of the effects of the bombs on human beings, showing instead the bombs' power over army bases, factories, bridges, and mills!

The language at the lab is filled with euphemisms. The building where the first bombs were produced is called "Engineering Applications." Nuclear wastes are "repackaged." The bombs themselves have pleasant or humorous names like "Little Boy," "Fat Man," "Mike," "Romeo," "Priscilla," "Oak," and "Kingfish."

Many of the "side effects" of developing nuclear weapons also remain hidden. Richard Rhodes, who received the Pulitzer Prize for his history of atomic weapons, believes that the high cost of our weapons is closely linked to the decay of our infrastructure and neglect of pressing social needs. Soviet costs were similar and were a key factor in the economic decline leading to the USSR's collapse. Yet so often this collapse is presented as proof that the U.S. expenditures were worth it, and no mention is made of our own decline and its connection with our "defense" budget.

2. We have to cut through massive webs of ideology to see structural violence clearly.

Along with efforts to hide structural violence, there are also well-developed ideologies to support the view that a particular form of structural violence is normal (and hence not actually violence). We may now see through some of the ideologies that have supported institutionalized racism, sexism, and homophobia, for example, but this has taken much work over many years, just as it takes great effort in spiritual practice to cut through the conditioning around our sense of self and other.

Ideologies typically work in three basic ways to support relationships of domination, according to the work of John Thompson (see his *Studies in the Theory of Ideology).* The **legitimization** of existing states of affairs is accomplished through promoting supporting views and disparaging contesting views. **Dissimulation** prohibits conflicting views and conceals such prohibition through a kind of organized but unspoken logic; systemic problems, for example, may be recast as individual problems. **Reification** presents inherently changing states of affairs as eternal, the way things have to be.

During our retreat, we met such forms of ideology at Los Alamos, particularly in the public relations efforts of the museums and lab publications. We saw the selectivity of the Bradbury Museum in the exhibit on the "beneficial aspects of radiation." There was, of course, no exhibit on the harmful effects of radiation. We saw the film chronicling the building of the first atomic bomb, with its initial alternating stark images of good (religious images from New Mexico churches of candles, prayer, Mary, and native pueblos) and evil (Nazi machine guns and fighting). Such images suggest the unambiguous role of the bomb as a tool of good responding to evil. In a similar way, Steven Younger, the associate laboratory director for nuclear weapons at Los Alamos, appealed to the historical destiny of the United States as a selfless force for freedom in the world, in a 1999 talk before Los Alamos scientists:

BPF-ers in our campground. Left to right: Trena Cleland, Maylie Scott, Greg Mello, Vilma Ruiz, Donald Rothberg, and Diana Winston

> [Nuclear weapons] are intended to prevent other countries, other states, other national entities from doing something that really isn't in our national interest...Sometimes we forget how important the work that we do is. We have a critical role in history...We defend freedom on this planet...We try to help other countries. We're a very generous country. So a strong defense is absolutely critical, not just for the United States, but for this country to accept the role that has been thrust upon us by history. We didn't seek to have a major empire. We didn't seek to be the most powerful country on the planet. It sort of happened to us.

In speaking with the different scientists with whom we had lunch every day during the retreat, I invariably found near the beginning of our conversations a quick move to speculative thinking justifying nuclear weapons. One spoke of how it is only the strong who succeed in evolution; another, of the way that nuclear weapons helped to win the Cold War; another, of the importance of nuclear weapons in order to deter the aggression of others; and another, of how the work at Los Alamos preserves the rights of demonstrators like us! My sense was that the scientists wanted us to view them as individuals living with integrity in support of a noble mission, and near the beginning of every conversation they summoned their best and surely timeworn rationalizations.

3. Responding to structural violence can be lonely work; one can feel marginal, crazy, and hopeless.

We sit here on hot asphalt next to our Cruise America RV, in a remote parking lot, mostly in silence, while more than 10,000 Los Alamos employees go about their business. I imagine that all of us have sometimes felt on this retreat as if we are acting strangely, and wondered whether we will have any effect at all on the nuclear weapons industry. Just as the everyday working of institutions and policies normalizes structural violence, so it renders abnormal those who contest such violence. We are susceptible both to the judgments of others and to our own internalization of these judgments.

4. We're all implicated in structural violence.

Although we may sometimes feel radically apart from the mainstream, it's also true that in many ways we are deeply embedded in the very institutions, ideologies, and policies that we question. We cannot so easily claim moral superiority. We benefit from living in a wealthy country, whose wealth depends in part on dominating and threatening others. Collectively we have permitted the continued existence of nuclear weapons.

5. We mirror internally the outer forms of structural violence.

Like the cold warriors and advocates of continued maintenance of nuclear stockpiles, we, too, have fear and ignorance, develop our own types of "armaments," seek in various ways to control others (and let ourselves be controlled) through threats and anger, and provide sometimes elaborate rationalizations in our own defense. Last night at our council circle, Diana Winston spoke of observing her own fear and desire for control surfacing in the very context of our retreat here.

Yet it is the recognition of how we share some of the underlying fears and desire that actually provides a basis for deeper communication with the architects of structural violence. In our conversations with the Los Alamos scientists, I found myself watching (but generally not acting on) my own tendencies to think myself "right" and engage in the kind of polarized polemics with which the scientists were no doubt very familiar, from their encounters with anti-nuclear activists. Such awareness helps us go beneath ideological rhetoric.

6. It's hard work. To respond to structural violence is to be involved for the "long haul."

Addressing structural violence is like the work of traditional spiritual practice; we are attempting to respond to some of the deepest roots of suffering. To work on issues of racism or sexism or the existence of nuclear weapons is to take on a kind of lifetime koan, just as we do when we take the bodhisattva vow. There are not always quick results or sometimes even any apparent results. Furthermore, we have to make a living—job listings for those responding to structural violence are few. There are surely more jobs and grants to perpetuate structural violence! Hence, we often face difficult choices and need to make real sacrifices. Yet this is our practice. Rabbi Tarfon, a teacher in Israel in the second century C.E., said, "It is not upon you to finish the work. Neither are you free to desist from it."

7. We have to do our homework.

There can be a kind of naiveté in spiritually based activism, in which there are good intentions but not so much groundedness. We can "come from the heart" and still be quite naive. Somehow we have to combine competent analyses and effective strategies with spiritual insight. We have to be able, like the shaman, to act in different worlds. Here at Los Alamos, it's very clear that if we don't do our background homework, we won't be taken seriously by the scientists with whom we have lunch every day.

8. We tend to forget that the institutions supporting structure violence can collapse quickly when no one really believes in them.

We get taken in by the seeming solidity of institutions. We forget about impermanence in general, and and also we forget how rapidly specific systems can change. Remembering the collapse of Soviet power in the USSR and Eastern Europe or the collapse of apartheid in South Africa helps us to keep a "long view."

As for nuclear weapons, we can remember the poll (*www.gracelinks.org/nuke/poll.html#text*) in which 84

Facts about Los Alamos

• The U.S. has spent almost $6 trillion on nuclear weapons since 1940. Today, we spend more to design, build, and test nuclear weapons than we did during the Cold War. The budget for the Los Alamos Lab alone exceeds the entire budget of the World Health Organization.

• The U.S. continues to design and deploy new kinds of nuclear weapons, such as the versatile B61-11 nuclear earth-penetrator bomb and new high-yield designs for our submarine fleet. Work on entirely new weapons is also underway.

• The U.S. maintains an arsenal of about 10,000 nuclear weapons, even though Russian negotiators recently asked if we would agree to strategic arsenals in the range of 1,000 weapons. We refused.

• Los Alamos has 24 nuclear and toxic waste landfills, containing at least 18 million cubic feet of waste. About 54,000 drums' worth is produced and buried at Los Alamos each year, mostly from nuclear weapons work.

From a brochure produced by Greg Mello and Vilma Ruiz, Los Alamos Study Group, www.lasg.org

percent of the U.S. population agreed that they would be safer if no country had nuclear weapons (1997). We can remember the potential of the present moment: the end of the Cold War and thus of most of the earlier rationales for nuclear weapons, and the UN support for a decade of nonviolence in this first decade of the new millennium. One scientist who has worked at Los Alamos since 1966 told me that most who work there would like to see nuclear weapons abolished—if they could feel safe without them.

9. In this culture, Buddhist teachings often focus on the more personal rather than the structural sources of suffering.

Often our concerns about structural violence are not supported by our spiritual communities. Even though Buddhists claim to be addressing suffering (or *dukkha*), there is typically an emphasis on *my* suffering rather than suffering as such. We need to make clearer the connections between structural violence and personal suffering. We also need to question the extent to which individualistic spiritual practice reinforces a sense of separate self. We can learn in this regard from our Christian and Jewish friends, especially from the prophetic tradition of concern for the "other" that passes from Isaiah through Jesus down to contemporaries like Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Luther King Jr., and liberation theologians.

10. We tend to forget that love, wisdom, and nonduality are deeper than violence and denial.

Being in the presence of entrenched structural violence certainly "tests" us. We may often think ourselves weak in comparison with the systems that we contest. We may feel isolated and forget the deeper love and wisdom that is at the heart of our beings.

This suggests the vital importance of both community and spiritual practice. We need to find refuge within the "beloved community." And we need to return to our own lived experiences of love and wisdom. Such continual access to spiritual nourishment is what sustains us for the long haul. In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. said:

> Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism...This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all human beings...When I speak of love...I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. ❖

Donald Rothberg is on the faculty at Saybrook Graduate School, where he has developed a program in Socially Engaged Spirituality. He has written and taught widely on socially engaged Buddhism, and is the co-editor (with Sean Kelly) of Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers. *He has been a mentor for BPF's BASE program since its inception in 1995.*

Dragon's Lair, continued from page 33

ing cardboard-like cafeteria pizza. In this moment, are my actions contributing to peace and nonviolence? Am I patient? How is my equanimity? Am I mindful? Can I be awake in this moment? The sitting supported our inquiry.

Did our presence make a difference to the future of the planet? Though we felt like tiny pebbles in a limitless ocean, our trust in the dharma is vast. Here we surrender to the mystery of the dharma and say, who knows? We must not forget that the power of love is stronger than the power of destruction. The earth benefited from our presence. This much we know.

P.S. It's worse to inhale plutonium. ❖

[Special thanks to participant Mark Pringle of Arcata, California, for his contributions.]

Trena Cleland, a BPF board member, was part of a group that walked across the U.S. in 1981 to promote nuclear disarmament.

Diana Winston, associate director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, is a regular contributor to Turning Wheel *and other Buddhist publications.*

Some Resources on Structural Violence and Atomic Weapons

On structural violence:

Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996)

Donald Rothberg (ed.), *Responding to Violence* (special issue of the journal *ReVision*, Fall 1997)

On atomic weapons:

Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (1995)

Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, *New Nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Nuclear Disarmament* (2000)

Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (1995)

Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons* (1998)

Steve Schwartz, *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940* (1998)

Web sites:

Los Alamos Study Group: *www.lasg.org*

Alliance for Nuclear Accountability: *www.ananuclear.org*

Natural Resources Defense Council: *www.nrdc.org*

The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translation, 1952–1998

by Gary Snyder

Counterpoint, 1999, 608 pages, $35, hardcover

Reviewed by Alan Senauke

How Poetry Comes to Me

It comes blundering over the
Boulders at night, it stays
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire
I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light

—Gary Snyder

Literature works its spell in the deep forest of one's life, sometimes outside the range of the campfire, or sometimes in the full glare of sunlight. Such has been the effect of Gary Snyder's words on my own life. I know this is true for many others. And I want to be clear: it is the words that matter most—"Lay down these words/Before your mind like rocks..." (from "Riprap," 1955)—not Snyder's various personae: mountain man, doyen of '60s counter-culture, iconic Zen trickster as depicted in Kerouac's *Dharma Bums.* Actually, Snyder was in Japan through most of the 1960s. There is a descriptive truth, I suppose, in these personae, but the more compelling truths are to be found in his poems, essays, and texts. Now these texts have been collected in a wonderfully thick volume, *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translation, 1952–1998,* carefully edited by Snyder himself. It's about time.

The truth, or truths, of Snyder's work have had a resonance for me over 35 years of reading. In high school and college I found in Snyder a voice and diction that spoke to me in a personal way. From the beginning he has used his own kind of highly condensed Buddhist language that refers back to the old Chinese and Japanese Zen poets, and yet, in a deceptively colloquial way—much like William Carlos Williams—is completely American. For example, here is the poem "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout," from the early volume, *Riprap.*

Down valley a smoke haze
Three days heat, after five days rain
Pitch glows on the fir-cones
Across rocks and meadows
Swarms of new flies.
I cannot remember things I once read
A few friends, but they are in cities.
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
Looking down for miles
Through high still air.

I came to Berkeley and to formal Zen practice myself in the early 1980s, just about the time that Snyder was writing the elegant essays that comprise *The Practice of the Wild.* In those days I used to entertain fantasies about moving to the Pacific Northwest, maybe starting a small meditation group in my house. Reading this book, it was clear to me that my home was here in Berkeley, with my Zen community and musical friends. It was my job to recognize and value my roots and actual situation. A short poem in the *Reader* speaks to my condition in my adopted hometown, where Snyder himself has lived and studied.

For Berkeley

City of buds and flowers
Where are your fruits?
Where are your roots?

"Buddhism and the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture" appeared in *Earth Household* (1969) as "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution." This essay is source material for socially engaged Buddhists in the United States. The ideas are broad and challenging, even if I am not in full agreement. We all should read and argue about the nature of Buddhist social engagement until we find our own path. Interestingly, Snyder's conclusions have been reframed in the latest version. The original seemed to lean on the revolutionary possibilities of youth culture, which, alas, have not borne fruit to date. Here his vision is tempered by experience. "The traditional, vernacular, primitive, and village cultures may appear to be doomed. We must defend and support them as we would the diversity of ecosystems; they are all manifestations of Mind."

Mind is always Snyder's concern. He argues or demonstrates that the wild mind of rocks, trees, and animals resides within each of us. He uses words to point to something beyond words, and yet the pleasure of these words is deep and compelling. It is a wonderful conundrum, like the old myths, tales, and koans that likewise point us back to basics.

In reviewing this book, I have reflected on my own life as well as on Gary Snyder's words. But my life resembles so many other lives in our time, and Snyder has spoken to us so intimately—teaching, surprising, delighting us—that my approach here seems appropriate. I invite you to get a copy of *The Gary Snyder Reader* for yourself or a friend and let the words run wild in your own mind. ❖

Alan Senauke is Executive Director of BPF.

Sorrow Mountain: The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun

by Ani Pachen and Adelaide Donnelly

Kodansha International, 2000, 293 pages, $24, hardcover

Reviewed by Alan Senauke

One Sunday some months ago I came across an elderly, beaming Tibetan nun in the shoe department of a Berkeley outdoor clothing store. I bowed to her and offered *"Tashi Delek"* in greeting. She smiled brightly and returned the greeting. Her friend Daidie Donnelly came around a rack of hiking boots and we talked. Daidie introduced me to Ani Pachen, who was part of a group of Tibetans and Western supporters who were walking the length of California to publicize the case of Tibet. Ani Pachen was in need of good walking shoes, but the problem was that all the available shoes were made in China. Since Ani Pachen had spent 21 years in Chinese prisons, they were inspecting labels to find shoes made elsewhere. Finally Ani La shrugged her shoulders and settled on a comfortable pair, alas, of Chinese manufacture. Something about the light in her eyes changed my whole day.

Daidie, or more properly, Adelaide Donnelly, modestly said in parting that she had written a book with Ani Pachen, *Sorrow Mountain,* telling the story of Ani's life, from an idyllic childhood in rural Kham, through the cancerous process of Chinese occupation and prison, to her new life in the Tibetan exile community of Dharamsala, India, as a daughter of the Buddha. I went right out and bought the book and read it.

Ani Pachen was born Lemdha Pachen, the daughter of a Khampa chieftain, in 1933. She grew up in a warm circle of family, friends, monks, and nuns, riding and walking through pastures and forests, by rivers, in a country that was peaceful and proud. She dreamed of becoming a Buddhist nun and spurned an arranged marriage, an act of rebellion presaging a whole future of principle and resistance.

At the same moment, in 1950, Chinese troops were massing on the borders of Tibet, with large concentrations along the eastern side of Kham. The occupation came on steadily, with an erosion of human rights, the dismantling of indigenous forms of government, and the exploitation of labor and resources. In the eyes of this young woman, the disempowerment of her people was bewildering. She watched while those she loved most were reduced to weakness and death.

With her father's death in 1959, as the occupation was baring its teeth, Lemdha Pachen took up her hereditary responsibility as the leader of a Khampa guerilla resistance group. The tension between dharma vows and armed resistance pulled strongly at her, but even the monks around her felt that the survival of the dharma was at stake.

This is the richest part of *Sorrow Mountain* to me. When is armed resistance appropriate? What price is paid when one takes on the burden of killing? It's clear that the inner price was high for Ani Pachen, while at the same time she has some peace in knowing she acted to save sentient beings. In the outer world of cause and effect, she, her family, and her guerilla band were captured in less than a year. Most disappeared into Chinese prisons, were tortured and held in terrible isolation for years. Very few came through alive.

In 1981, during a period of liberalization following the death of Mao Tse Tung, Ani Pachen, along with fellow prisoners, was suddenly released from detention camp at Nyingtri and told to return to Chamdo, where she had been arrested so long before. Instead, she made her way to Lhasa, where she resumed a life of dharma practice and political action. The Tibetan rebellion of 1987–1988 was strongly supported by the monks and nuns of Lhasa. The repression against them was swift and terrible. Chinese soldiers went from house to house, rounding up suspected dissidents. In that dangerous moment Ani Pachen escaped to Nepal, and finally to Dharamsala, where she at last fulfilled her dream of meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and rededicating her life to the freedom of Tibet's peoples.

The first-person narrative of *Sorrow Mountain* is a real accomplishment of storytelling. This is the story that His Holiness the Dalai Lama urged her to share with us. One can hear the deep voice of compassion. (It occurs to me this would make a wonderful book-on-tape.) I assume that this voice is not precisely Ani Pachen's but the fruit of her collaboration with Daidie Donnelly, which is fine with me. This is not precisely oral history. But the flood-tide of Chinese occupation is experienced personally and interwoven with dreams, in a meeting of inner and outer life. The unbreakable thread of faith in dharma weaves through everything. In her 21 years in Chinese prison camps, the Dharma sustained Ani Pachen. It still does. ❖

Briefly Noted:

Women's Education in the Global Economy–A Workbook

by Miriam Ching Louie with Linda Burnham

Women of Color Resource Center, 2000, 166 pages, $24.95
To order: 510/848-9272, or <chisme@igc.apc.org>

This is "a workbook of activities, games, skits, and strategies for activists, organizers, rebels and hell raisers." Lively and educational group exercises include a revision of *The Dating Game*, in which participants representing different developing countries compete for World Bank loans. The book celebrates inspiring examples of activism around the world, especially in the labor movement, that mainstream history books ignore. —*Susan Moon*

Uncovering the Wisdom of the Heartmind

by Lin Jensen

Quest Books, 1999, 202 pages, $15, paperback

Reviewed by Judith Stronach

Not for nothing is Sam Hamill, prestigious poetry editor of Copper Canyon Press, among the dharma teachers who praise Lin Jensen's book on its back cover. Poetry is the source of the dharma's transparency in this book of thoughtful three- to ten-page essays. Jensen is a retired college teacher, and his writing is marvelous and elegant. He has a poet's ear for texture, tone, and rhythm. He is particularly acute when it comes to detail, capturing the smell of willows, the intensity of a bird singing without being heard because of the wind, or the way monks' vestments flutter purple and saffron over squares of white silk, like brilliant insects drawn to blossoms.

An essay on biking is typical of Jensen's work in how it imperceptibly becomes a lesson on balance and trust. Only it is not a lesson but a sensitive poem on all the details of riding a bike and being open to life from this vulnerable seat. Then in the midst of the experience, insight happens, not as an idea but as a moment when the heart and mind falter in ordinary reality and stumble into their own realm.

Jensen ordained in 1994 in the Soto Zen tradition, and his path seems to allow life to happen without willing it, discovering what is there beside our ideas. His practice unfolds through reconstructing stories of childhood, especially his relationship with his father, rites of passage, and adult years of work, love, and homemaking. Not all of his stories turn on the dharma, but I found his voice all the more authentic for not using vocabulary that we hear in our zendos.

Authentic too is his encounter with shadow aspects of experience. He looks at our inherent wisdom and also at what happens to cut it short, harden, and distort it, and what kind of lives are lived in the face of cruelty, fear, loneliness, and assaults on innocence.

For this reader, at least, some of the stories of cruelty were difficult to read: the killing of a faun hit by a car, the process of debeaking turkeys on his father's farm, the tying of a putrefied turkey carcass around a dog's neck as punishment. Because Jensen is so eloquent, these experiences required a very upright posture for me to be able to read through them.

I also found the book's sequencing problematic. Jensen chose to arrange it by themes, which means that the stories are not chronological. I found it startling to go from childhood to adulthood and back to childhood, These reservations, however, do not undercut my highest recommendation to read this book.

Jensen's full confidence comes into play in the stories that turn on emptiness and impermanence. An injury brings with it the need to sell a beloved house and with it the calm knowledge that searching for security only diminishes one's life. Such insights into impermanence throughout the book lead to a healing of Jensen's ego that finally stops its useless effort to feel safe.

The house sale entails giving up the garden, yet Jensen comes to see that he never *owned* the garden, and that indeed, his very body is made of the ground's produce. Insights into emptiness also bring healing, as he says the best we can do is harmonize with the earth, in a mutual entrustment of earth to self and self to earth. He believes that "breath itself is drawn from undivided air," that we are ourselves through what is not ourselves.

Because of this value system, I felt I could trust Jensen and his poetic sensibility to lead me through moments of pain to grace. This trust is necessary, because he rends the heart. He gives us the moment of absence after thousands of horned larks disappear from a mountain valley. He gives us the moment after his father's death, when only one of two remains. He then meditates on how regeneration in nature comes from enormous generosity. Such rending is valuable—it leads Jensen and his readers to the source of benevolent wisdom. ❖

Finding a Joyful Life in the Heart of Pain

by Darlene Cohen

Shambhala, 2000, 250 pages, $24.95, hardcover

Reviewed by Joan Starr Ward

Immediately upon getting this book, I turned to Chapter Seven: "Mad as Hell and Can't Take One More Thing: Dealing with the Anger Pain Provokes." I felt relieved to read the author's story of the jam jar. Sitting at the breakfast table, her toast still warm with melted butter, she couldn't get the jam jar open because the jar lid was on too tight for her weak hands. Years of rheumatoid arthritis went into the next act—hurling the jam jar against the wall. The satisfaction, she writes, of watching the jam drip down the wall was as great as if she had spread the jam on her toast and eaten it. All day, whenever she entered the kitchen, she felt the pleasure anew to see the mess.

I like that story. It's embedded in a chapter that calls upon us not to suppress our passion with an imposed serenity. I recall a meeting of the Mendocino County BPF chapter in which our guest speakers were impassioned social activists (non-Buddhist) who were decidedly distrustful that we began the meeting with meditation. After their presentation and exhortations, I questioned their tactics because I was worried their confrontational style was increasing a sense of Us and Them. "Peace and Love! Peace and Love! What about action?!" they exclaimed.

Darlene Cohen's comfort with the paradox of acceptance and action is one of the most appealing aspects of this book. I wish she had been at our meeting. And she clearly knows her material. She has had 18 years of living with a crippling disease, 18 years of learning to not hold back her frustrations. Simultaneously, she is committed to her Zen practice, to using pain as part of that practice, and to staying connected to life around her. The exuberance of her stories suggests that she has indeed found joy—and everything else—in the heart of pain (which includes suffering of all beings, not just her own suffering). And I like it that she is willing to tackle difficult questions—anger, pain, happiness, busyness—without saintliness.

Why then am I not willing to recommend this book without reservation? One reason is that I feel tired when I read a book full of rhetorical questions like the previous sentence. I prefer writers to tell, not ask. I wondered, too, how carefully the book was edited—the frequency of "really," "very," and "a tad" was distracting. Perhaps these chapters are based on talks Cohen has given, which would account for the conversational style and, from my perspective, the inconsistency in voice and organization of ideas. I got lost several times and had to backtrack to see if I could find the point.

Certainly this is a book I can wholeheartedly recommend to my neighbor, who is curious about Buddhism, dealing with pain in his body, and finding that allopathic medicines just aren't working. The author has some great exercises, both physical and meditative. And the next time someone offhandedly remarks that illness can be avoided if we just do the right things, I will suggest they take a look at this book. It's a fine antidote to a good many of our cherished notions about the definition of health. ❖

Joan Starr Ward writes and weaves in Northern California.

Director's Report

There is a Chinese curse—perhaps apocryphal (or was it made up by Al Gore?)—"May you live in interesting times." Well, we certainly do. Alas. Votes have been cast for two presidential candidates and a month later we still don't have a president elect. While I have my own clear preference for who "comes out on top," the legal posturing, pious pronouncements on democracy, and general chest-thumping of "alpha" males reminds me that real choices around questions of globalization, corporate accountability, prisons, and the death penalty are sadly absent from mainstream politics.

The Middle East, Israel in particular, is on the edge of civil war between Palestinians and Israelis. Bitterness and implacability and righteousness will bring nothing but death and sorrow. Again, where is the principle of compassion, what His Holiness the Dalai Lama calls "a policy of kindness"? This might be the final, necessary expression of realpolitik.

Burma's military junta, the SPDC, draws a noose ever tighter around the already limited freedoms of Aung San Suu Kyi and her comrades in the National League for Democracy. They have no freedom of movement, no way to share their message of basic democratic rights with the millions of Burmese deprived of those rights, caught in spiraling poverty and despair. NLD party leaders and even rank and file members are subject to arbitrary arrest, torture, and disappearance. There is no end in sight.

Of course there is much more one could write about in today's interesting world. Just sustaining ourselves in the face of suffering is our challenge. Staying put, sitting upright whatever comes. And understanding that when change comes, it can come quickly, and personally. We need to be present with that change.

Life at our Alcatraz Avenue office has been pretty crazy over the last few months. In September, Tova Green, our Development Director and Chapter Coordinator, left for a period of Zen monastic training at Tassajara Zen Monastery. After working closely with her on the board and staff over a six-year period, I was sad to say goodbye, even though I rejoice that she has this opportunity to deepen her practice. Our new development director is Swan Keyes, a young woman with a Buddhist and activist background who is finishing up a degree program in clinical psychology at JFK University here in the Bay Area. We are happy to have her on board.

Paul LeMay, who served nobly as Administrative Director for a year, also moved on in September. We miss his dry humor and unflappable confidence, qualities that will certainly work in his favor in Silicon Valley's lions' den, where he has moved. We are grateful to Vanessa Ramirez, whom I wrote about in the last *TW*, for taking on the challenge of Paul's former position. She will be well-assisted by Michael Trigilio, who has just begun working at BPF after two years at the Community of Mindful Living, a sister organization in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh.

Heidi Strupp, who served as the Prison's Project's Assistant Coordinator, has taken a full time job with Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. Heidi's dedication to the well-being of prisoners and their families was clear from the start. We wish she could have been with us longer, but know that she will prosper and help all beings in her new position. As Diana Lion reports on the Prison Page, we are happy to have hired a new assistant, Gayle Hanson.

So what you may rightfully gather from all the staff changes is that those of us left behind have been under a lot of pressure to take care of business. We mostly succeed, but the pressure and busyness have been pretty intense. Sometimes things fall through the cracks. The overheated economy of the Bay Area creates tensions for us. It is hard to make ends meet on a nonprofit salary. And sometimes we feel just plain worn out. I'll share with you some advice I try to offer myself. Thomas Merton wrote:

> There is a perverse form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by non-violent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes work for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

Finally, I want to share a memory from the October Buddhism in America Conference sponsored by Naropa in Colorado. Joseph Jarman, Ralph Steele, and Jan Willis led a workshop on the African-American Buddhist experience. Walking into their room I had the bittersweet realization that I had never before been in the presence of three African-American Buddhist teachers at one time, taking their rightful place as seasoned teachers. This should not be as rare an experience as it seemed. In the future I am sure it will be an everyday fact for followers of the way. ❖

—Alan Senauke

Next BASE program in the Bay Area:

FEBRUARY–JULY, 2001

Applications are still available.
Internships with stipend may still be available.

We are also seeking donated or inexpensive housing in the Bay Area for BASE participants for up to six months, from February to July 2001.

Please contact Diana Winston at BPF: 510-655-6169, or <dwinston@bpf.org>.

BASE News

Last year, former BASE (Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement) participant Aran Watson suggested that a BASE group for young people would be a significant way to support the resurgence of activism among youth. As a young activist himself, he wanted to create a space for young people to come together to explore the intersection of Buddhism and activism in an urban setting. I enthusiastically agreed.

In September, Youth BASE was born. We brought together a diverse group of nine young people, ages 19–25, who are working in service and activist organizations that include the Zen Hospice Project, Vegan Action, a Tenderloin childcare center, a Chiapas support group, diversity training, Food Not Bombs, and more. We are meeting weekly and holding monthly retreat days. We are using the six paramitas (perfections of virtue) to provide a dharma container for our explorations. Recently the group met with Ajahn Passano, the abbot of Abhayagiri monastery, to discuss generosity (the first paramita) in light of his forest protection work in Thailand.

Youth BASE represents the fruition of a dream for me. As a young person, I longed for a socially engaged Buddhist community where I could explore how my desire for social change met my dharma practice. Ten years ago, there were few places for me to turn. Now, to be able to offer BASE to young people and serve as a guide and mentor is an incredible gift.

Inspired by its first wonderful year, Educators BASE began its second year by welcoming some new members and continuing to explore the intersection of education with Buddhist theory and practice. Cassie Scott has taken over the organizing and Lyn Fine is continuing on as mentor.

In November, we sponsored a BASE Community Retreat that focused on the topic of justice. We heard a dharma talk by Melody Ermachild Chavis, private investigator, BASE graduate, and author of the socially engaged Buddhist classic, *Altars in the Street.*

This fall we've seen several BASE outcroppings—programs and events inspired by BASE principles, though not explicitly following the BASE format. In September, several former BASE participants started the Community of Buddhist Helping Professionals and began to hold monthly BASE-inspired retreat days to "balance care for others and care for ourselves," for those working in caregiving fields. Paul Sheppard, a BASE alum, has begun a group for Buddhists and Recovery to bring Buddhism and the recovery movement together. He credits BASE training for the inspiration, format, and skills. Jonathan Gustin, a graduate of Home BASE, recently started the Green Sangha in the Bay Area, founded on BASE principles. They hold four-hour monthly meetings with an action each month. This month, for example, their project is to get 100 people to switch from Pacific Gas & Electric to a green power company.

In November, Alan Senauke taught a three-day retreat on "Right Action" at Zen Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper, New York. He also taught a workshop on socially engaged Buddhism at the Buddhism in America Conference in Boulder, Colorado, in September. Donald Rothberg and I taught a five-week series in Berkeley titled "Introduction to Socially Engaged Buddhism." Next year we will be teaching retreats on socially engaged Buddhism in New York City, New Mexico, and North Carolina.

Also this fall, BPF has sponsored other education events in the Bay Area, including a Day of Mindfulness with Vietnam vet and Peacemaker priest Claude AnShin Thomas; a lecture by high Gelugpa lama Zachoege Rinpoche on "Tibetan Buddhism and Nonviolence"; a seminar on "Socially Engaged Interpretations of Buddhist Teachings" with teachers including Joanna Macy, Taigen Dan Leighton, and Joseph Bobrow; and an afternoon on "Globalization, Buddhism, and Nonviolence," with Sarah Laeng-Gilliat. Sarah is also sponsoring an ongoing film and lecture series on globalization in Santa Fe, New Mexico, through March 2001. ❖

—Diana Winston

Youth BASE would like to extend special thanks to Berkeley Buddhist Monastery and Ven. Heng Sure, Marv Belzer, Ty Cashman, Elenna Rubin Goodman, Judy Grether, Rebecca Mayeno, Ajahn Passano, Mitchell Rattner, and Clay Taylor.

Announcements & Classifieds

Making the Invisible Visible. Collection of writings by people of color and their white allies about healing racism in our Buddhist communities. Order from BPF, 510/655-6169. $5 a copy.

Safe Harbor, BPF's publication on guidelines, process, and resources for ethics in Buddhist communities, is available for a $5 donation. Contact the BPF office, 510/655-6169, e-mail: <bpf@bpf.org>.

BPF Staffers, wanted, needed, loved. Call the office: 510/655-6169.

Announcing the completion of the BPF library! Thanks to volunteer Doug Neilson, all of BPF's books, videos, and audiotapes on socially engaged Buddhism have been catalogued and are available for borrowing. Stop by our office at 1840 Alcatraz, Berkeley, California, to take a look.

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

Sangha for Buddhists of color meets monthly in the San Francisco Bay Area, for meditation, dharma talks, and mutual support. For information, or to be placed on the e-mail list, contact Lauren Leslie: 415/642-7202 or e-mail: <bebuddha@hotmail.com>.

Diversity and Social Change Sangha, for those interested in blending mindfulness practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh with social change work, meets weekly in Oakland. Contact Don at 510/530-1319 or Olga at 510/540-0141.

Prison sangha members invite all creations into the mandala of their practice and vow to serve them. How may we serve you? Contact David Wilson, #6564610, or Bob Brown, #5417594, at the Oregon State Penitentiary, 2605 State St., Salem, OR 97310-0505.

Prison Dharma Network (PDN) needs your donations of dollars and used dharma books to continue making the dharma available to prisoners. If you are interested in forming local or regional chapters to facilitate contemplative prison ministry, contact: PDN, P.O. Box 4623, Boulder, CO 80306-4623, 303/544-5952, e-mail: <pdn@indra.com>.

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

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

Gay Buddhist Fellowship. Sittings, speakers, and discussions every Thursday evening and every other Sunday morning in San Francisco. Classes, workshops, retreats, monthly potluck dinners, and work in Buddhist AIDS projects. Newsletter, with information and articles on topics of concern to gay Buddhists, available on request. (See BPF Chapters and Affiliates page for address.)

Lenten Desert Experience XX begins with a Weekend Retreat and Action at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, March 2–4, and concludes at the end of Lent with a Peace Walk to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, April 8–13. For more information, contact: Nevada Desert Experience, PO Box 46645, Las Vegas, NV 89114, 702/646-4814, e-mail: <nde@igc.org>, Web site: *www.NevadaDesertExperience.org.*

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

Northern California Abbey for 400 nuns and monks is being organized in the Sierra foothills. For more information and to make donations, contact Lama Tenzin Choezin. E-mail <jacquelinetyson@bigplanet.com>; tel: 415/454-7137.

Families with a future serves children of incarcerated women, via visits. We also offer emotional support groups to schools and community organizations. We have just opened our first Web page for children, which hosts a message board. Please e-mail us at <fwaf@aol.com>, or call Ida McCray, founder, at 415/255-7036, ext. 320; 100 McAllister St., Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94102; Web site: *www.fwaf.net*

The Conch-us Times, the Journal of the Dead Buddhists of America, for those appreciating both Grateful Dead and Buddhist cultures: $8/yr. Payable to: Ken Sun-Downer, Box 769, Idyllwild, CA 92549.

Gratitudes

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