

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



REFUGE & SHELTER

***Where do we find it? At "Home" • In a Monastery
On a Peace Walk • In a Refugee Camp
In the Dharma • On the Street • In Co-Housing***



From the Editor

I sit in the warm kitchen drinking my morning cup of green tea. The sun streams across the red Mexican tablecloth, and behind the voice on the radio I can hear the washing machine's homey rhythm. Out the window two squirrels are chasing each in the walnut tree. It's going to be a beautiful day. And the newscaster's voice says that right now in Falluja, where it's dark night, U.S. bombs are lighting up the city, killing unknown numbers of people, and turning homes to burning rubble. In my Berkeley home, I feel the vibrations of the washing machine, but the people in Falluja are feeling other vibrations. The effort to understand that both are real almost breaks my mind in two.

Shelter—physical protection from blizzards or blazing sun—is one of the basic requirements for sustaining life. Refuge, on the other hand, is more emotional and spiritual. Refuge is where you feel safe, where you feel a sense of belonging. You might find refuge in Buddha, Jesus, your parents, your grandmother, your garden, the mountains, the universe, the mosque.

Everybody needs both shelter and refuge.

Driving to work yesterday, I waited at a crosswalk for a family to cross the street: a young mother and four children with unbrushed hair and dirty clothes. The mother wore a strange assortment of layers that flapped in the wild wind. She ducked her head against the cold, held the hand of the youngest child, and herded the others—like leaves that might blow away—across the street. They looked around as if they weren't sure where they were going after they got across the street. For some reason I paid attention—maybe it was the way the wind was whipping them—and I imagined myself as one of those children, not knowing where I would sleep that night, or what there would be for me to eat.

This was in Berkeley. Now take that family, and to their suffering add murder, rape, starvation, arson of their home. Then multiply by 500,000, and you get Darfur, in Sudan, where almost two million people have been displaced and about 80,000 have died since the violence began in February 2003.

These refugees lack both physical shelter and emotional refuge. The desert is hostile; they have to walk miles for water and firewood. They don't feel safe and they don't belong. And think of the karma being born in all those children—the legacy of their trauma. How do we who have both refuge and shelter in ample measure extend ourselves to those who have no place to go?

I take refuge in Buddha, dharma and sangha.

I don't say, "I find refuge." I say "I *take* refuge." It's an active thing. I have to do something about it. Refuge doesn't come to me; I have to go there. And if I take refuge, then surely I can *give* it, too.

In a world of 17 million refugees and counting (according to the U.N.), where do you start? You just start somewhere. Like the Berkeley couple I know who are leaving their home to take medical supplies to Iraq. Like Polly Jones (p. 26), a young Englishwoman who is starting a training center in Calcutta where refugees from the Chittagong Hills will learn herbal medicine.

Mysteriously, deep refuge is there inside the suffering. If I were in Falluja or Darfur, I don't know if I would have access to that refuge, but I hope I would.

The 91st Psalm says, "The Lord is my refuge and my fortress...under his wings shalt thou trust." And the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* says, "Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom, the lovely, the holy... In her we can find shelter... She makes us seek the safety of the wings of enlightenment."

May the refuge I find in Buddha, dharma, sangha, and a red tablecloth in the morning sun give me courage to work for peace and justice. ♦ —Susan Moon

Coming deadlines for *Turning Wheel*:

Summer '05: **Crossing Borders**. Deadline: February 7, 2005

Fall '05: **No theme**. Deadline: June 1, 2005

Send submissions of essays, poetry, drawings, or photographs to *Turning Wheel*, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703-9906, with SASE; or to <turningwheel@bpf.org>.

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



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Pru See is an artist and illustrator from England, now living in New York State's Hudson Valley. She particularly loves to paint portraits of houses. She created the images on the cover and at right based on her own childhood drawings.

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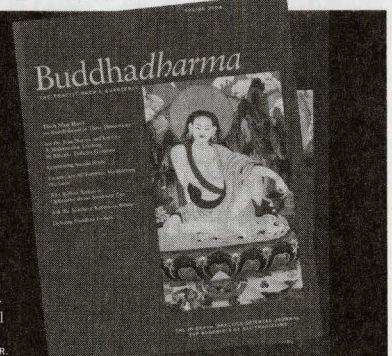
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AFTER THE ELECTIONS

A Statement and Call to Action from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship

The 2004 U.S. presidential election is finally over. Some of us are deeply unhappy about the outcome and others are rejoicing. All of us cherish the same dream of safety and happiness, but our fears, beliefs, and the compelling delusions of the American political spectacle blind us to our true connection to each other. However we may feel, though, we take heart from the great outpouring of civic energy throughout this election year. Unprecedented numbers of people came out to vote and to work according to their convictions.

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship calls on its more than 4,000 members and the wider Buddhist community to recognize that our hard work for peace and justice carried on throughout this long election season must continue. We recommit ourselves to this work for the long run.

Our nation's situation in the world is still the same. Our country is profoundly divided, and a pointless war is underway. Lives on both sides are lost daily. We fear many more will die. We hold precious the lives of our troops in Iraq, and grieve for the more than 1,200 who have given their lives. And we hold equally precious the lives of Iraqis entangled in the escalating violence. The most recent reports indicate that at least 10,000 Iraqis have died as a result of this war (some sources cite a figure closer to 100,000). According to one study, the risk of death by violence for civilians in Iraq is now 58 times higher than before the U.S.-led invasion (*The Lancet*).

In these times, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's commitment to work toward social, political, economic, and environmental justice for all remains strong. We will continue to speak out against this war and to stand in solidarity with our colleagues in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the American Friends Service Committee, and the more than 800 organizations of the United for Peace and Justice coalition. We will continue to work on building a culture of peace by supporting initiatives such as the Department of Peace and the Nonviolent Peace Force, and by helping to create inclusive circles where people can come together in the diversity of their views and backgrounds. And we will continue to show up and offer a witness for peace and justice in as many sites of suffering and injustice as we can.

Much of the world thinks of the United States as a deluded and dangerous empire. This election may only confirm them in this belief. People in other countries have suffered under the "leadership" of both Republicans and Democrats. As long as corporations hold the world's purse strings and our military does their bidding, no one here at home or anywhere in the world will be safe.

Peace is a dynamic process, never separate from conflict and disagreement. It is about regaining our balance over

and over again, and remembering that even our "enemies" embody Buddha nature. As we recall the distortions, invective, and divisiveness of the campaign year, this generous-minded remembering is essential.

We suggest three timeless vows:

- to transform greed into generosity
- to transform hatred into love and compassion
- to transform ignorance into clarity and attention.

Living with these vows, let us dare to continue the work of peace and justice that has already been well begun. Let us be selfless and unafraid. Being selfless means being connected to all beings, not just those we momentarily agree with. Being unafraid means moving towards our differences with an open heart, even when we feel fear. In this new political season, can we dare *not* to believe everything we think? Can we dare to tell the truth as we understand it? Can we dare to change our minds?

Finally, as part of an interfaith effort with other religious peace fellowships in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, we encourage our members and the Buddhist community at large to use the time before Inauguration Day (January 20, 2005) to develop teach-ins, workshops, vigils, and other events in order to explore nonviolent alternatives to war. ♦

Δ For more information on BPF actions, contact Maia Duerr: maia@bpf.org, or 510-655-6169, ext. 311.

Δ For links to religious peace fellowships active in the various faith traditions, see www.forusa.org/rpf.

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Letters

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

Dharma and Democracy

The fall issue is just stunningly good; the range of articles and complexity of each has heartened me and helped me to move beyond bitterness and anger toward focused action. I especially appreciated the reminders of our values of nonseparation and interconnectedness in this time when it is so easy to feel alienated and polarized. Thank you for the thoughtfulness and richness of this timely issue.

—Judy Harden, Calais, Vermont

On "The Wall"

Thank you for publishing Annette Herskovits's excellent article, "The Wall: Nonviolence in Palestine" (TW, Fall '04). I spent six weeks on the West Bank in 2003 with the International Solidarity movement (ISM), a human rights organization committed to supporting the nonviolent resistance in Palestine. I observed the nonviolent resistance of the entire village population of Budrus on the West Bank to the destruction of their olive groves, and the excellent work of Dr. Mustafa Bharghouti, a West bank physician who has long advocated nonviolence and who has many followers and supporters in his home country.

Violence against unarmed civilians is never acceptable, whether they are Palestinian or Israeli, but it has always disturbed me that the U.S. media focuses so heavily on Palestinian violence, yet rarely mentions the far greater U.S.-funded and armed Israeli military and economic violence against a largely unarmed and defenseless civilian population. Nor do the U.S. media usually acknowledge the Israeli peace groups who are working cooperatively and nonviolently with Palestinians to stop the wall and end the occupation.

I am not Jewish myself, but when I was in Palestine I was around American, European, and Israeli Jews who were actively working every day to end the occupation and stop the separation wall. These Jewish activists were welcomed warmly into the homes of local Palestinians and shown great hospitality.

As an American Buddhist, I have often despaired of my spiritual community ever coming to grips with the true nature of what is going on in Israel/Palestine. The U.S. Presbyterian Church has decided to divest from Israel. The Anglican Church is on the verge of doing the same. In the San Francisco Bay Area, churches and temples are opening their doors to Palestinian and Israeli activists and many churches are sponsoring delegations and holding report-backs and forums. Yet the Buddhist community has largely remained uninvolved and silent on this issue. I hope *Turning Wheel* and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's example of publishing fine articles like this can help lead the way to greater awareness and discussion of this crucial issue in Bay Area and American Buddhist circles.

—Francesca Rosa, San Francisco, California

Indra's Net

Compiled by Annette Herskovits

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

Honoring Victims of the Iraq War

U.S. news media announced on September 8 that the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq had reached 1,000. Few, if any, noted the Iraqi civilian dead—a number which, according to Iraq Body Count, was at least 13,000 in late October and maybe as high as 100,000, according to a recent article in *The Lancet* (a British medical journal).

Many were killed by Iraqi car bombers, but a far greater number were victims of U.S. "precision bombing" of cities. Iraq's interim President Ghazi Yawar said, "Air strikes on cities are...not acceptable in any way. I consider it collective punishment."

The U.S. aim is to wrest control of all cities from insurgents before Iraq's January elections, and civilian lives seem to count for little in this "pacification push." Press releases from the U.S.-led "Multi-National Force" mention not a single civilian death—all those killed are "insurgents" or "anti-Iraqi Forces."

In early October, the U.S. military bombed Samarra and then, together with Iraqi government forces, overran the city. They claim to have killed 125 guerrillas, but several reporters spoke with hospital administrators who said 23 children were among the 80 bodies brought to the hospital during the three-day assault. One ambulance driver said, "Dead bodies and injured people are everywhere in the city, and when we tried to evacuate them, the Americans fired at us.... Later on they told us that we could evacuate only injured women and children and we were not allowed to pick up injured men."

Nadja, a city of 300,000, was subjected to a similar assault in August. And Fallujah is under a full-scale attack, after an assault last April that killed 600 Iraqis and failed to take the city from insurgents.

Santa Monica, California, has a memorial to U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq—crosses set up on the beach. To memorialize the Iraqi victims would take miles of beach.

How can we expose the U.S. government's suppression of the truth and bring the Iraqi civilian dead to the awareness

of Americans? A fence on a heavily traveled Berkeley street is covered with cardboard panels illustrated with tombs, each representing a death from the war in Iraq. All are included: U.S. and other coalition soldiers, and military, insurgent, and civilian Iraqis. Every Wednesday, the memorial's designer updates it, based on Internet research. —A.H.

Parliament of World Religions 2004 Barcelona, Spain

According to Catholic theologian Hans Kung, "There will be no peace among nations until there is peace among religions. And there will be no peace among religions until

there is dialogue among religions." Such dialogue brought together 9,000 people from over 75 countries in Barcelona in July, for a week of conversation, music, and prayer.

More than 400 workshops and celebrations filled days and nights: speeches and dances, sacred music and silence, tree planting, food, art, meditation from dozens of traditions, and workshops on dreaming, the universe, and peace-building. At the end, the participants vowed to act to end religious violence, improve access to safe water, alleviate the distress of refugees, and eliminate the developing countries' debt.

Clearly, dialogue among religions alone will not bring world peace, but this peaceful coming together was a significant step. One could even envision the religious world turning from ignorance to understanding and from bloodshed to harmony.

Although the Dalai Lama did not appear due to poor health, monastic sangha members from the Theravada, Vajrayana, and Mahayana traditions

demonstrated the vigor of Buddhist monasticism today.

Jake Swamp, a Mohawk chief from New York State who has planted millions of white pine trees in his life, spoke with the power of earth-based wisdom. He told stories of the Iroquois Peacemaker, who founded the Iroquois Confederacy. With a wise elder's humor, he reminded listeners of the value of life's basic elements: air, water, fire, and earth.

Some of us spent four days at Montserrat Abbey, a thousand-year-old Benedictine monastery high above Barcelona. Its black Madonna bears a striking similarity to Guan Yin Bodhisattva. A small eight-sided chapel behind the Virgin creates a sacred space of breathtaking beauty: every surface is decorated with ceramic inlay, precious stone, painted icons, or colored glass. Shafts of sunlight



Part of a Berkeley fence that memorializes each death in Iraq. Photo by Susan Moon

shining through evoke the *Avatamsaka Sutra's* state of interpenetration without obstruction.

In a world where the marketplace dominates public discourse, we need, more than ever, guidance, clarity, models of well-being, alternatives to the purely material definition of who we are.

The Parliament and other global interfaith organizations benefit from Buddhist input. Buddhists can serve the planet by coming forward with the insights provided by the precepts and by the practice of concentration. The Parliament does interfaith action with a global scope; Buddhists know how to do stillness. Together, action and stillness can lead humanity closer to a world of awakening and selfless service.

—Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D.,
Director, Berkeley Buddhist Monastery

The Sikhs' Treat at Barcelona Parliament

For many of us at the Parliament of World Religions, the signature event was scrumptious selfless service by the Sikhs.

At lunchtime thousands of us—having just emerged from this or that lecture or discussion—strolled down the waterfront toward the Sikh camp. After being greeted, we removed our shoes, washed our hands, and had our heads covered with white cloth by young Sikh women with gracious faces and British accents—these Sikhs were mostly from Birmingham, England. The head cloths symbolized our worthiness to receive offerings.

Inside, we passed rows of cross-legged eaters waiting for lunch. According to my companion, feeding a few thousand is not uncommon in India, where large weddings go on for days. But the Sikhs I questioned afterward considered this a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It had been a spontaneous decision; they were not sure where the money to pay for the meal would come from.

As we sat patiently, hungrily, Sikh men, with bushy black beards and head-wraps, hustled down the aisles with buckets of steaming vegetables, warm chapati, yogurt, rice, and bottles of water. For five or ten minutes, we were principally concerned with getting enough. There followed a period of ravenous eating coupled with comradely gazes toward those eating across the aisle.

The last five or ten minutes were spent declining the frequent requests to refill our plates—or perhaps accepting and pleasantly overeating. Finally, we sat in the sea of Parliament participants, marveling, ears bathed in the chorus of voices, industrial air conditioners, and trance-inducing Sikh chanting from a temporary temple in the large tent.

And then, really without any conscious decision, everyone rose and walked easefully down the aisle toward the exit. There, a young woman gestured for the white cloths. After finding our shoes, we walked outside into the warm summer day, looked down to the Mediterranean below, and felt the beginning of an afternoon breeze.

—Max Track ❖

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Family Practice

No Refuge, No Shelter

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

*Live in joy,
Without possessions,
Like the shining ones.*

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

A couple of memories come back to me when I ask myself, as a Buddhist householder, if I am living in accord with my understanding of the dharma.

The first memory is of my mother in the last year of her life. Reduced by her battle with cancer down to skin-and-bone, she would sit at her kitchen table, sorting through and reading bank statements and investment reports from her stockbroker. Throughout her long marriage to my father, Mom had always been the one with math ability, and she filled out their income tax returns and kept track of their investments, especially after Dad began showing signs of dementia, worrying that he didn't have enough savings in the bank. She said she'd show him the bank statements over and over, but it didn't seem to ease his anxiety. They had both grown up during the Great Depression and they practiced frugality throughout their lives, working hard and saving everything they could to hand on to their children. As it turned out, my parents' stockbroker was untrustworthy, and immediately after their deaths he "churned" the account, losing a large chunk of money in futile investments while collecting fees for "managing" the account.

The other memory is of my mother-in-law, who during the time I knew her appeared to be deep in depression. After Thanksgiving dinner at her house one year, I was hoping there might be some quieter time for my husband and me to sit and talk with her in more intimate conversation. While her family members watched television or chatted in small groups, my mother-in-law sat alone at the now-empty table, cleaning her good silver and putting it away in special cloth cases. She looked as though she were in a trance, dreamily polishing each fork and spoon, obviously in a world of her own. We never had a single heart-to-heart talk, and she died in 2001.

As a Buddhist practitioner, I'm not against trying to save money to pass on to my child, and I'm not against owning objects that give me pleasure, but I do recognize that any idea, person, or thing that I regard as "my possession" causes me to suffer. Either it's not quite right, not enough, or it's wonderful and then I'm afraid it will diminish and become less wonderful. Having spent a period of my life living monastically with no personal possessions except for a few clothes and a sleeping bag, I occasionally reflect that my immediate family isn't excessively into "having" things. We

don't own family china, silver, jewelry, or furniture that's been passed down or that we intend to pass down. In fact, unless we rented storage space, our one-bedroom apartment couldn't hold anything more, not even new books. For every book we buy, an old one has to go. There's also the ever-present danger of earthquake or fire here in the San Francisco Bay Area—it just doesn't seem like a good idea to spend a lot of time and effort trying to build up material possessions. I've even stopped taking a lot of family photos in the last few years. When I look at photographs, I can see they're just flat images, a way of trying to capture and fix in place something that is alive and moving. It can't be done.

* * * *

"What are you writing about today?" my son asks me.

"Refuge and shelter, from a Buddhist perspective," I say.

"In Buddhism, there is no protection," Joshua says.


"But wouldn't you like it if when we die, Dad and I leave money for you?" I ask.

"Hoarding isn't Buddhist," my 15-and-a-half-year-old answers in the same no-nonsense tone. End of conversation.

We have a morning ritual on weekdays. Josh's alarm goes off at 7:30 AM. Sometimes he gets up and puts the kettle on the stove. Chris gets up and makes tea and coffee and toast. I lie in bed, mentally organizing my day. After a while someone brings me a cup of hot tea. I prop up the pillows, reveling in the luxury of being served in bed. I love this moment. It's pure joy, the joy of living with people who love me and whom I love.

There's no shelter where I can store up everything I cherish, no refuge where I can freeze time. The baby I "had" over fifteen years ago is now a young man. Even our cat can't properly be called "our" pet; she jumped in through our back window one summer night five years ago and adopted us. Under the circumstances, each morning I do the only thing possible: I drink my tea, put jam on my toast, and vow to try to save all beings today. I say thank you to my husband for making breakfast, and I tell my son I love him. And I say good-bye to both of them as they go out the door. ❖

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History

King Buddhadasa's Single-Payer Health Care

by Diane Patenaude Ames

When the legendary Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hsien visited Anuradhapura, the capital of what is now Sri Lanka, he found a large, prosperous city with well-maintained streets. Above all, it was a city of Buddhist monasteries. Of the estimated 10,000 monks in the capital alone, about 5,000 lived in the Abhayagiri, a monastic center in which everybody seemed to have Mahayanist leanings of one kind or another. Another 3,000 lived in the ultraconservative Mahavihara, a major seat of the Buddhist tradition that we now call Theravada. In the past, the doctrinal split in the Sri Lankan sangha had sometimes expressed itself in political strife featuring book burnings and the exile of "heretics." However, it would appear that the king whom Fa-Hsien met, Buddhadasa (reigned 340–368 C.E.), wisely avoided this level of sectarian conflict and gave at least some material support to both sides.

He also built and supported hospitals. For as long as the island had been Buddhist—and possibly even longer—its kings had accepted the principle that health care should be available to everyone. They realized that while the ailing rich could afford to hire doctors, buy medicine, use ser-

vants as full-time nurses, and put themselves on the diets their doctors prescribed, poor families could not do any of these things. Thus Sri Lanka may have been the first country in the world to invent the hospital as a refuge for the sick and injured masses. By Buddhadasa's day the land was full of free public hospitals, lying-in houses for obstetric care, and outpatient clinics. Because Buddhism was always closely associated with medicine, support for these institutions was considered a religious act of great merit.

Buddhadasa not only supported existing hospitals and built new ones, he organized a national system of health care by appointing a physician for every ten villages and setting up a clinic, called "a refuge for the sick," in every village. This was all paid for with a set percentage of royal revenues, creating a system we would call "single-payer health care."

Buddhadasa was himself a great physician who treated many difficult cases, including, to the horror of his peers, patients of low caste. He recorded his considerable knowledge in a classic Sanskrit medical text called the *Sarartha Sangratha*. Not limiting his compassion to humans, he treated animals and established veterinary hospitals. He also set up homes for the blind and the crippled, people who might otherwise have been left to beg.

A pious Buddhist, Buddhadasa sponsored the first translation of the Pali Canon into Sinhalese. However, he is chiefly remembered as a great physician king, a man who said, "If you can't be a king, be a healer." ❖

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Ecology

Cemetery Practice

by Stephanie Kaza

*Under a tree was the great Sage Buddha born
Under a tree, he overcame passion
And attained enlightenment
Under two trees did he pass in Nirvana
Verily, the Buddha held the tree in great esteem.**

Down my street is an old cemetery overlooking the lake. Being an old cemetery, it is home to lovely old trees. Davis and I often go for walks there, enjoying the presence of the trees. One sturdy white pine leans gracefully, still strong against the wind. A tall red oak shelters the gravestones below, brilliant in fall golds, soon to be bare for winter. Cypresses mark the lower boundary, protecting the dead from passersby on the bike path.

Many of the grave markers here date back to the 18th century. There is a stillness around these stones, a sense of settled rest. Whatever was unresolved in these lives has now dispersed, leaving only a marker of a long-ago event. Walking among the stones, we feel only the steady shelter of the trees, the lives still living amidst the dead. Their arching branches enclose this quiet spot only yards away from the busy street.

Cemetery practice was a common recommendation in early Buddhist teachings. Monks were urged to confront their fears of death by meditating in a graveyard. The spirits of the dead, still struggling with their suffering, were thought to haunt their burial places, afflicting those who visited at night. Sitting in meditation, one had no choice but to meet them head-on. Tibetan *chod* practice takes this a step further: visualizing one's own death and dismemberment in graphic detail.

I pass a different cemetery on my daily bike ride up to school. This one is more modest but still well protected by trees. The sign at the entrance says firmly, "no flags, no plastic flowers, nothing artificial." The simple stones are mostly bare unless there's been a recent holiday. Sometimes I take the side road that cuts right through the plot. No one drives along here; I see only the occasional dog walker. "Nothing artificial." I've taken this up as an everyday koan, a small cemetery practice. I read the sign quietly to myself—how wide is the wisdom in this phrase?

"Artificial" in this context means any attempt at permanence—such as plastic flowers lasting longer than real flowers.

The central point of a graveyard, is, if anything, impermanence. The dead are dead, their bodies transformed into unrecognizable matter. "They say, in the celestial realms/ the trees emanate/ the Buddha's blessings/ and echo the sound/ of basic Buddhist doctrines/ like impermanence."*

The cemetery then is a kind of shrine to impermanence. It is an ideal refuge where one might penetrate ego attachments to life. Entering the space of the cemetery, you can easily imagine the granite stone with your own name on it. Of course, this is sobering. It cuts right to the root of our delusion of individual permanence. The trees, though, are helpful companions, offering testimony to the ongoingness of life. Here among the stones, the "sheltering tree of interdependence" offers a wider refuge, a field of practice for more than a lifetime.

I pedal up the hill, carried along in the flow of life and death. Breathing the cool fall air, I take refuge in the shelter of my neighborhood cemetery. This route through the granite stones reminds me again that I, too, shall pass. In the blazing golds of autumn, these trees, though, still sing of life. ♦

*Quotes are from "The Sheltering Tree of Interdependence: A Buddhist Monk's Reflection on Ecological Responsibility," written by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to mark the opening of the 1993 International Conference on Ecological Responsibility at New Delhi, India.

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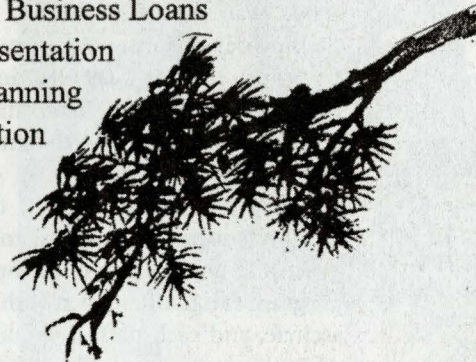
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The Walk Home

by Alissa Fleet



Photo by Xuong Dang

Alissa Fleet recently took three months to drive across the United States. Her cross-country journey came right after the peace walk she went on last spring (the subject of the essay that follows). She got out her road atlas and marked the points where there was a Thich Nhat Hanh sangha, a food co-op, or Buddhist friends she could stay with. She traveled with a prayer drum, and held spontaneous prayer ceremonies over places in the land where evidence of suffering was

apparent, and at the places that lodged her—friends' homes, practice centers, a teepee in South Dakota, a picnic table one night in Death Valley. She adapted this style of traveling from peace walking with the monks and nuns of the Nipponzan Myohoji order.

Alissa has stopped vagabonding for the time being and has taken up the work of sangha building. She is particularly interested in building community among young people. She practices in Berkeley, California, with the Morning Light Sangha, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. She is 30 years old.

When I heard that the walk was going through my hometown, I knew I had to go. Every year, the monks and nuns of the Peace Pagoda in Leverett, Massachusetts, take one month to peace walk across the state. "Walk for a New Spring," it's called, ending on the first day of spring. Supporters join the walk for a few hours, days, or weeks at a time. The route changes every year, but when I heard that the walk would be going to Cape Cod, and to Sandwich even, I knew I had to be there.

Every evening throughout the monthlong walk, there was a public program to talk about issues of peace and nonviolence in the host communities. The program would often open with everyone gathered in a circle, and each person would say their name and where they were from. The "where are you from" part was complicated for me. Sandwich, Massachusetts, is the town where I grew up, although I haven't lived there since high school. I lived in Boston for a while, but then I gave up my apartment in the city and have been living a nomadic lifestyle, bouncing around the globe ever since. On many nights I would just say: I live on the walk. When I was walking, I felt like I was at home no matter where I was. When we stopped for a midmorning break at a donut shop, that was my

home. When we were pulling our sleeping bags out of the van that followed us from town to town, the church where we stayed for the night was my home. Because I had no fixed address, some might say I was homeless, but I thought of myself as home free.

I guess I wanted to walk through my hometown like it was just another town we were passing through, just another place where we were spreading the message of peace. I wanted to be low profile. If you were not one of the people organizing the overnight stops and evening programs, it was possible to just walk carefree and await instructions at the end of the day about where to sleep.

But our small group of walkers all knew my full answer to the "where are you from" question. As we got closer, I was called on more often with questions about which route to take and how far the next bathroom stop would be. I learned that we were going to overnight in Sandwich. The plan was to sleep at the Quaker Meetinghouse. "The Quaker Meetinghouse," I thought to myself, "that's no good." I pictured creaky wooden floors and no heat. We had been sleeping in churches for a few days in a row (as opposed to home stays, where each walker usually has the luxury of a bed and a shower). As walkers, we were truly happy to sleep anywhere. But as we approached Sandwich, I was starting to feel more like a host than a walker. As a host, I wanted to give the walk a big welcome.

We were less than 30 miles away—two days by foot—so I made some phone calls. I called my aunt first, since I knew she would be the easier one to ask.

"Hi, Aunt Suzie. Listen, I'm in Falmouth now and, y'see, I'm on this walk," I began. She's usually game for this kind of thing. She said she would be happy to host us at her place; she had had a difficult year and liked the idea of having "peaceful people" in her home.

It would be a tight fit to squeeze all ten of us in at my aunt's house, so I called my parents next. As anticipated, they were less receptive. While my inclination to try to pull things off at the last minute comes from my father, my urge to be a perfect hostess comes directly from my mother. When I asked her, she said no, that there wasn't enough time for her to clean and do all that was necessary to welcome guests appropriately. Especially guests in such numbers. I tried to tell her that we didn't really care if the house was clean or not, that we were used to sleeping anywhere. She wasn't having any of it.

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The next day it was drizzling as we walked through Hyannis. One of the monks was sick with a stomach bug and we were trying to hitch a ride for him. No one was stopping for us. I was wracking my brain to think of other people I could call who might want to host some peace walkers on short notice, but I came up blank. It was then I realized that this is where I'm from, but it's not really my home anymore. I wanted to be able to give the walkers a cozy bed and have soup simmering on the stove and a pile of fresh towels ready for showers. I realized that even though I felt like a host, I wasn't going to be able to welcome the walk in the way I would have wanted to. The sinking feeling went deeper in my stomach as we walked.

Although I had walked hundreds of miles before, on the day we walked into my hometown it seemed like we had walked a very, very long way. Much longer than 15 miles. Since I knew the way, I carried the banner at the front of the line, but this was not like walking at the head of a parade, waving to admirers along the side of the road. As we walked, we played small round drums and chanted a prayer in call-and-response style: *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*. Some days on the walk, when our spirits were high, the prayer sounded like a song and had a triumphant ring. But our walk into Sandwich was not one of those days. We were still drumming and chanting the same prayer we always prayed, but on this day it sounded mournful to me and I saw my hometown in a different light.

Our path took us along Route 6A, a scenic road that draws tourists out for Sunday afternoon drives. As we walked I looked out over the small ponds and vast salt marshes that stretch all the way to sand dunes. I was able to really see the landscape and smell the saltiness in the air. The land took on a timeless quality. I thought of all the people who had walked and lived on this land before us. I saw my grandmother as a young girl, sailing with her brother up the creek. I saw my great-grandmother going for a swim in the late afternoon of each summer day, no matter how bitterly cold the ocean water. I saw early settlers learning to plant on this land, tasting cranberries and corn for the first time. I saw native people fishing and harvesting quahogs and making ornaments from their purple shells. I was aware that we were not far from Plymouth, Massachusetts, the place of the first encounter between native people and the Europeans, and that we are still feeling the reverberations from the cycle of violence that began at that meeting.

As I looked at the land in this way, the cars whizzing by seemed so out of place. By the side of the road there were beer cans and glass liquor bottles that had been tossed out of windows. There were losing lottery tickets and fast food litter. Was there more trash here than in any other place? Doubtful, but I noticed it more

here. "What was it like growing up on *Cape Cod*?" People always ask me this, their eyes suddenly far-off. For many people, Cape Cod is a mythical place, a place they fantasize about running away to when they are locked down at their job. They dream of leaving their cares behind, convinced that if they could just get to the perfect beach, the ocean would dissolve all their worries and anxieties. But there on the side of the road was evidence that this, too, is a place where people still try to escape, where they still suffer.

As we walked I looked into the faces in the cars driving by, searching for people I might know. There was an occasional wave or toot of the horn from cars passing by, but on the whole people seemed blasé and indifferent. In this place of wealth and privilege, most drove by as if a troupe of people with colorful flags and drums walking down this narrow-shouldered road were a perfectly everyday occurrence. There was none of the curiosity we had encountered when walking through a poor city neighborhood. Many drivers avoided eye contact; they looked past us, as I sometimes do when I encounter a person on the street who I think is about to ask me for something.

Part of me said, "No wonder I had to get out of here." Doesn't everyone think this about their hometown? That it's so boring or hopelessly small-time that they just have to get out. In my case, I had to get out because I thought there was no way I could stay and find any answers to my biggest questions. Growing up I had my share of inner turmoil. And although we lived in this idyllic place, there was a lot of sadness and difficulty in my family. How can I suffer less? How can I possibly help my family to suffer less? These were my burning questions, and the pain and helplessness I felt are what propelled me on my path, away from home, off to find some magic cure. They led me to travel to far-away places, places that inspired me and places that were suffering from recent war.

Going back home on this walk, I felt I was returning empty-handed; I still didn't have any answers for how to help my family. I had discovered only that it wasn't just me and my family that needed healing, but seemingly the whole world. I did know that going on these walks had uplifted and inspired me. I was hoping that maybe this would touch my family and the place where I was from. This walk was the only offering I had, and yet, as I made contact with the town again, it seemed to fall

Because I had no fixed address, some might say I was homeless, but I thought of myself as home free.



Alissa with her Aunt Suzie and her grandfather.
Photo by Craig Richards

flat. Other than coming out for a photo shoot, my parents weren't really into it, and in general, our walker energy felt low. Even our strongest walkers were suffering from fatigue and blisters that day.

Mercifully, we ended the day a little earlier than usual. We had our potluck at the Quaker Meetinghouse and then all ten walkers, monks, and nuns headed to my aunt's house. As we always do, each of us found perfectly fine couches or vacant beds or dark corners suitable for a night's sleep. The walkers got to know my aunt a little and learned more about why it had been a tough year for our family. She told about how she had lost her 18-year-old son that year, my cousin Scott. She said that if we had time, we could go with her to a place nearby that Scott had loved, and share a short prayer.

Early the next morning, we walked towards the woods across the yard from my aunt's house. We tapped our drums softly, so as to not wake my grandparents in the house next door or my parents the next house down. We walked down the sandy dirt path, the path I used to walk down barefoot in the summertime to pick blueberries, the path that led to a shortcut to the beach that my cousins and I would take when we



Alissa and her mother
Photo by Don Fleet

were feeling bold enough to cut through the marsh and jump gullies that got wider at low tide.

My aunt headed our procession, with the dog, and led us down the wooded path to a huge fortlike structure made from a wild tangle of branches and twigs. My cousin Scott was always building these. A few months before he died, I met him in the woods, and he showed me the biggest one he had made, a little further down toward the marsh. He bent some young saplings together for the base and then wove in more branches to make the outer walls. He weather-proofed it with a tarp over the top of the dome, and had brought some

beach chairs down that circled around a campfire pit. Once the fort couldn't get any bigger, he dug in the swampy mud to construct a moat around it. And then one day, after months of work, he set the whole thing on fire.

He started building others, like the one we stood before now under a canopy of trees. He would bring friends here to hang out and listen to Phish music. And this is where he would come when he couldn't deal with school; when the voices were too loud in his head and when the meds could not control his anguish. These woods and webs of branches had been his refuge until one day when none of the fortresses he built could contain his suffering. In the small hours of the night, he took one last walk down this path, and then far out into the marsh, where he used his own hand to break through the shell of the world.

For days my family was in agony, not knowing where Scott had gone and fearing the worst. Helicopters searched the woods and blueberry fields. It was Scott's father and one of Scott's friends who finally walked far enough out into the marsh—where they found him, delivered.

My aunt finished telling the story and we took up drums and started our prayer again. It was the same all-purpose prayer we used for both our joys and our pains. We offered this prayer outside of every home and church that welcomed us in for the night, and then again as we left the next morning, thanking the dwelling for the shelter it had provided. Sister Jun-san quietly poured a water offering from a water bottle. We each took a turn offering incense by the small entrance to Scott's shelter, where you can crouch inside to see a picture of Scott hugging the dog, some stones and crystals from his huge collection, and one of the intricate Escher-like drawings he would do. "Na Mu Myo

*This morning, my brother is back from his long adventure.
He kneels before the altar,
his eyes full of tears.
His soul is longing for a shore to set anchor at
(a yearning I once had).
Let him kneel there and weep.
Let him cry his heart out.
Let him have his refuge there for a thousand years,
enough to dry all his tears.*

*One night, I will come
and set fire to his shelter, the small cottage on the hill.
My fire will destroy everything
and remove his only life raft after a shipwreck.*

*In the utmost anguish of his soul,
the shell will break.
The light of the burning hut will witness
his glorious deliverance.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh
from the poem "I Will Say I Want It All"

Ho Ren Ge Kyo, Scott!” Kato-Shonin, the monk leading our walk, greeted him with a warm hello.

Feeling the swirl of sadness as the energy of the walk met this most intimate place of family suffering, I stood back and took in the scene of this simple ceremony. And then all of a sudden, I got it: my cousin Scott was building *wetus*. This is how my aunt described what he was doing, too, as she told the story and placed another branch on the thatched roof. He was building *wetus*, as the Wampanoag people native to this land had done. In this moment, it was so clear to me that my cousin was feeling the pain of the land. He was building a refuge not just for himself, but he was also pointing back in time, to the countless generations who have lived here, who lost the land, who lost everything.

When we are born into a place, we inherit the history of the people who have lived here before us, people we have never known, and their lives become part of us too. That is part of what it means to be from somewhere; you have a connection to all that has happened here. Standing in front of this *wetu*, I knew that Scott was rebuilding for them. And that he left a perfect landmark where he could show us how to begin to rebuild again.

We finished the ceremony, circling around the dwelling, clockwise, just as the monks and nuns do at sunrise every morning around the Peace Pagoda, the magnificent structure built for the sole purpose of housing the relics of the Buddha himself. We honor each dwelling with the same reverence, each dwelling holding the possibility for awakening.

Walking back I felt a lightness inside. I realized that coming down to the woods for a short prayer was not just a favor the walkers did for my aunt or for me. It turned out to be very much part of the walk; the banner we carried as we walked the streets calls for a non-violent future. Most of the time people read and respond to our banner in terms of being pro- or anti-war. But here, I saw that it is also about uprooting the violence that runs deep in our society, the violence that too many young people turn inward on themselves when they take their own lives.

Since walking back home, my own urge to wander has died down somewhat. Although I did not go back home with a secret formula from a distant land, it turns out I was not entirely empty-handed. I carried with me the strong aspiration to help and to heal—and sometimes that is all we need. With only the aspiration for peace, the way sometimes reveals itself in surprising ways. At some moment, things that did not make sense suddenly now do. And we are led in the early morning hours to a place where the great wound in the land, in our families, and in our own hearts is articulated so clearly, a place where we can break open our pain together. ❖



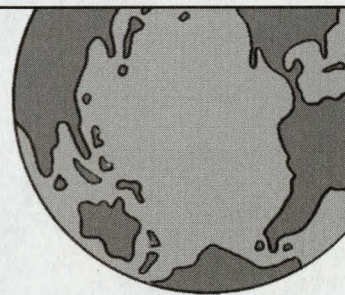
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The Screaming Corner

by Ed Bowers

The following pieces are taken from Living in the Land of the Dead, an anthology of poetry and prose published by The Faithful Fools (see facing page). The anthology contains the voices of people who live in and around the streets of the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. Both of the excerpts below are by Ed Bowers, who also edited the anthology.

Nobody moves to the Tenderloin of San Francisco unless the power of their presence and the intelligence of their words is not appreciated anywhere else.

When I first arrived here, it was not of my own choice. I had been married for 18 years, and as my wife and I went our separate ways, I had to find a place to live. North Beach was too expensive, so I found an affordable room with no kitchen, and a bathroom in the hall. This refuge was located on 7th and Market.

It was a clean room, but in three years I have made it as dirty as the soil out of which wheat grows. Ripped-up poems thrown onto the floor, Altoid ashtray cans

overflowing with cigarettes, a cheap boombox playing old Charles Mingus recordings, a cold depression hanging in the air without advertisements for itself.

The first night I arrived here, I'd spent hours, which seemed like hundreds of years, standing on various San Francisco street corners with my ex-wife as she cried tears of regret that were as useless to me as I was to her now.

Then, finally, she returned to her home, and I entered my room and tried to sleep alone. But the words of the people on the street kept me awake.

All night long they sang to me.

You see, there is a Screaming Corner outside of where I live on 7th and Market, where those who love no one, and whom no one loves, express themselves after 3:00 AM.

"I wanna kill myself," was one line I heard repeated over and over again in a woman's loud and matter-of-fact monotone voice for over three hours.

Others on the Screaming Corner are not so discreet. They don't want to kill themselves. They want to kill *you*.

All of them have one thing in common: they have no face.

"I have to get out of here if it's the last thing I ever do," I told my ex-wife on the phone a few days later, sounding like an old rock song. But I didn't believe I could.

Then I settled down. I went to the bars. I hung out on the streets. I made friends. I listened to people. I surrendered to God or the Devil or whatever operation runs this show. I started seeing the faces behind the words.

And I found out that it was here in the Tenderloin that I could express myself more than any place I'd ever lived in the United States of America. For over 30 years, I had traveled and stopped in the East Coast, the South, and the West Coast, but now I'd finally arrived.

The Tenderloin is beyond all coasts. It is the last stop. The end of the road.

The Screaming Corner in the Land of the Tenderloin Dead is where visceral poetry, and love, and hate are honestly expressed.

Words here are live wires inserted into your brain in the middle of the night when you look out your window to see the waning Moon.

These words will keep you awake.

These words are mantras that you will never forget if you have the courage to take them seriously.

* * *



Photo by Lydia Gans

The afternoon Sun warmed me as its rays entered through the front door of the bar, and I looked outside and appreciated what a beautiful city San Francisco is when I get away from the Financial District, where I worked for 20 years witnessing its spirit destroy bodies and souls like an invisible, discreet cancer, and when I leave the tourist traps to the tourists, and stay away from the coffeehouses, and surround myself with people who have survived a war that no one else will acknowledge has been declared, and I can stare out the window of a bar, and observe wild cats dancing on the shoulders of men and women who have no conventional reason to continue living, but will do so defiantly until the end, and I can drink and smoke my poison on the outskirts of a world which poisons itself with the external appearance of health, only to succumb to internal rot. I have survived by finding places where I am allowed the freedom to die and be reborn, and where no one cares who or what I am as long as I don't ask too much from them while I sit at peace with myself and feel blessed to be me. ❖

To find out more about the work of the Faithful Fools, or to get a copy of *Living in the Land of the Dead*, contact: The Faithful Fools Street Ministry, 234 Hyde Street, San Francisco, CA 94102. Email: <faithfulfools@value.net>. Website: www.faithfulfools.org. Tel: 415/474-0508.

Lydia Gans, photojournalist and writer, contributes regularly to *Street Spirit* newspaper on issues of poverty. She is a member of the Food Not Bombs collective, which provides vegetarian meals daily in People's Park in Berkeley, California.



Photo by Lydia Gans

Refuge at the Home of the Faithful Fools

It is the fool in the king's court who is looked upon to speak the truth.

Who are the Faithful Fools? Living in a tall purple building on Hyde Street near Turk in the middle of San Francisco's Tenderloin district, Kay Jorgensen, the social justice minister at San Francisco's Unitarian-Universalist Church, and Carmen Barsody, a Franciscan sister, lead and collaborate with many volunteers, workers, visitors, artists, and street people to create this ministry, this place of refuge called the Faithful Fools. Here they accompany, comfort, listen, and reflect, empowering the creative spirit in all of us to speak truth to the suffering that surrounds us. They believe that people are changed through personal experiences that engage the heart, and when people are changed the institutions and systems they are a part of can be changed.

On many Saturdays, they take teachers, students, lawyers, doctors, mechanics, clergy—mostly middle-class men and women, young and old, from all walks of life—onto the streets in what they call “street retreats.” They bring us together to bear witness to the deprivation that exists there and, by transforming our own perceptions, to break down

the separation between those of us who have homes and those of us who live in the streets. In this way they hope to create a pathway across a boundary that is harshly defined in our society.

If you ask them what “home” is, the Fools will say: “Most of us think that ‘home’ is a place to live. That’s partially true; to find someone a place to live requires money, persistence, a lot of faithful accompaniment, and many months, sometimes years, of working with people and agencies. But what we have learned at the Faithful Fools is that home is more than a place. When one is constantly moving or being moved, the continuity of relationships becomes home. What we often forget is that people need people, and in our present age that seems to be the scarcest resource of all.”

“Welcome All Fools” is the greeting that meets you at the front door. “We invite you in. We invite you to join with us in our personal reflections of what it means to live within a neighborhood where the face of human suffering is not masked.” ❖

—Martha Boesing

The Four Noble Truths of Suicide Prevention

by Lauri Mattenson

For Ethie (1946–1996)

Joseph set himself on fire, figuring that if he didn't die, at least the hospital would supply him with enough painkillers to enable him to try to kill himself again. Three weeks later he called the Suicide Prevention Center. He apologized for wasting my time. "I don't know why I called," he admitted. "The truth is—I don't feel much like talking." And the truth was, I had no idea what to say to him. So instead, I asked if he was open to a suggestion.

"Sure, what the hell."

"Will you take a moment and just breathe with me?"

Together, we sat up in our chairs. I asked him to inhale slowly through his nose and allow the breath to touch the place in his body that hurt the most. On the first exhale, he burst into tears.

He cried for at least four minutes without pause, and my heart rate increased as I started to worry: *Did I overstep my role as a volunteer? What do I say to him now? Am I making this worse for him?* Suddenly he stopped and said, "Goddamn. I haven't cried since I was a kid. Thanks. I think I'll be OK today." Then he hung up.

This was not a typical call, in part because I have never asked someone to breathe with me before, and in part because there's no such thing as a typical call. There is no formula, just two human beings who have reached out to pick up the phone. In a sense, we are both volunteers. Callers volunteer intimate and vulnerable thoughts; volunteers offer a ready mind and an open heart. This is not charity work. Each call is an exchange.

I would describe the Suicide Prevention Center the same way Stephen Batchelor describes Buddhism, as a "culture of awakening." I've been working on the crisis line four hours a week for the last three years. It is, for me, a practice of the present moment, an engaged form of meditative training. And like formal meditation, it cultivates compassion, acknowledges pain and contradiction, eases isolation, and reminds me to be attentive to my breath and grateful for my life. It helps wake me up.

I, too, have experienced wanting to die, but I didn't want to vanish. I wanted transformation and liberation—a confrontation with life itself. I considered taking poison or pills, cutting my neck or wrists, hanging myself, jumping off a building, driving off a cliff, driving head-on into another vehicle at top speed, provoking a police officer until he had no choice but to kill me, and shooting myself. All this made me a lower suicide risk than someone who had settled on one method and had a plan to enact it. But I didn't feel low-risk. In some ways, I felt crazy, and yet I was utterly common. According to the World Health Organization, at least a million people worldwide commit suicide annually, and 10 to 20 million make an attempt.

I learned very early to restrict my own breath and muffle my tears in order to contain my feelings. This kind of hypervigilance is exhausting. When people call the lines and say, "I just can't take it anymore," I hear that familiar, weary, breathless quality. Sometimes all it takes is one deep breath to crack you open, as it did with Joseph. But more often, people who call can't connect with their own breath. They are literally gasping for air. Norma locked herself in the bathroom with the phone after her husband had



I Invite You. Sculpture by Herb Ferris

punched her in the face; Carl was unable to leave his bed due to chronic back pain and could hardly even take a shallow breath.

Sometimes we all need to take refuge in human presence, in the voice at the other end of the line. But finding refuge does not necessarily mean finding the answer. At SPC, we practice not-knowing. This means not advising, not persuading or promoting solutions, not diagnosing, and not even reassuring.

Though caller and volunteer are not literally face-to-face, the trust between them is vital and needs to be reciprocal. The caller bares a crucial part of herself when she says aloud, "Yes, I am thinking about killing myself." Just to say it creates an entry. People often keep that thought hidden so long that releasing the burden of secrecy is transformative. Many callers cannot speak these words to their own families. And many tell me they don't want to let their psychiatrists down, so even in a therapeutic setting, they hide their urges. In a culture in which suicide is judged as both criminal and sinful, it takes great courage to reject the stigma and tell someone how you really feel. But because we are just two people on the phone, we are free of the limits of most relationships. There is only relating, not relationship with its expectations and future needs. There is just the present moment, which allows for deep listening. If you are angry, tell me you are angry. If you are sad, tell me you are sad. If you have no idea how you feel, tell me that. You do not need to soften your rage, hide your shame, or pretend that everything is OK. Sometimes it's not. I try to listen deliberately. I picture the Buddha, and his huge receptive ears.

Of all the Buddha's teachings, it's the Four Noble Truths that apply most readily to suicide prevention. They help me understand what it is I am doing when I pick up the phone. First, I acknowledge suffering. It is not my job to tell someone not to think about suicide or to convince them that life is wonderful. My first goal is to acknowledge their feelings, whatever they are. I ask, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" It sounds so obvious, but it's a question many people avoid. Even when families notice potentially suicidal behaviors (such as giving away treasured possessions, stockpiling pills, hinting at suicide or saying things like "you'll be better off when I'm gone"), they still don't ask this question. Sometimes the closest they can come is to ask, "Are you thinking of hurting yourself?" It's understandable. What parent wants to hear their child say, "Yes, I am thinking about ending my own life."

There are, of course, follow-up questions. *Do you have a plan? How would you do it? How often do you think about it? Has something happened recently to intensify these feelings? Have you tried before? Do you have any support from family or friends? Have you seen a therapist?*

Then I move into the Second Noble Truth as I see it: understand suffering. It is more important to listen

and express love and concern for the person than it is to ask any particular question. And I am always impressed by the callers' willingness to reveal themselves, to name their pain, to face it, sometimes even to cradle it. "Cradle your anger like a baby," says Thich Nhat Hanh. "Treat it with care and respect. Do not shut it out or it will return. It is there to teach you."

Sometimes it's hard to figure out the origin of someone's suffering. Consider the following conversation:

Me: What's going on?

Stephanie: Nothing.

Me: Why did you call today?

Stephanie: I don't know.

Me: Is there anything you feel like talking about?

Stephanie: I don't know.

Me: Stephanie, are you thinking about suicide?

Stephanie: (long silence and a sigh) I don't know.

Stephanie was not the only one to answer my questions in this way. Quite a few callers are unresponsive. I admit that, at first, part of me wants to say, "Well if you don't know, then neither do I. Don't waste my time." But as those thoughts arise, I try to remember what my husband tells me about aikido. The way to deal with an opposing force is to yield to it, not to resist it. Strength and understanding both require flexibility. When I said to Stephanie, "What does it feel like to not know?" she burst into tears and told me that she was making small cuts into her wrists and thighs, and was frustrated because it wasn't "working."

I try to see things from the caller's perspective so that I can travel with them, even if for a brief moment. This is toughest to do when a caller is incoherent, drunk, or mentally ill. Sometimes a caller's story makes no sense, but I recognize that they are still trying to communicate. Dave was agitated when he called. He told me his father had died, but later said his father was sitting next to him on the couch and wanted to speak with me. At some point in the conversation, I asked him, "If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?" He became gentle and was barely audible when he said, "I wish I was born taller. Then maybe people would have treated me with more respect."

Whenever I ask callers the question about changing one thing in their lives, almost everyone picks something unchangeable. "I wish I hadn't had that back surgery. The pain is worse now"; "I wish I wouldn't have cheated on my wife—it wasn't worth it"; "I wish I was never born." When I ask the follow-up question, which is to select one thing that *is* possible to change, they are often stumped. A lot of people don't believe the Third



I Invite You, detail.
Sculpture by Herb Ferris

Herb Ferris lives and works in Windsor, Vermont. He is a student of Ato Rinpoche doing Chakrasamvara practice and is active in the Shambhala Buddhist community. Web site: www.herb-ferris.com

I ask, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" It sounds so obvious, but it's a question many people avoid.

Noble Truth as Thich Nhat Hanh describes it in *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*: "Healing is possible."

In addition to acknowledging suffering, sometimes we help people redefine their views of themselves. I will never forget a conversation I had with Margaret. She had attempted suicide four times but admitted that she really didn't want to die. She just couldn't handle the pain anymore. She had been raped repeatedly by her father and uncle for almost her entire life. Her mother had died when she was an infant and she had no other family. Now that she was 16, she wanted to move out of the house but had no money or resources. She saw no other option but to end her life. She was incredibly articulate about her feelings and said she had forgiven her father because she knew he had been sexually abused by his own father. I gave her some referrals for support services and information on sexual and emotional abuse. She was amazed to find that all these services were available. When we ended the call, I told her how impressed I was by her strength.

She was shocked, and insisted, "But I'm so weak. All the suicide attempts...I cry all the time...and I have no friends."

Then I said, "My God, Margaret, you're a survivor, not a weakling! Don't you know what it takes to get through what you've been through?"

"Maybe now I do," she said.

Sometimes words are deeds. They create change and deliver freedom. But sometimes words are *not* enough. I wrote a lot of poetry in college, but it never unburdened me of my obsession with suicide. When I ask people what they do that brings relief, most people name simple practices such as watching the sunset, playing the guitar, listening to music, walking in the park, calling a friend, exercising, journaling, taking a bath, planting flowers. The Fourth Noble Truth is that we must cultivate healing. As yoga teacher Judith Lasater says, "Discipline is not about determination. It's about consistency. The point is not to clench your jaw and convince yourself you can do it. You just need to practice."

Practice begins with this moment. When a caller is spinning off into what-if land (What if she leaves me? What if I get fired? What if he finds out?), I ask them to finish one of these statements: *Right now I feel.... Right now I need.... Right now I am....* This worked for Roberto. He was 15 years old and had his father's gun in his lap when he called. His father had punched him after seeing him kiss another boy. Roberto said, "What if he kicks me out of the house? What if I can't finish high school? What if Steve [his boyfriend] never talks to me again?" His answer to my question was, "Right now, I need to tell my father I know where he keeps his gun."

James also had a gun. He and his wife got into an argument because he wanted to paint the walls of their apartment black and she wanted to paint them yellow. He said he wanted to enter darkness because it is closer to truth. But these "dark" emotions, the ones that shake things up, can also shine light on what needs attention.

In one of my lowest moments, one woman in particular helped me balance dark and light and see that suffering is not pathological—it is human. She sat with me and told me to "breathe out fear" and "breathe in strength" until I calmed down enough to tell her what was really going on. She was like a mother to me in many ways, but when she eventually took her own life, I didn't judge her for it. I understood her choice, though I'm not sure I could explain why. It just is.

"To be or not to be" is not the question. The question is: To be *and* not to be. How can we be with our suffering, our confusion, our inconsistencies, our grief, our disillusionment, our monstrosities? I think that's what Hamlet was really trying to figure out. How to be a truth-teller in the shadows of all the things that are "not-to-be." How to find our own way.

This work reminds me that I can only take refuge in the moment in front of me: the taste of cherries, the smell of the pavement after the rain, the rhythm of the human voice. Any alive encounter and the silence after it. ❖

Lauri Mattenson teaches composition and service-learning at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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"Their children are like our own children"

The Mosque That Sheltered Jews

by Annette Herskovits

There is in the center of Paris a handsome mosque with a tall slender minaret and lovely gardens. It was built in the 1920s as an expression of gratitude from France for the over half million Muslims from its African possessions who fought alongside the French in the 1914–1918 war. About 100,000 of them died in the trenches.

During World War II, when the Germans occupied France, the mosque sheltered resistance fighters and North Africans who had escaped from German POW camps. (The French recruited 340,000 North African troops into the French army in 1939.) When the French police started rounding up Jews and delivering them to the German occupiers, the mosque sheltered Jews as well, most of them children.

The Nazi program called for eliminating all Jews, of any age. More than 11,600 Jewish children under 16, including 2,000 younger than six, were deported from France to be murdered at camps in Eastern Europe. Still, 83 percent of the Jewish children living in France in 1939 survived. Most were "hidden," that is, given non-Jewish identities to keep them out of the authorities' reach. This required massive help from the French people.

Hiding children entailed a complex, extended organization. Rescuers had to get hold of the children, which often meant kidnapping them from detention centers or Jewish children's homes in full view of the Nazi occupiers. They had to procure false papers, find shelter (in foster homes, boarding schools, convents), raise funds to pay for upkeep, and send the payments without attracting attention. They had to keep records, in code, of the children's true and false names and whereabouts, bring the children to their hiding places in small groups, and visit them regularly to ascertain that they were well treated. Many who participated in this work—both Jews and non-Jews—perished.

Innumerable French citizens provided aid of a less active kind: they remained silent, even when they suspected the children were fugitives. Many of the chil-

dren were recent immigrants who spoke French with an accent and did not "look" French. A child might disclose his or her true name when surprised—or in defiance. Most at risk were very young children, who needed repeated coaching.

I know all this because I was a hidden child. When my parents were deported from Paris to Auschwitz in June of 1943, never to return, my 13-year-old sister and myself, just turned four, were in a foster home in the French countryside. With no more money coming for our keep and the danger to people sheltering Jews, our foster parents balked at keeping us. In the fall, I found myself hiding in a shabby Paris hotel room with my 17-year-old brother.

My sister became a maid for a French family. But by winter, thanks to my brother's astuteness and courage, my sister and I were taken in charge by a clandestine child rescue network, a secular organization in which Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and communist men and women participated. The organization saved

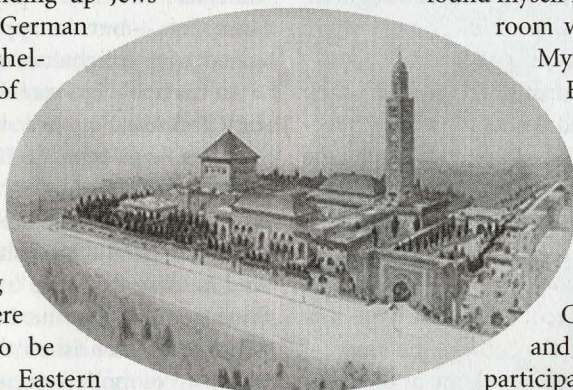
500 children, including my sister and me. As

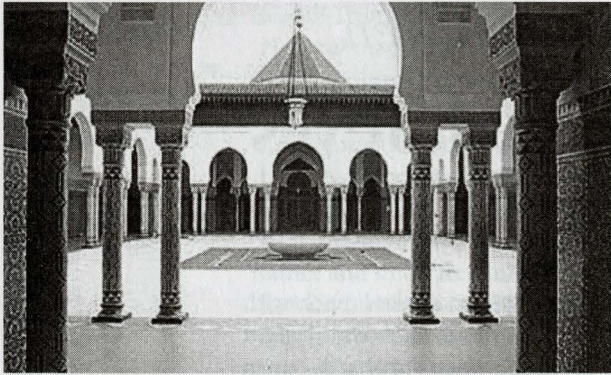
for my brother, he survived by his wits.

I learned of Muslims who helped rescue Jewish children only recently, in the newsletter of *Enfants Cachés* (Hidden Children), an association of Jews who survived the Holocaust in France as children.

The mosque-based resistance network consisted of people from Algeria's mountainous Kabylia regions. Kabyls are one of several North African groups who have preserved their Berber language and culture—Berbers inhabited North Africa before the Arabs invaded and introduced Islam in the seventh century. At least 95 percent of Algerian immigrants to France came from Kabylia. The network's Kabyls communicated in their Berber dialect, Tamazight, making infiltration almost impossible.

The soul of the network was the mosque's rector, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, a man with three nationalities—Algerian, Moroccan, and French—who moved with ease in all three worlds and whose Islam was tolerant and inclusive.





Interior courtyard of the mosque.

More than 1,700 people are thought to have found short-term shelter in apartments on or near the grounds of the mosque. Benghabrit set up an alert system that allowed fugitives to disappear

swiftly in case of a raid—if necessary to the prayer room's women's section, where men were normally not admitted. He wrote numerous false birth certificates making Jewish children into Muslims.

Access to Paris's sewers directly beneath the mosque's grounds provided an escape path, as did the mosque's proximity to the city's central wine market on the Seine, where barges laden with wine barrels came and went. One woman recalled being taken out of Paris on a barge; a Kabyl at the helm took fugitives concealed in his cargo to the South of France, where they could be smuggled to Algeria or Spain.

The French League Against Racism and Anti-semitism has asked Israel's Yad Vashem Institute to recognize Benghabrit as one of "The Righteous among the Nations," a title honoring non-Jews who risked their lives to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Benghabrit would be the first Muslim to earn this distinction.

* * *

In these times of mutual hatred, a hatred that is sustained by distorted views of the "other," the story of Muslims saving Jewish children struck me as one Jews and Arabs especially should hear. This history strengthens my sense that mutuality and harmony make up the natural fabric of human relations. Division and cruelty are like torn places in that fabric. Surely, at certain times and places the tearing can be so thorough that it seems the fabric is not there. But that is an illusion.

My friend Mathis Szykowski, also a Holocaust survivor and a hidden child, testifies to this: "It must be said and repeated that in any account of survival, there are many people who will help, at great risk to themselves, people who appear almost mysteriously, whom you trust instinctively. No one can survive such circumstances by themselves. So it becomes obvious

that in life as in death, we are all interdependent." A human being whose mind has not been distorted by ideology will instinctively help another in danger, especially a child.

Again and again over the

years, I have heard stories of help that appeared unexpectedly, almost mysteriously, during those dark days. A friend recalls that when she was 11, living in Czechoslovakia, her parents were taken away by the Gestapo. By chance, she and her nine-year-old sister had been left behind, so they went to Gestapo headquarters themselves and told the guard they wanted to be reunited with their parents. The guard said "Go away!" several times, speaking softly so as not to be overheard, until they left. Somehow they survived. The SS guard had saved their lives.

Enmities between peoples come and go depending on intricate historical, psychological, and economic forces. Political powers will conceal or twist reality to suit their own ends. For most of the 1,400 years since Islam's birth, Jews and Muslims lived in relative harmony in Arab lands. Like the Christians, Jews were *dhimmis* (protected people): Islam protected their lives, property, and right to worship. Jews enjoyed no such rights in the Christian world until the French Revolution. To be sure, *dhimmis* were placed below Muslims—they had to pay a special tax, could not ride horses, etc.—but the application of these restrictions varied; with enlightened rulers, the Jews prospered.

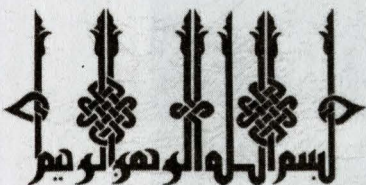
In his book *Le Passé d'une Discorde: Juifs et Arabes du VIIe Siècle à nos Jours* (*The Days Before the Breach: Jews and Arabs from the 17th Century to Today*), Israeli historian Michel Abitbol writes about "the historical drama which, in less than half a century, ended two thousand years of Jewish life in the Arab countries." And he describes the "resplendent Judeo-Arab civilization, one whose inexhaustible intellectual and religious riches nourished the entire Jewish world until the dawn of modern times."

* * *

On July 16, 1942, Paris police set out to arrest 28,000 Jews on orders of the French Vichy collaborationist government. They had in hand names and addresses, obtained from a census of Jews the Germans had ordered soon after they occupied France. That day and the next, the police fanned out through the city, packing the arrested Jews into requisitioned city buses. They found only 13,000—largely because some police officers had spread the word ahead of time and many Jews had fled. More than 4,000 children aged 2 to 16 were among those arrested.

On the second day, a tract was circulated through the miserable hotels that were home to immigrant Algerian workers. The tract, in Tamazight, was read aloud to the mostly illiterate men: "Yesterday at dawn, the Jews of Paris were arrested. The old, the women, and the children. In exile like ourselves, workers like ourselves. They are our brothers. Their children are like our own children. The one who encounters one of his

(continued on page 25)



Making Myself at Home

by Susan Moon

Sometimes I wonder if the old brown-shingle house in Berkeley that has been my home for most of the last 32 years makes it harder for me to find a home in the dharma. I'm thinking about Layman P'ang and his wife and daughter, devout Ch'an practitioners in eighth-century (C.E.) China. When all three of them attained the Way, Layman P'ang gave away their house to be used for a temple, and they put all their possessions in a boat and sank it in the river. Then they wandered about the country, supporting themselves by weaving bamboo baskets.

Unlike the P'angs, I am currently engaged in an attic reorganization project, sorting through possessions: several boxes labeled "spiritual books" for which I have no shelf space, a stray pair of crutches, an extra Waring blender, mittens in mothballs, rug pads, bookbinding equipment, my grown sons' collections of superhero comics, bottlecaps, souvenir spoons, and on and on. (As a homeless person wrote in *Street Sheet*, "Home is where people lock up their stuff while they go out to buy some more.") I was upset when my mother, doing an attic reorganization project of her own after I was grown, threw away my collection of *Little Lulu* comics. So even though I feel burdened by possessions, I'm not ready to sink these boxes in the Berkeley Marina. And besides, Layman P'ang didn't give away his house until *after* he had attained the Way. Perhaps Complete Perfect Enlightenment will hold off a little longer and not come to see me until I've finished organizing my stuff.

There are different kinds of homes. We each have a very small home that's exactly the right size for us—the home of our body—and nobody else lives there (unless we are pregnant). And then we all have the really big home of this particular planet—a home we share with just about everybody we know. But we also need a middle-sized home, in between the big one and the little one.

In ancient times, Buddhist monks were called home-leavers because they renounced their attachment to home and family in order to be at home in the dharma. "Cloud-and-water monks," they moved about as fluidly as clouds and water. But even Buddhist monks need some kind of physical refuge from stormy weather. Dharma doesn't keep the rain off your head.

My house is big, my roof is wide, and I've always shared it with others. I can't afford to live in it alone, and I wouldn't want to. I got the house, with the help of my parents, when I became a single mother, in order to have an extended family of sorts. After my

children grew up and left home, I continued to rent rooms to friends and relatives. People would come and go because their lives changed, and I was forever reconstituting my temporary family in the house. I began to feel like a snail with a shell that was too big. Running a boarding house was not what I wanted to be doing with my life.

And so, four years ago, I packed up my personal stuff in the attic, rented out my house, and made plans to move to a sort of retreat center in Sonoma County that was created and managed by a dear friend and elder, a Benedictine monk, in the country,



Photo by Susan Moon

but within commuting distance of Berkeley—a place I had already come to know and love. My friend had vacated the main house because the stairs had become hard for him to manage, and he had built himself a little ground-floor apartment annex to his library. I was going to live in the main house and sleep in a little tower bedroom.

About a week before I was to move in, while I was visiting family on the East Coast, disaster struck: my monk friend called me and said, "The house burned down yesterday."

"Oh, no!" I said.

"Naked we came into this world," he said—and I could hear him smiling—"and naked we'll go out."

I came back to Berkeley, and I was as close to homeless as I've ever been. I didn't know where I was going to go. I felt as though I had been shot from a cannon into outer space, and I was floating up there in the blue, unexpectedly elated, unencumbered, liberated

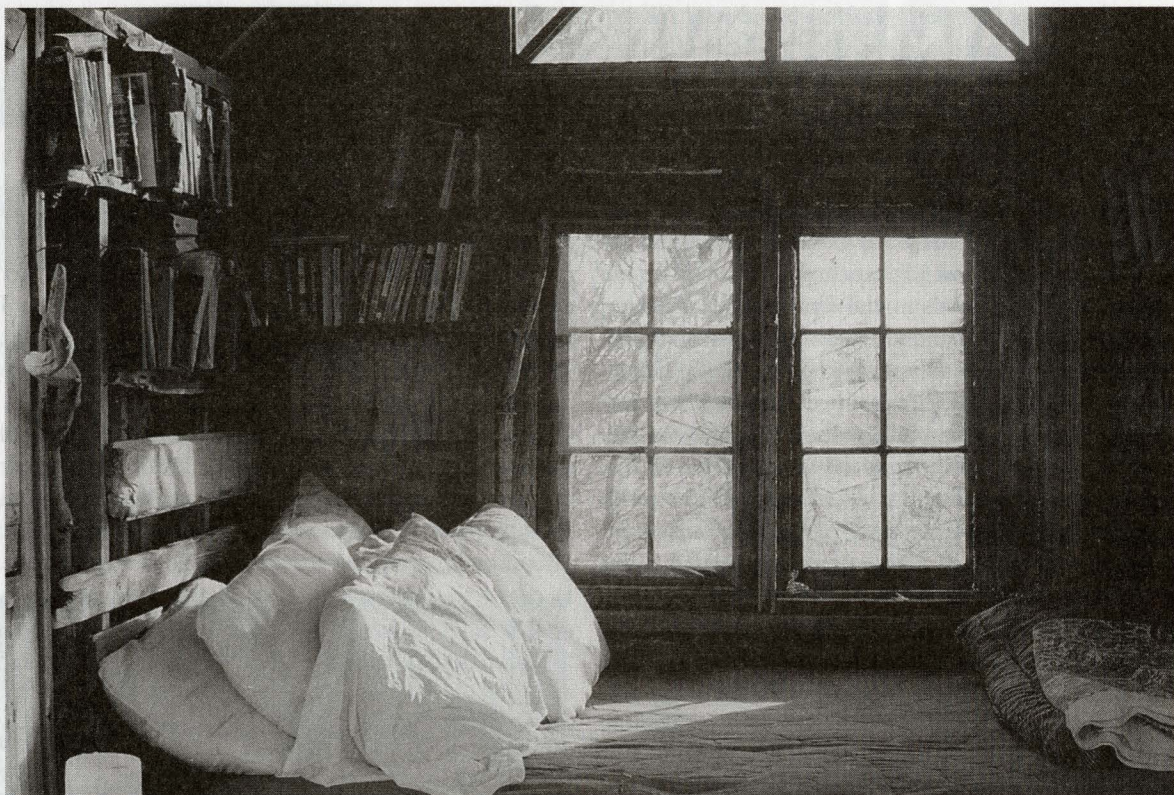


Photo by Susan Moon

from gravity. But I wasn't really homeless—I knew that I was going to land somewhere or other. Friends and relatives came forward, and I had my pick of warm beds.

For the next three years I bounced around, trying out different homes. At first, I went to the retreat place anyway, and lived in a wine barrel that had been converted into a guest cabin. It was lovely and it smelled delicious, but it was supremely impractical for the long term. No place to put my file cabinet.

The last place I lived during my cloud-and-water phase was at Muir Beach, in a one-room flat looking out over the ocean. I loved being in the country. Lying in bed at night, I could hear the sound of the waves. In the morning, sitting at my desk, I saw hawks drifting over the opposite hill. I went for walks on the beach, collected pebbles, watched the fog drift, picked blackberries. I sometimes visited friends next door, to watch the ball game or have dinner. It was “paradise,” as occasional visitors from town would exclaim. A friend gave me a wooden sign that I put on the mantel: “A DAY AT THE BEACH IS WORTH A MONTH IN TOWN.”

But at first, I had a hard time just being alone, especially in the evenings. I didn't like coming home and having nobody there. I was afraid—not of a robber but of the abyss that unmitigated aloneness could sometimes be. There was nobody to reflect me back to myself, nobody to tell me I was real. That feeling changed during the time I lived there. I learned to

enjoy my own company more, and I stopped being *afraid* to be alone. This was a valuable lesson.

I also learned that I do better not living in such isolation. It was hard for me not to be accountable to anybody at all. I wanted to be part of a system that's larger than myself. I had this at work, but not at home. There wasn't anybody who needed me to drive them to the bus stop and there wasn't anybody to put the kettle on for. My daily life was structured according to my own whim. That can be nice for a short period of time, but I don't think human beings are really meant to live that way. I need to feel that my life is interwoven with others, and that what I do matters to somebody else and what somebody else does matters to me.

And so, though I loved it there, I also knew that it wasn't where I would live until I died. I'm getting older and older, and the time is coming when I won't have so much energy, and I began to worry: “Well, this is nice now, but it's really too small, too far away from family and community. Where will I go for the last long haul, when will I figure it out, and how will I get there?”

After three years of wandering from one place to the next, living like a student, I moved back into my house in Berkeley, with two old friends, just a year ago. I had been looking for the perfect home, the perfect combination of solitude and community, country and city. I wanted everything. But in the course of my wanderings, I finally got it that if you live in a place where the surf sings you to sleep at night, you can't

walk to Black Oak Books when you get up in the morning. Maybe it's developmental. I finally said: *Oh, OK, so this is my life!* I put down some fantasies and picked up some reality. At my advanced age, I grew up a little more. I took the middle way. And I realized how fortunate I am to have this home.

We all need a sense of belonging and we need a sense of being at home. It doesn't have to be a house like children draw in pictures with a pointed roof and two eyes for windows and a mouth for a door. But a spot on the ground that is a refuge—we want that.

My friend Jarvis Masters is a prisoner on San Quentin's death row. For over 20 years, his home has been a cell that's about six by eight feet. It's his living room, his bedroom, his kitchen, his bathroom, his everything. And he's in that home all day long every day, except for the two times a week when he gets to go out on the yard for exercise, and except for the times he gets visitors. He has made this cell his home. He has pictures on the wall. The bed consists of a mattress on a concrete slab, but Jarvis keeps the mattress on the floor and uses the concrete slab as his desk. He sits on the mattress and spreads his papers on the slab. The hot water tap in the sink is hot enough that he can make soup from packages of ramen. Even in that alienating environment, the need to make a home finds expression.

When we ask, "Where do you live?" we mean, "Where do you sleep at night?" But I want where I live to be where I really *live*. Now I ask myself this question: "Where am I most alive?" And I remind myself that wherever I happen to be, that *is* where I'm alive. That better be where I'm living.

Any of us could become homeless. Homeless isn't so far away. Even the homes we make in family and community are impermanent. The people we love can be taken away from us by a faraway job, death, divorce, misunderstanding.

Here's the bottom line: "Home is where the heart is." Home is the people you love and the place you love. Home is also where the heart is literally, biologically. Home is inside me, between the ribs. That's my home. I take it with me wherever I go. So I continue to live this seeming paradox: I need a stable home and sense of belonging for this mortal body, and yet I am practicing (and I do mean practicing—I haven't mastered it yet) being at home wherever I happen to be, and with whoever else happens to be there too. I take refuge in the dharma—wherever I am. And I'm still planning to get rid of all that stuff in the attic in case I want to live in a wine barrel again. ❖

Susan Moon is the editor of Turning Wheel and of the new anthology Not Turning Away: The Practice of Engaged Buddhism (Shambhala), available at your local bookstore.

Mosque, continued from page 22

children must give that child shelter and protection for as long as misfortune—or sorrow—lasts. Oh, man of my country, your heart is generous."

We can't know how much help these men were able to give.

* * *

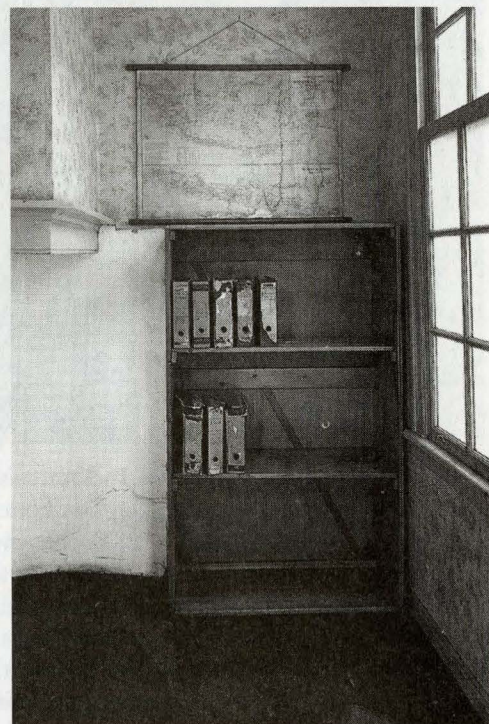
Most of the children captured in that July raid were taken with their mothers to camps near Paris. There, French police used truncheons and water hoses to separate mothers from the younger children: the adolescents and their mothers were taken to Drancy (the French camp from where trains departed for the east) and then deported to Auschwitz. The 3,500 younger children left behind had been taken on the initiative of Vichy's prime minister, Pierre Laval—the Germans had not requested it. The Vichy government waited for Berlin to authorize their deportation. When approval came, the children were packed into boxcars, each with a few adults. All were killed in the gas chambers on arrival.

The thought of such moments of ultimate darkness used to obscure the entire world for me. As I have pieced together the many stories I have heard and read over the years, I became able to simultaneously see light shining in many places. The story of the Muslims who saved Jewish children is one that affirmed that vision.

The words of the Kabyl tract read to poor immigrant men taught me to trust whispers of unity: Those dead children are like myself. They are like my own children. So are the Israeli children killed in bombed-out buses. So are Iraqi children lost as "collateral damage" and the million Palestinian children who every day must struggle with fear—of Israeli soldiers with machine guns, tanks, bulldozers, helicopters, rockets—and the many dead and wounded among them. ❖

[With gratitude to Derri Berkani, whose film *Une Resistance Inconnu: La Mosquée de Paris* introduced me to this story.]

Annette Herskovits writes on politics and human rights (including Turning Wheel's "Indra's Net" column) and practices at the Berkeley Zen Center.



From a postcard: Behind this bookcase is the secret entrance to Anne Frank's hiding place in Amsterdam.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Refuge and Refugees

by Polly Jones

For many young people growing up in the West, notions of “home,” “shelter,” and “refuge” revolve around family connections, property, prosperity, and success. Although I am a white, English, middle-class young woman, my notion of “belonging” is quite different.

I grew up in multicultural East London, which has the largest Bengali (the name for both the language and people of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India) community outside Bangladesh. At school, most of my friends were Muslims from the Sylhet district in Northern Bangladesh; I learned to speak the Sylheti dialect on the playground. Later I sang folksongs in Bengali with a Bangladeshi folk group. Over time, I developed a longing to visit this country that I felt an indirect connection to.



Polly Jones (right) and
Tangchangya friend

My Work In South Asia

In 1994, I volunteered for a year as an English teacher at Bodhicariya School and Orphanage in Calcutta, for refugee tribal children from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a highland area bordering India and Myanmar (Burma) in southeast Bangladesh. The CHT is the homeland of 11 different indigenous communities, covering more than 5,000 square miles—roughly 10 percent of Bangladesh—an area of mostly low-quality land, in contrast to the very fertile alluvial plains in the rest of Bangladesh.

This volunteer teaching job was my first journey away from the UK alone. I thought I was quite prepared for the experience. I knew I would have to adjust to the simple way of life in a village with no electricity or running water, but I found myself in a community I knew nothing about, made up of Buddhists, not Muslims. They spoke Chakma (the name for both the language and the largest indigenous group from CHT) instead of Bengali. They didn't look the same as my Bengali friends; the women wore their own hand-woven textiles instead of saris.

Since my childhood, I had heard that Bangladesh was a beautiful country, but also one of the poorest places in the world, frequently hit by devastating floods and cyclones. I was unprepared, however, to learn about the another side of Bangladesh: the continued government repression of indigenous communities.

I learned to speak Chakma, and this gave me direct insight into people's lives. I have become accepted as a part of the CHT community and have grown attached to the way of life of these tribal people. I now feel much more at home there than I do in the West.

The contrast between CHT and the West is stark. Recently, while in CHT, I saw a BBC program discussing what American kids wanted for their future. I had been asking members of a CHT village the same question only an hour before. The American kids said they wanted a big house, a fancy car, the latest designer clothes, and a nice family that stays together. In contrast, the villagers I spoke to wanted safety, secure jobs, schools for their children, access to health facilities, and enough money to pay for the next meal.

I am currently working in conjunction with Shishu Koruna Sangha (SKS), a Buddhist children's welfare organization established in 1986 by human rights activists, Buddhist monks, and education workers in response to the Bangladeshi refugee situation in north-east India. We hope to establish a traditional herbal medicine clinic and vocational training institute for young people from CHT. (See the “Seeds of Change” section on p. 29 for more information on this project.)

For the last two years I have also been photographing and interviewing indigenous people in the CHT for a research program about social exclusion and extreme poverty (in association with Manchester University in England and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies). I ask people about their culture, their history,

and how they, as indigenous and mainly Buddhist people, relate to notions of home and citizenship in a Muslim country in which “development” projects have damaged the ecosystem and caused mass dislocation and marginalization of native people.

The Jumma People and Traditional Agriculture

Jumma people are so called because of their use of the traditional slash-and-burn cultivation technique, *jum*. There are nearly 600,000 Jummas—mostly Buddhists, with some Hindus, Christians, and animists—in the CHT. Traditionally, entitlement to land comes for Jummas as a result of hard work. If a Jumma family works on a piece of land, nurtures it, and lives off its produce, the land is registered in their name (although the land remains a communal asset—it doesn’t actually belong to an individual in the sense of land title). After 10 to 12 years of jum cultivation, the land is left to rest for 5 to 10 years and the cultivators shift to a new location to start the process of clearing and planting again. This crop rotation system, which comes from a Buddhist ideology of not taking more than you need, maintains the fertility of the land. The nature of shifting jum cultivation also demonstrates the Buddhist truth of impermanence.

This traditional system of farming began to be dismantled in the 19th century, when the British separated CHT from the plains. They didn’t approve of the practice of jum cultivation, which they said was primitive and environmentally unsound. The British encouraged plow cultivation, and European entrepreneurs took over ownership of the most fertile land for teak, tea, coffee, and orange plantations. CHT was opened up to Bengali settlers from the plains, who came to plow or lease land for commercial purposes. The Jumma were permitted to cultivate only a third of the original jum land in the traditional way. Today, jum cultivation is becoming increasingly difficult, as land is scarce.

CHT Under Pakistani Rule: Monoculture and Job Discrimination

After Partition in 1947, when the Pakistani government took over the CHT, intense exploitation of natural resources—including commercial logging and monoculture teak plantations—began to transform the CHT. A paper mill was established in 1953 with \$13 million in aid, including \$4 million from the World Bank. The mill created 10,000 jobs, but only 200 went to Jummas, and those were mostly menial positions.

Pellamoni Chakma, a contract laborer, told me:

“They [the Bengalis] take the powerful jobs, and the best parts of our land... They are not interested in helping us progress. It is better for them if we remain impoverished and desperate for work. They pay us a low wage because they know we can’t turn down the

offer of any wage. My salary is lower than a Bengali doing the same work, but if I didn’t have that job, what situation would my family be in? If we say anything about salaries being low, we put ourselves at risk of losing our jobs.”

Lack of Affordable Medical Care

The village of Tangchangyapara, inhabited by Tangchangyas—one of the tribal groups in CHT, now numbering only 50,000—is three hours by gas-powered boat from the nearest town. This village, like others in remote areas, has no running water, sanitation system, health facility, electricity, or phones—not even a local shop and certainly no schools.

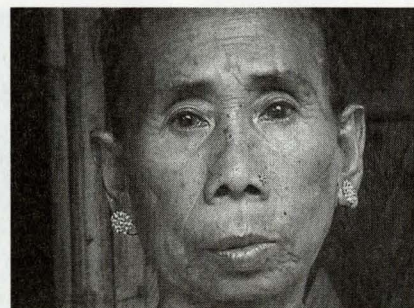
Upon arrival, I was approached by a 12-year-old girl. She hadn’t met anyone with white skin before. “Why are you a funny color?” she asked, “Is it because you are sick?” I told her I came from London, but she hadn’t ever heard of England or Europe. I asked her if she had heard of Dhaka, the capital of her country. She hadn’t. She said she hadn’t been to school so she didn’t know about such things. I asked her if she knew what Coca-Cola was. She nodded with a smile. She said she lived with her parents and a little brother who was sick with malaria. She also had malaria. I asked if her brother had seen a doctor but she told me no, her mother was caring for him.

What would happen if her brother—or anyone in a serious medical situation—needed medical attention? An elder of the village told me:

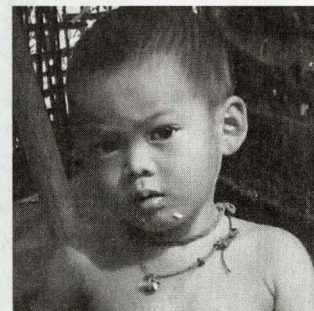
“If any of us fall sick we have to seek assistance from a doctor in Rangamati, a day’s journey away.... If it is critical, we get a doctor to come here to our village, but it is very expensive—around 900 *taka* (\$15). We have to pay him and hire the boat to bring him here and take him back. It is difficult because the average family income is 100 *taka* (\$1.65) per day. There is no way to earn lots of money here.... Sometimes, there is no time to get a doctor.... My eldest son died last year, from diarrhea and a sick stomach.”

The Kaptai Dam: Tourist Attraction or Disaster?

Tangchangyapara, like most of the villages in the Rangamati District, is surrounded by water from the Kaptai Lake. In the 1960s, the Pakistani government received aid (particularly from the U.S.) to help industrialize East Pakistan. When the Kaptai Dam was built, land and homes were submerged by water. Kaptai Lake is now promoted as one of the top tourist attractions in Bangladesh. The state tourist magazine proudly announces that “on a moonlit night, the submerged Royal Palace can be seen.” But the disappearance of the treasured Chakma Palace was a huge psychological blow to the community. During my first



Jumma woman
Photo by Polly Jones



Jumma child
Photo by Polly Jones

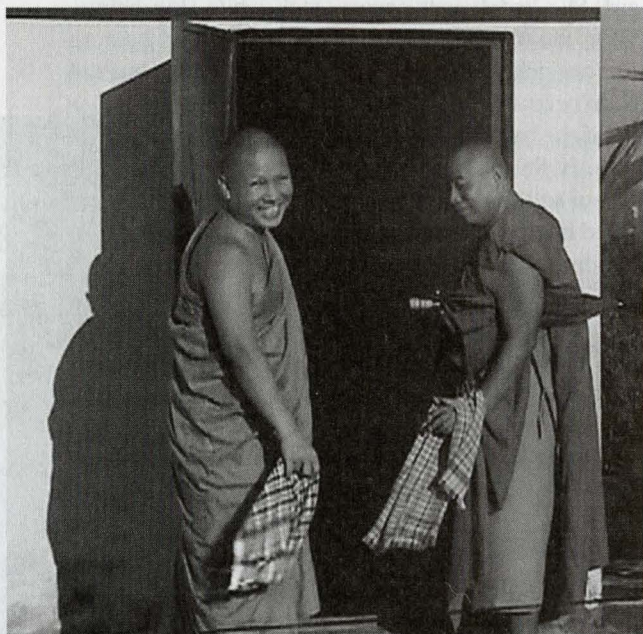
visit to the Hill Tracts, I was admiring the beauty of the scenery while crossing the lake at sunset on a boat trip with some Chakma friends. One told me,

“This lake that you find so beautiful was made from the tears of our people. Below this water lie our villages, our homes, our agricultural land. Even our Chakma Palace is below the water. We lost everything.”

Pushbomala Chakma, an 80-year-old woman, described what happened:

“The water slowly covered our land. First it covered our agricultural land where we used to grow rice—it flooded the fields, and then more and more water came. What could we do? We couldn’t stop the water.”

The people from Tangchangyapara cleared new areas of the forest to make homes and villages. None of the



Jumma Buddhist monks. Photo by Polly Jones

villagers received compensation for the land they had lost. They survived by working as daily laborers and collecting wood and vegetables from the forest to sell in markets. On a good day they could earn about 70 taka (roughly \$1.17).

Migration and Military Occupation in CHT

Suresh Chakma, a 78-year-old cultivator, told me:

“It was better for us when the British were here. We were protected by special rules. Even under Pakistan it was better—we were independent. When the CHT became part of Bangladesh, everything was taken. These hills that were once the land of Jummas aren’t for us now. Slowly the Bengalis have taken over everything.”

In 1971, after the Bangladesh Liberation War resulted in Bangladesh’s independence, the Jummas

hoped for political recognition and some form of autonomy within the state of Bangladesh. Instead, between 1974 and 1984, the government brought 400,000 Muslim Bengali settlers from the plains into CHT, an area with little cultivatable land remaining after the construction of the Kaptai Dam. The government stationed the major part of the Bangladesh army in CHT. This military occupation of CHT has obstructed political and economic development and resulted in gross human rights abuses.

There have been 11 major massacres in CHT since the late 1970s. Thousands of Jummas have been killed, as reported by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Survival International. Manushi Chakma told me what happened in her village:

“When the Bengalis arrived, they were accompanied by the army. They directed us to leave the village. Otherwise, they said, there would be trouble. They said that Bengali families would be moving onto our land, that the land didn’t belong to us anymore. They were pointing guns at us.... Some of my neighbors said they wouldn’t leave. Many of them were killed when the Bengalis took over our village.”

In the mid 1980s, a tribal resistance group called Shanti Bahini started fighting back against the Bengali settlers and the army. Horrific counterattacks ensued. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there were many reports of killings, torture, rape, arson, forced relocation, and cultural and religious oppression of the Jummas. As many as 55,000 Jummas fled over the border into northeast India.

For many people, the experience of fleeing from attacks was often as harrowing as the assaults. Kamini Chakma, a middle-aged cultivator, recalled his escape following the attack on his village in 1986:

“We had to run through the jungle for days with no food or water.... The army chased us.... We saw people being killed.... there were cut-up bodies everywhere. I left our village with my wife, but we had to split up and travel separately. My son was at school at the time of the attack, and we couldn’t find him.... It took seven days for me to reach the refugee camp in Tripura. I searched for my wife and son.... Eventually I found someone who told me my wife had died of exhaustion before she reached the border of India. I kept up my search for my son. I heard stories of the school being burned down and students and teachers and Buddhist monks being killed, but still I kept hope I would find my son. Today, I am still waiting for news about him.”

The 1997 CHT Peace Accord: Broken Promises

The 1997 Peace Accord between the Bangladeshi government and CHT tribal leaders promised that refugees could return to their original land in Bangladesh. However, very few of the agreements that

were set down in the Peace Accord have been kept. Only a small number of refugee families were able to move back onto their land, since in many cases it was now inhabited by Bengali settlers from the plains. Kamini Chakma told me what happened when he returned to Bangladesh after 11 years as a refugee in India:

“I found my home occupied by Bengalis. We had been promised that our land would be returned to us if we returned to Bangladesh, but the Bengalis refused to vacate my property. The army just instructed us to move into the transit camp. I stayed there for 2 years waiting to move back onto the land that has been in my family for generations.”

Kamini Chakma finally gave up hope. He has moved to a different area of CHT and is working as a laborer on someone else’s land. The situation in CHT remains unstable and uncertain, and it is aggravated by continuing settlement of Bengali Muslims into CHT.

Although they are not as frequent as they were in the 1980s and 1990s, violent attacks continue to take place throughout the Hill Tracts. As one Chakma man explained to me:

“There are no human rights for Jummas from the Hill Tracts. Nothing happens when wrongs are committed against us. Last month, the homes of 400 Jumma families and a Buddhist temple were looted and burned down by Bengalis. People were killed and girls were raped. What will happen to those who lost everything? They are living in the forest now with no food, no home. Where is the justice in that? Who will listen to us?”

These disturbing experiences have had an impact on people’s sense of citizenship in different ways:

“How can I be Bangladeshi? I have no connection with Bengalis or Bangladesh. They look down on us. They threaten and criticize us. They say we should wear saris and dress like them, that we should speak Bengali, not Chakma. They say the food we cook has a bad smell. How can I feel any connection with them when they treat us like that? How can they be ‘my people’? I am not Bangladeshi; I am a Jumma woman of the Hills.”

Others are indifferent to the political borders that surround them:

“I have always lived here in the same village, yet when I was young my country was India; when I was middle-aged it was Pakistan, and now that I am old it is Bangladesh—what does it mean to me? Yes I am a Bangladeshi citizen, but to me all that means is that I live in a country called Bangladesh.”

Seeds of Change

The CHT region is known for its wild forest resources, and is one of the most biodiverse areas of the Indian subcontinent, rich in rare medicinal plants.

Jummas traditionally depend on herbal medicine practices. Sadly, these traditions are being practiced less and less frequently. A coalition of Buddhist and human rights groups has launched a program to provide training and jobs for Jumma people while also improving the health of the Jumma population.

Our plan is to reintroduce a program of traditional herbal medicine and primary health care to people who desperately need it. We plan first to train young people from the Bodhicariya School, who will then offer training programs for villagers and farmers in remote areas, in the propagation of medicinal plants, primary health care, and some basic pharmacy for the management of common health complaints.

We need support to cover the cost of setting up and running this program. Any donations would be greatly appreciated.

Through my work in CHT, I have found a path that has given me a new and meaningful direction. I hope this article will help generate interest in protecting and preserving a rich indigenous culture that is currently disappearing in Bangladesh. ❖

Polly Jones is a 29-year-old postgraduate from East London. For a decade she has been working with indigenous people in Bangladesh and India, researching their traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices. She can be reached at <pollyjones@bodytree.org>.

How to Donate:

You can donate online (preferred) at <http://www.bodytree.org>. If you don’t have Internet access, send checks to The Daneford Trust, 45-47 Blythe Street, London E2 6LN. E-mail: dfdtrust@aol.com. More information about Daneford Trust is on the Website above. If you write a check, indicate that the donation is for the SKS School and the training program in traditional herbal medicine.



Weaving traditional clothes. Photo by Polly Jones

Chittagong Hill Tracts Chronology

- △ 1860: CHT annexed by British
- △ 1947: Partition of India. CHT became a part of Muslim East Pakistan, even though the people of CHT had opted to become a part of India. First migration into India of non-Muslim indigenous people concerned about their rights in East Pakistan.
- △ 1957–1963: Construction of the Kaptai Hydroelectric Dam, which flooded Jumma lands.
- △ 1971: Bangladesh Liberation War and independence of Bangladesh.
- △ 1974–1984: Bangladesh military occupation and Bengali Muslim settlements in CHT.
- △ 1980s–1990s: Continued fighting between government forces and Shanti Bahini (tribal resistance group).
- △ 1997: Truce. CHT Peace Accord signed between the Bangladesh government and the tribal political party.

Cooperative Housing: The Next Generation

by Sam Bernier

My wood-framed house is made of trees from wild forests. The water I flush down my toilet once gurgled in Sierra streams. The light I'm writing by is smoke out of a power plant's stack. The asphalt shingles on my roof are a product of the petroleum industry.

I push myself to live differently: to consume less, love more, and most importantly, to be a conscious creator of that which will come to be.

Many of my friends share an interest in creating sustainable living space. As young people transitioning between school and the working world, we find ourselves at a tipping point. We don't have families, mortgages, or much debt. We yearn for freedom and meaning amid the confusion and contradiction which is this modern world. We don't want to compromise our ideals and perpetuate the status quo; yet in order to be part of this world, a certain amount of compromise is necessary. We lack models of what simple, sustainable living looks like, and yet we long for it. Like each new generation, we envision new structures and new systems, and we attempt to enact them.

A small number of my peers and I have become deeply involved in creating cooperative housing. As this movement matures, it has the potential to open minds to different ways of living in our world.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the student co-op movement began. At first, these co-ops were established to provide students with affordable meal plans. Later, they evolved into residential co-ops. Students organized themselves to buy a house together, generally with the help of someone willing to front the down payment. The members of the co-op then paid the mortgage with their rents and worked on the house themselves in order to cut costs. As their organizations gained equity and paid off mortgages, profits were invested in expanding the co-op movement. Some of these fledgling cooperatives were assisted by university and government grants. In this way, student housing cooperatives grew on many college campuses in the U.S. and Canada.

Knowing that community is important to me, I decided to join a housing co-op when I went to college. The environment was incredibly stimulating, socially and intellectually. I lived with 50 creative, knowledgeable peers. We pooled our financial resources to buy large quantities of local organic food inexpensively.

Cooking and cleaning chores were divided up by the group so they could be done more efficiently.

Through those years I grew tremendously as a person; I found the freedom to unfold my own character. Yet, after graduation, we were forced to move on to make room for the next generation of co-ops. And so we set out to expand this system into the adult world.

A year ago, a group of us formed Cooperative Roots, an organization dedicated to creating affordable, sustainable, cooperative housing in the San Francisco East Bay Area. Currently our project is pure chaos: 13 people in a medium-sized single-family residence that is being transformed into a 15-room cooperative village. Building materials, bicycles, dirt, and tools clog our yard, leaving a narrow path between the front gate and back cottage, where the 13 of us share a mobile home-sized kitchen and bathroom while we remodel the main house. Ninety percent of the construction work is being done by members of our group.

The house has a huge yard with perfect sun exposure and dozens of producing fruit trees. We hope it will provide us with a large percentage of our fruit and vegetables year round. Additionally, we are designing and building a solar thermal system for both domestic hot water and radiant floor heating, and investing in a photovoltaic system, which will supply most of our future electrical needs.

Today's housing co-ops have learned from the communal living movement of the '60s and '70s. Now we see more clearly some of the factors that contribute to long-lasting communities. There is general consensus today that the following six ingredients are important prerequisites for cooperative housing:

- 1) solid, inclusive decision-making processes
- 2) a common vision and vision statement
- 3) a good idea of the resources, information, skills, and tasks that will be needed, and a willingness to either learn these skills or hire them out
- 4) clear written agreements concerning property ownership, and how to invest in and divest from the community
- 5) conscious effort to build good communication skills and work on conflict resolution
- 6) careful selection of new members who can work within the vision and agreements of the community.

(continued on next page)

Habits Are No Refuge

by Jenny Grill

After several years of sitting, I have begun to realize that I've been fooling myself about what it means to take refuge in the dharma. When the going gets tough for me, taking refuge often means sticking to a familiar groove, avoiding unpleasantness, and resting in what I perceive to be the "comfort" of dharma. But as any meditation practitioner will tell you, when the going gets tough...well, the going gets tough. Immediately turning to our favorite habits is understandable, and it's a good way to hide, but it is not much of a refuge.

There is no place to hide. Refuge cannot be predicted. In fact, the more I practice, the more profoundly I understand that this "don't-know place" is exactly where I *can* take refuge. But how do I do that?

Recently I went on vacation for two weeks, and like an earnest Buddhist, I brought my cushion with me. For the whole two weeks I didn't sit. And for once,

instead of feeling guilty, I simply let the idea go and left the cushion in the trunk. I knew by the third day of this trip that sitting was not going to happen. It was hard not to feel guilty; I had to work at it.

Once home again, I resumed sitting in my regular morning time. Within minutes, I became aware of the fact that I create a separate personality when I sit. I was stunned to come face to face with "this is Jenny when she sits." Once I began to see things as they are, everything felt fresh. The light bulb of dharma came on, and for a moment I floated with no expectations. How had this happened? And then I realized that for two weeks my practice had been something new: not-sitting. This had allowed me to be more honest and to see that my practice had become predictable and stale. I had neglected to open the window and let fresh air in. I think I was wary of what that fresh air might do to me.

Being open to things we can't even imagine is key. Pema Chödrön teaches this in *When Things Fall Apart*: "That's what the dharma is all about; turning all our habits around, reversing the process of how we make everything so solid, reversing the wheel of samsara." Most of us ride this wheel of samsara in a similar way. We think we're resting in the dharma, but often, as I found by not-sitting, we're resting in habit. It's as if we have all placed our orders for milk: two bottles, every morning, on the doorstep. We think we know what we're getting. And maybe one day we get skim milk instead of whole milk. This is the kind of unexpected we can handle. But then another morning we get a beehive, puddles of rainwater, a brochure for auto detailing, perhaps even a bucket of fire. And then once in a while, it's back to milk.

How do we respond to all of these deliveries? Personally, I used to feel upset when I didn't get milk. But what I am slowly learning is that my ability to take refuge in the dharma comes from developing a grateful heart and an appetite for the unexpected—not just for the milk. ❖

Jenny Grill lives in Tallahassee, Florida, where she practices Zen and is a member of BPE.

Co-ops, continued from previous page

Our project has gone out of its way to address these issues in the hope of enduring as long as possible.

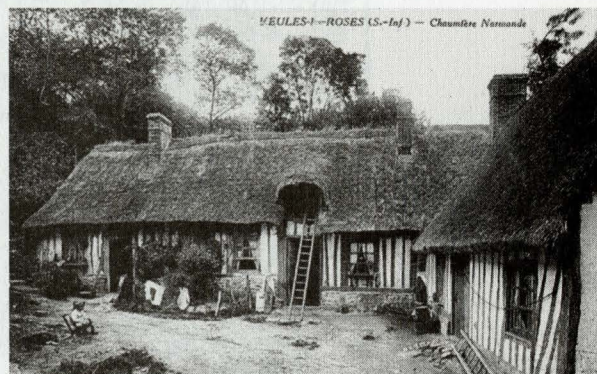
When our co-op is established, we would like to be a public model of sustainable, urban community living. We plan on holding regular workshops and tours to share what we've learned about communal property ownership and simple, cooperative lifestyles. We hope to demonstrate that it's possible to live in the San Francisco Bay Area without falling into the trap of extreme busyness. We also hope to use the equity we gain in our current property to start more cooperative housing projects, so that others can share this wonderful experience.

Where we live, how we live, and who we live with have a profound effect on our beings. Cooperation is a conscious manifestation of interdependence. As a group of people working together to form a greater whole, we challenge our small selves, as well as the competitive push of our society. Personally, I see this movement as a real way to remain engaged in this urban, modern world while living a life that fosters happiness and peace. ❖

Website for Cooperative Roots:
<http://barringtoncollective.org/roots>

Sam Bernier studied mechanical engineering in school but has recently decided he would much rather create new social structures which give people the space to transform themselves. He likes to ride his bicycle helter-skelter through the Berkeley Hills.

From an old postcard:
Thatched cottage in
France



To those who live and die in mu, for Redwood trees

by Jiryu Mark Rutschman-Byler

"Mu" is the turning point of a famous koan. It refers to the Chinese character for negation and expresses the Buddhist truth of Emptiness. Either silently recollected, spoken, or shouted, "mu" is at the center of a meditation practice used in some forms of Zen training.

Do you know if there are Redwoods in Japan?
Mu contains all things,
but I have only seen Redwood trees
in California, and they have awakened
me, I've heard their songs.

You also know the songs
of mu and Redwood trees;
together we scream mu,
one night you screamed alone
the songs of Redwood trees.

You were wet that night
from off-the-schedule swimming—
wild, off-the-schedule eyes—
you screamed out through the Japanese night
songs and chants of Redwoods,

screaming in the temple graveyard
another country's songs,
our other country that it hurt to think about,
those songs it hurt to sing.

You whispered,
"mu is broken,"
and you screamed,
you had awakened,
you had gone beyond,
had broken
mu had broken you
but something still was left,
your wet hair and your wild eyes,
the remnants of the Redwood songs.

After dawn they took you to the hospital,
you shouted and awakened village streets,
for you had seen, gone beyond,
had broken mu
had broken you—
they gave you sedatives.

You came back and we went on,
amidst, around, above,
your intermittent, gone-beyond sedation,
waiting for your mother
who would come to take you home.
We went on resolutely to awaken mu,
although, from time to time,
your singing or sedated speech
would demand that we awaken
out from our effortful awakening,
and meet
your wild eyes.

It was quiet after you had gone,
after the day your mother came
to take you off the schedule,
to that other country, where the Redwoods are.
I did not see it, we were out,
the rest of us were out on alms rounds,
shouting and awakening the village streets
for pennies and the Way,
for you,
and for the ocean that had wet your hair,
your wild eyes,
and somehow—
somehow we were shouting in the Japanese streets,
shouting out our call for alms,
for Redwoods. ❖

This poem is a version of a prose piece from a book-length manuscript that Jiryu Mark Rutschman-Byler, a Soto Zen priest in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi, is currently completing about his experience as an American-trained practitioner in Japan.



Drawing by
Hamlet Mateo

Hamlet Mateo grew up in the Dominican Republic. He lives in San Francisco and is working on his second poem comix. He has practiced Zen meditation since 1998.

Housewarming

by Denise Caignon

Two years ago, I pulled up stakes, abandoned the house I'd lived in for 17 years, and, along with my seven-year-old daughter, flew 3,000 miles across the country to take up residence in a "cohousing" community. (Cohousing is a type of intentional community that features clustered homes, cars parked on the perimeter so that there are no garages, paths instead of streets between houses, safe play areas for kids, and a "common house" where meals can be cooked and shared.)

After living as a renter in this new community for awhile, I decided to go ahead and sell my old home in California. As momentous a decision as this was, I didn't allow it to really sink in emotionally; I just pushed ahead, reasoning that the time was right—I better sell the house before the California real estate bubble popped.

To prepare my house for sale, we flew back to the West Coast, where I spent a month plowing through my garage and all of our (it now seemed to me) useless junk. To get through it all, I didn't let myself feel a bond with the house; I forced myself to see it as "just a building," this building that had been my home—the first I'd ever owned myself. My marriage had begun and ended in this house, and my daughter had slept within its familiar walls from the time she was only hours old.

The next year, while I was in town visiting friends, I drove by the house, stealing furtive peeks out the car window. The new owners had converted my beloved, half-wild garden of sage and unkempt roses into a weedless lawn. Had they even removed the hand-painted gravestone my little girl and I had made to shelter the body of our skinny cat? Of course the new owners were strangers to me, but it felt somehow wrong that I'd never set foot in that house again.

As a single parent with no living parents of my own anymore, I moved to an "intentional" community quite consciously. I wanted my child to have something I hadn't had (I grew up in many different parts of the U.S.)—something very simple and once taken for granted: to grow up in a stable community of peers and trusted adults. And for myself, I wanted to know my neighbors, be a part of their everyday lives—*sans* appointment books and coffee dates.

* * *

Last weekend, here in our new community, my neighbor Jane threw a housewarming party for herself and her daughter. They had just moved into a home recently vacated by the original owners, Manny and

Irma, an octogenarian couple who had moved to a staged "assisted-living" community in anticipation of the time when they might need more help than our community would be able to provide. (They were afraid—and rightly so—that our commitment to community life would stop short of residents being willing to change each others' diapers someday.)

A Tibetan Buddhist, Jane opened the party with a blessing on the home; we then all sat in meditation for 20 minutes. We were invited next to share our thoughts about what home meant to us, and our wishes for Jane's new house. But what was most powerful, most poignant, was that Manny and Irma, the first owners, were there to help warm this house. Through tears they spoke of their love for the home they'd designed, and how they missed it—but how good they felt that their friend Jane and her child were the new inhabitants. The architect who'd developed the blueprints for the house—also a member of our cohousing community—spoke about how houses have lives of their own: many people move through them, but the structures survive and absorb the essence of so much lived experience—usually long past the life spans of those who found shelter within their walls.

For the first time since selling my home, I deeply felt the loss of my baby-blue house by the sea: the old apple tree that gave and gave like a doting mother every autumn, the braying of the sea lions and the low moan of the ocean buoys drifting through my windows when the wind was just right. I realized then, in my blood and bones, the severing that had taken place, the permanent ripping away of my old home.

We are a nation of vagabonds; the very idea of staying close to ancestors or deeply loved land is foreign to many of us. My recent loss echoed back through my childhood, to all the homes I'd ever been wrenched away from.

Unlike me, unlike most of us, Manny and Irma can gently transition from their old home to the new one. As they left, they told Jane to call if she "needed anything"—help with the radiant floor heating system, advice on the garden. A bit of the continuity I'd always wanted was alive in that room: the bittersweet words from Manny and Irma, the sounds of the kids playing in the next room. For better or worse, here we were together—a modern, middle-class version of a tribe, a nearly random assortment of people who'd ended up here from all over the country—set adrift by the industrial,

(continued on page 35)

Houses have lives of their own: many people move through them, but the structures survive and absorb the essence of so much lived experience.

No Other Address

by Tova Green

A Room of My Own

As a child I had no safe place, no place to hide. I grew up in a crowded apartment where no one knocked on closed doors. I never had a room of my own, with a door I could close.

Now zazen is giving me a room of my own. It seems paradoxical that sitting in silence in a room full of people, all facing the wall, not physically touching yet intimately connected, is giving me this room, this safe space.

As a child I didn't learn to love myself, to listen to my inner voice, or to respect my needs. Although my parents loved me, I didn't feel valued. What I don't know yet is how zazen is changing this, but I can see that it *is* changing.



Safe House.
Photo by Susan
Butler

Susan Butler, writer and photographer, teaches at Pine Manor College in Brookline, Massachusetts. She is the author of *The Hermit Thrush Sings*.

What I do know is that I feel safe in the zendo. I feel valued by the community of people around me, and deeply listened to when I speak with my teacher. All this is healing me, and shifting something deep inside me.

I have been teary all day today. I have always longed for a safe place. What could be better than to find this place within me?

My Zen Center Door

I recently moved into San Francisco Zen Center, to a high-ceilinged room with white walls and a window looking onto the courtyard. Zen Center is a brick building that was originally designed by Julia Morgan in the 1930s as a refuge for Jewish working women.

The building is now a home for Zen students;

about 50 students live and practice here. The building is scoured clean by Zen students. Its walls are hung with paintings and calligraphy, and vases of flowers decorate altars and tables. Walking through the lobby is a treat for the nose; I often catch the scent of narcissus, freesias, or roses. Sometimes these delicate fragrances are overpowered by the heavy aroma of frying onions, baking bread, or simmering sauce from the kitchen at the end of the hall.

It seems odd to me that no one at Zen Center puts their name on their door. When I moved into Room 8, I wanted to put something on the door that would welcome me and give others an idea of who lives inside. I taped a card, a painting by my friend Joanne, of a woman's head, her hair blowing in the wind, with a path into mountains behind her. Joanne sent the card when I told her I was leaving my partner of nine years to move to Zen Center. The woman on the card gives me courage to continue on my path alone.

Later I added another card to the door. It says "goodness surrounds us like the sky" with a watercolor swatch of blue. My name *Tova* means "goodness" in Hebrew. I like being reminded of the meaning of my name every time I open the door and make the transition from the anonymity of the long corridor to the warm refuge of my room.

Widening Circles

*I live my life in widening circles
That reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
But I give myself to it.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours*, I, 2
(trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy)

I threw myself into practice during Rohatsu sesshin, and though it has ended, I am still in sesshin mind. I feel irresistibly drawn to take part in a practice period at Tassajara, as if Tassajara were a magnet.

This circle of my life is about practice, Zen practice. I want to give myself to it completely. It may mean giving up my life as I have lived it. I look around my small room at San Francisco Zen Center and feel sadness about having left my partner, our house, garden, cat. Most of my books, my kitchen gear, and photographs are in a friend's garage. To go to Tassajara I will have to leave my job at the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. And, at least at this moment, I say yes. I am willing, eager, ready, to take the next step. Although I am giving up my life as I've known it, I am

embracing a rich tradition of home-leaving, a path of endless learning and discovery, and a community of people who extend themselves to help others.

I am aware of my aging body. As my parents approach the end of their lives, my own mortality becomes more real. With the time I have left, I want to do what is most important to me: practice.

Giving myself to Zen practice isn't only about renunciation. It's also about love, community, and joy. Yesterday I took part in Buddha's enlightenment ceremony, circumambulating the Buddha Hall while chanting the *Heart Sutra* in Japanese. Jana was pounding the taiko drum and others were showering us all with flower petals. I felt great love for myself, for all of us in the Buddha Hall, for this Zen tradition which seems solemn but has so many sides to it.

So I give myself to this next, widening circle and trust that, as I go inward, I will also be reaching out across the world.

Settling

When I left City Center for Tassajara, one of my practice leaders gave me some advice: "Don't think of Tassajara as home." Her words have been a koan (a phrase or a story, usually containing a paradox, that points to the nature of ultimate reality) for me as my stay at Tassajara has extended beyond the one year I thought I'd be here.

The first summer I was here, guests often asked, "Do you live here?" I never felt comfortable with this question. Sometimes I'd reply, "I don't live anywhere else, so I suppose I live here." That was true. I had no other address. The things I owned that I hadn't brought with me were stored in a friend's garage.

By the second summer when guests asked, "Do you live here?" I'd say, "Yes, I'm a resident." I avoided using the word home, but I felt more settled about being at Tassajara. I had become familiar with the schedule, grown more comfortable with the transitions from practice period to work period to guest season and back to practice period. I was more accepting of the changes in housing every six months. A Tassajara cat had come to live with me. Although my job as kitchen manager was challenging, I enjoyed working hard. I was developing some friendships.

Sometimes I miss having a permanent home, with a phone of my own and all my books in one place. I'd like to play my cello without disturbing anyone—we're not allowed to play music at Tassajara, and I've become a lapsed cellist, after playing for 50 years. Recently I needed my passport, and I had to search through boxes of books and papers in my friend's garage three times before I found it.

It's difficult to keep in touch with close friends and family from Tassajara, especially during the winter months when we can't have visitors. When my cousin

in Boston complained that she felt she'd lost contact with me since I came to Tassajara, I wished I had access to e-mail, or could visit her more easily.

Despite all this, nearly every day something reminds me that I'm grateful to be here—noticing the evening light on the mountains, or having tea with a dharma friend, or appreciating the silence in the zendo. Why not think of Tassajara as home? ❖

Tova Green, formerly associate director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, was ordained as a Zen priest in January 2003. She has been living at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center for the last four years. This article is excerpted from two small books (Zen Moments and Tassajara Moments) she authored about her experiences with Zen practice—a journey that has included practice periods at Green Gulch Farm, San Francisco Zen Center, and Tassajara.



In His Father's Arms.
Photo by Betty McAfee

Photographer, teacher, and grandmother of eight, Betty McAfee is a longtime Berkeley resident and social justice activist who uses photography as a tool for social change.

Housewarming, continued from page 33

post-World War II U.S. economy and the revolutions in transportation and communication that have allowed us to scatter so far from our birthplaces.

The place I live now is imperfect; it's no utopian commune. There's old, bad blood between some, behind-the-back gossip, and days when this community feels like your typical, slightly dysfunctional, suburban neighborhood (albeit more closely spaced). *And:* I know all my neighbors' names, all 33 households-full (and that was true within two weeks of living here); I've broken bread with most of them at our occasional "common house" dinners; I've done door-to-door political canvassing with some; I've painted the shared dining room walls and pulled weeds and watched our children together. We're planning a string of "turning 50" parties for the mass of us about to cross that particular threshold. If I sit down outside my front door for more than a few minutes, I'm sure to have a conversation with someone before long. I don't hear the sea lions at night anymore, but now I have the buzz of the cicadas and the neighbor kids raising a ruckus across the path (instead of a street!). And I have a new house that is slowly beginning to warm. ❖

After more than a decade spent researching intentional communities in the U.S. and around the world, Denise Caignon has finally settled in a cohousing community in North Carolina. She is a (somewhat lapsed) Zen practitioner in the tradition of Robert Aitken Roshi and the Ring of Bone Zendo.

Dream House

by Patrick McMahon

What is now proved was once only imagined.

—William Blake

I don't often hear the word *imagination* used in Buddhist circles. It's not hard to understand why that would be so: too much imagination can create all kinds of trouble as we attempt to cut through the productions of the mind, to make contact with fundamental being. On the other hand, too little imagination can hold us back from the very worthwhile troubles into which the bodhisattva vow urges us: the troubles of the suffering world, which, at least in privileged environments, can be so hidden. Avalokiteshvara, as she tunes in to the cries of the far-flung world, clearly employs imagination in the service of compassion. But how, exactly, does she manage it?

Recently, this question raised itself for me, one quiet Sunday morning at home. A thing of stucco and redwood, concrete and copper, my home is a product of the imagination if there ever was one: of the architect, the carpenter, the electrician, and the plumber; of the imagination which allowed my partner and I, when we first saw it in a state of dilapidation, to envision it as our dream house. Our home has been collectively dreamed into an especially sturdy physical structure: the 2-by-4's are full dimension, the walls thick with lathe and plaster, deadening the sounds of the outside world. There are rooms and more rooms in this house: rooms to contain and shut out, rooms that protect Nancy and my dog and me from all that threatens us—and there's a fair amount that's threatening, even close at hand, in this rare safe neighborhood in embattled East Oakland.

When I return to my home from a day's work in the world, I slow down—way down—so I can be taken in by the green lawns and flowered borders, so I can wave to a neighbor. Even the cars lined up in their driveways signify an ordered world. As I park my own, unlock the door and cross the threshold, I can't help but call to mind the hackneyed but comforting phrase, "A man's house is his castle." Buddhistically and politically incorrect as it may be, I can whisper it to myself here.

The soft heart of this world is the breakfast nook, and this sunny spring morning, outside the window, the roses are in full flush. Nancy is picking strawberries as I tend the steaming waffle iron. This is our Sunday morning ritual, the religious center of the week. Let the gunshots fire beyond our borders, let the motorcycles rev up their angry crusade: herein we are

safe. There's just one jarring note: the newspaper. Now, I don't care for newspapers, any newspapers, in my home; resist their intrusion of images and stories into my so-carefully-constructed sanctuary, resent how they grab my attention, forcing on me rapes and murders and hurricanes and deceits. I fought against subscribing but lost, because Nancy likes to "feel informed." (What she really likes are the comics.)

Over time, for the sake of domestic harmony, I've come to tolerate the paper. On Sunday mornings like this, as we take extra time over breakfast, it almost contributes to the comfy atmosphere—Nancy reading her comics while I watch my waffles. Sometimes I even let her read me *Doodlesbury* (until recently when it went to Iraq, blown-off legs, and Purple Hearts and all).

But this morning, I can't help glancing at the front page. In an instant I see my tolerance has gone too far. Before I can look away, I take in the outlines of a hooded figure, arms outstretched, crucifixion written all over it. I chew my second waffle, now cardboard in my mouth, and get up without saying anything to do the dishes. I am bending over the sink, my hands in hot soapy water, doing the comfortably repetitive work of washing dishes, when Nancy calls to me from the other room. "Oh no! Look, honey, at this."

"I don't want to look," I think to myself (not saying anything), and just keep my head down, rinsing, washing, drying. Nancy comes in holding the paper out to me. It's like watching a car go off the road in slow motion. I know that if I really wanted to I could still look away—but I don't really want to. In his photographic frame, a hooded figure is before me, balanced tenuously on a wooden box, the outstretched arms wired. Nancy reads to me the caption explaining that the figure is an Iraqi prisoner, whom our soldiers have told (falsely) that when he loses his balance, he'll be electrocuted. I wonder, with my hands still now in soapy water: how many days and nights will he stand, pissing in fear, before crumpling?

I busy myself again with the dishes. But something is going wrong inside me. I am tottering on the edge of a cliff. I feel myself beginning to lose balance, even as I pretend to stay erect. I've been on this box too long, a hood over my head, not wanting to know what's going on Out There—in Iraq, in Afghanistan, Bosnia, the subways of Spain, North Korea, the ozone hole over the South Pole, East Oakland. Meanwhile I'm sick at heart, wounded in soul, feeble of body. Denial itself is dragging me over and down, and I brace myself in the

Before I can look away, I take in the outlines of a hooded figure, arms outstretched, crucifixion written all over it. I chew my second waffle, now cardboard in my mouth.

Book Reviews

darkness for the shock of reality. I see the wired figure and I don't; what I am even more seeing-but-not-seeing is how disturbed I truly am.

The tension builds rapidly, and I start in on Nancy for not helping me clean up from breakfast. "I always have to cook and clean, sometimes it's too much..." and before I can stop myself I'm over the edge, screaming at my dear mate for erecting this figure of the Iraqi Christ in our home of homes. "I don't *want* those images in my brain. I don't *want* the goddamned paper lying around where I can see it." What I'm really saying, of course, is that I long to remain ignorant. That I can't stand to know. That I don't want that mute hooded face questioning me: "What's your role in this?" I don't want to know who is under that hood.

Rather than answer my own questions, I yell at Nancy. I see the fear cross her face. It's awful for both of us to have this side of me flash out. Gradually the anger sinks, into the very bowels of compassion. Yet I am still, I know, far from healing, far from redemption, far from helping my Iraqi brother on the box down to solid, unelectrified ground.

Within five minutes, I'll apologize, and the long overdue rain will fall. For months, for years, I'd been living with this dread of what we've collectively gotten ourselves into, but even more with my dread of exposing myself to the information, the images, the knowledge of evil. I will explain to Nancy that I was triggered, that I'm afraid of the whole nation being triggered: into fear, into revenge, into a new wave of denial, into heightened alerts. I am afraid of the way we displace our national fear onto that foreign, masked figure. The truth is that we are collectively poised on a shrinking box while our tormenters—our political leaders, our press, our own self-protective minds—threaten us with electrocution should we touch the ground.

But Nancy, in holding out the newspaper to me, has called my bluff. I have fallen but not been electrocuted. Going over the threshold of compassion, I'm nearer, at least in my imagination, to helping. I put my hand out. I take the bony elbow, gently, so as not to startle my brother. I help him off his narrow box. I remove the wires. I take off the hood. I see myself under it. I see us all.

But will my now fully activated imagination take me to the places where a flesh-and-blood hand takes a flesh-and-blood elbow? Has it taken me over the threshold of my dream house, or kept me this side of it? I can't say just now.

Yet, outside my window, the roses still bloom. Has anything changed? ❖

Patrick McMahon is a Zen student who lives with his partner and his dog in Oakland, California, and practices in his backyard. He is studying Jungian psychology in a master's program at Sonoma State University.

Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression

by Taigen Dan Leighton

Wisdom Publications, 2003, \$14.95

Reviewed by Roy Money

The bodhisattva concept finds its mythic expression in many figures embodying the practice of compassion, among them Manjushri and Guanyin. In *Faces of Compassion*, Soto Zen priest Taigen Dan Leighton, who teaches at U.C. Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, presents seven principal bodhisattva archetypes and describes their place in the history of Buddhism and their relevance to contemporary life.

The bodhisattva archetypes he discusses seem to have developed with the introduction of Buddhism to East Asia 2,000 years ago, but they find precedent in the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Jataka tales that recount his previous lives. The unifying concept of the bodhisattvas is their unwillingness to settle for final salvation until all other beings have been saved. Beyond this, each of the seven bodhisattva archetypes represents a different combination of the ten transcendent practices or *paramitas*: generosity, ethical conduct, patience, effort, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, commitment, power, and knowledge. Each of the archetypes is linked to particular paramitas, but all seven are realizations of potentials within human character. Leighton presents these archetypes as models of awakened Buddha-nature from which we can learn as we find our own way to awakening.

The ancient bodhisattvas were often worshipped as veritable deities, but Leighton makes them more real and relevant for our modern world by discussing contemporary Westerners whom he considers exemplary of his seven bodhisattva archetypes. He does not propose that they are actual bodhisattvas; many of them are not even Buddhists. But they illustrate for him the realization of important aspects of the bodhisattva archetypes. His choices include not only the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Aung San Suu Kyi, but also Rachel Carson, Bob Dylan, Muhammad Ali, Gloria Steinem, Jackie Robinson, and Rosalynn Carter.

The bodhisattva concept is central to the theory and practice of socially engaged Buddhism because it involves a fundamental orientation toward other beings and their awakening—or, as Zen master Dogen put it, "an aspiration to realize intimacy with all things."

Leighton's diverse examples, both classic and contemporary, illustrate that bodhisattva practice is a vast and inclusive domain, a fundamental human path not limited to Buddhist practitioners. This wonderful book animates the history of Buddhism and offers insight into human nature and contemporary culture. ❖

Roy Money practices zazen with the Stony Creek Sangha in New Haven, Connecticut. He works in the field of mental health research and is involved in various peace and justice efforts.

Books in Brief

by Shane Snowdon

"The Great Unexplored Resource of Our Time"

For famed peace scholar Michael Nagler, this vast, untapped resource is nonviolence, about which he writes sweepingly and inspiringly in *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (Inner Ocean). The book's 2002 incarnation, *Is There No Other Way*, won the American Book Award; the new edition features an introduction by Arun Gandhi, a five-point plan for putting nonviolence into action, and Nagler's same skillful blend of the personal and political. It's a must for the engaged Buddhist's bookshelf.

Also not to be missed is the new title *American Nonviolence: The History of an Idea* (Orbis), by Ira Chernus (author of *Nuclear Madness: Religion and the Psychology of the Nuclear Age*), which is both chronicle and guide.

Publisher Round-up

From Steiner Books comes *The Great Compassion: Buddhism and Animal Rights*, by Norm Phelps, spiritual outreach director at the Fund for Animals. In advocating a vegan lifestyle, Phelps examines classic Buddhist texts and lore (some of which he considers anti-animal), counters arguments used by modern Buddhists to defend meat-eating, and bravely calls on the Dalai Lama, an acquaintance, to adopt a fulltime vegetarian diet. Recent Steiner releases also include *Unarmed Heroes: The Courage to Go Beyond Violence*, 16 personal testimonies from around the world collected by Peace Direct, and Andrew Beath's *Consciousness in Action: The Power of Beauty, Love and Courage in a Violent Time*, a dialogue among environmental and spiritual activists (including Joanna Macy and Julia Butterfly Hill) that identifies the seven enduring attributes of consciousness that have made their activism so successful.

Wisdom Publications has just released the groundbreaking *Medicine and Compassion: A Tibetan Lama's Guidance for Caregivers*, by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche with David Shlim, M.D. Buddhist physician Jon Kabat-Zinn calls this book "magnificent" in its use of Tibetan teachings to present practical tools for giving more compassionate care with less stress and effort. Also watch for the early 2005 appearance of *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World*, by renowned Thai teacher Sulak Sivaraksa.

In early 2005, Shambhala will publish *Dharma Rain* co-editor Stephanie Kaza's intriguing new anthology *Hooked: Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume*. A compilation of predominantly new writing on personal and social overconsumption, this important book features the thinking of Asian masters, Western teachers like Pema Chödrön and Joseph Goldstein, and scholars like Rita Gross and Judith Simmer-Brown. But before entering a brave new year of fine Buddhist writing, you may want to

review *The Best Buddhist Writing 2004*, edited by Melvin McLeod and the editors of the *Shambhala Sun*. This boldly titled anthology, a first, offers 40 articles and book excerpts that you may well have missed—and that you'll be grateful to have collected in one rich volume.

From Lands of Ghosts

Two beautiful memoirs of tragedy and healing have been published in the last year by men who left their war-ravaged Asian homelands for the West. In *Fourth Uncle in the Mountain: A Memoir of a Barefoot Doctor in Vietnam* (St. Martin's), Quang Van Nguyen (aided by co-author and friend Marjorie Pivar) tells the riveting story of being adopted, as a young orphan in 1950s Vietnam, by a renowned 64-year-old Buddhist monk who teaches him the ancient healing techniques and spiritual beliefs that he himself learned from the reclusive "uncle in the mountain." In the simple declarative sentences of oral history, Quang details life with his adoptive father in rural Vietnam during three decades of war, his escape to Thailand as a "boat-person" after his father's death, his two years in a Thai refugee camp, and his miraculous 1989 immigration to the U.S., where he now lives in the Vermont countryside, practicing traditional herbal medicine. Collaborator Pivar, a shiatsu therapist, became well acquainted with Quang when he effectively saved her nine-year-old son's life. She later spent several years helping his wife immigrate to the U.S. after a nine-year separation, and then helped create this unique book as "the documentation of a bygone culture."

Equally lyrical and powerful is *From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey* (Perennial), Pascal Khoo Thwe's account of growing up in Burma's remote mountains and then leaving home in the mid-1980s as the first of 10 siblings to attend college. At Mandalay University, he encountered the corrupt and brutal government from which rural tribal life had somewhat distanced him. Leading protests after other students were killed, he was ultimately forced to flee to the jungle, where he became a guerrilla fighter against the Burmese military dictatorship. Incredibly, he managed to get a letter to a Cambridge University don he had met while working as a waiter in Mandalay, where the two had discovered a shared love of James Joyce. The don remembered him and managed to bring him to Cambridge on a scholarship—an experience that Khoo Thwe cherished, but that has prevented his return to Burma. Able to see his family only once in the years since, in a brief meeting at the Thai border, he writes gracefully and openly about all he has gained and lost in his journey. Like *Fourth Uncle*, his book vividly illustrates both the terrible impact of government-instigated violence and modernization on daily life and the inspiring ways in which people manage to go on in their shadow, day after day.

Peace, Justice, and Women

The diverse and fascinating essays in *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges & Achievements*

(SUNY Press), edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo of the University of San Diego, cover a tremendous amount of territory: some explore theoretical foundations for Buddhist social action, while others describe how women are changing Buddhist societies. Those in the first group examine the monastic code for nuns, the relationship between self-transformation and social liberation, and engaged Buddhist approaches to subjectivity, human rights, conflict resolution, and the counseling of women survivors of gender-based violence.

The second group of essays limns the shifting roles of Buddhist women in specific contexts, telling us of the recent revival of an order of nuns in Sri Lanka, the dramatic increase in nuns in Taiwan in the 1980s, dharma education for women and activism against trafficking in girls in Nepal, innovative religious education for women and a fading Buddhist caste system in northern India, the work of noted Thai women's advocate Khunying Kanitha (who died in 2002), and the crucial role of nuns in 18th- and 19th-century Japan.

A final thought-provoking essay describes its author's initial surprise that "the [Buddhist] teachings I found so liberating when practiced within the context of my individualistic middle-class American life were also used in Asian countries to support a hierarchical, male-dominated religious institution that has kept nuns in poverty and denied them access to many religious teachings." She later discovered, however, "the revolutionary models of resistance nuns had made to their institutional subordination—some that knew no parallel in my studies of the American feminist movement." Her essay presents these models as instructive for any activism that spans cultural, traditional, racial, and ethnic borders.

From Old Dog Documentaries—whose credo proclaims, "When you've fallen asleep smoking in bed and the sheets have caught fire, the old dog will shake you and wake you"—comes the wonderful 46-minute video *Missing Peace: Women of Faith and the Failure of War* (order via www.olddogdocumentaries.com or 802-457-9369). This eminently watchable video, accompanied by a useful discussion/study guide, features six women religious leaders (two Muslims, two Jews, and two Christians—alas, no Buddhists) discussing how to resist the widespread and growing use of religion to justify war.

Rage and Transformation

Jack Kornfield contributes a laudatory foreword to Ruth King's *Healing Rage: Women Making Inner Peace Possible* (Sacred Spaces Press), which he calls "revolutionary work." Adds Kornfield, "As a Buddhist meditation teacher, I was first simply trained to mindfully experience and tolerate the fiery energies of rage, hatred and fear. But beyond meditation I then struggled with a need to face them head-on, work with them, and express them, without creating more suffering." King, a self-described "technician of the sacred"

with a "background in psychology, leadership development, dance, meditation, and wisdom teachings," opens her book with a gripping account of her working-class childhood in South Central Los Angeles, where "you had to be tough to survive and being called bitch was a compliment." She weaves her skills, experiences, and knowledge of Buddhism into an engagingly direct book full of practices for learning from rage and making transformative use of its power. Her tools range from "rage altars" and "rage inheritance questionnaires" to "gentling gestures" and "predictable joys."

From Maia's Bookshelf

BPF Executive Director Maia Duerr has plucked a couple of titles from her overflowing bookshelves for mention here. *An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away* (Between the Lines), conveniently pocket-sized, is Canadian activist Mike Hudema's witty, creative list of 52 "tried and tested actions" for folks "sick of the daily barrage of Newspeak and itching to resist." His fun and do-able suggestions include sidewalk chalking, soapboxing, Buddha walks, information booths, same-sex kissing booths, mock awards, "boxes of apathy," and gas mask car-shopping! Maia also recommends Cynthia Kaufman's *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* (South End) to "any Buddhist wanting to learn about activism." ♦

Shane Snowdon is Book Review Editor of *Turning Wheel*.

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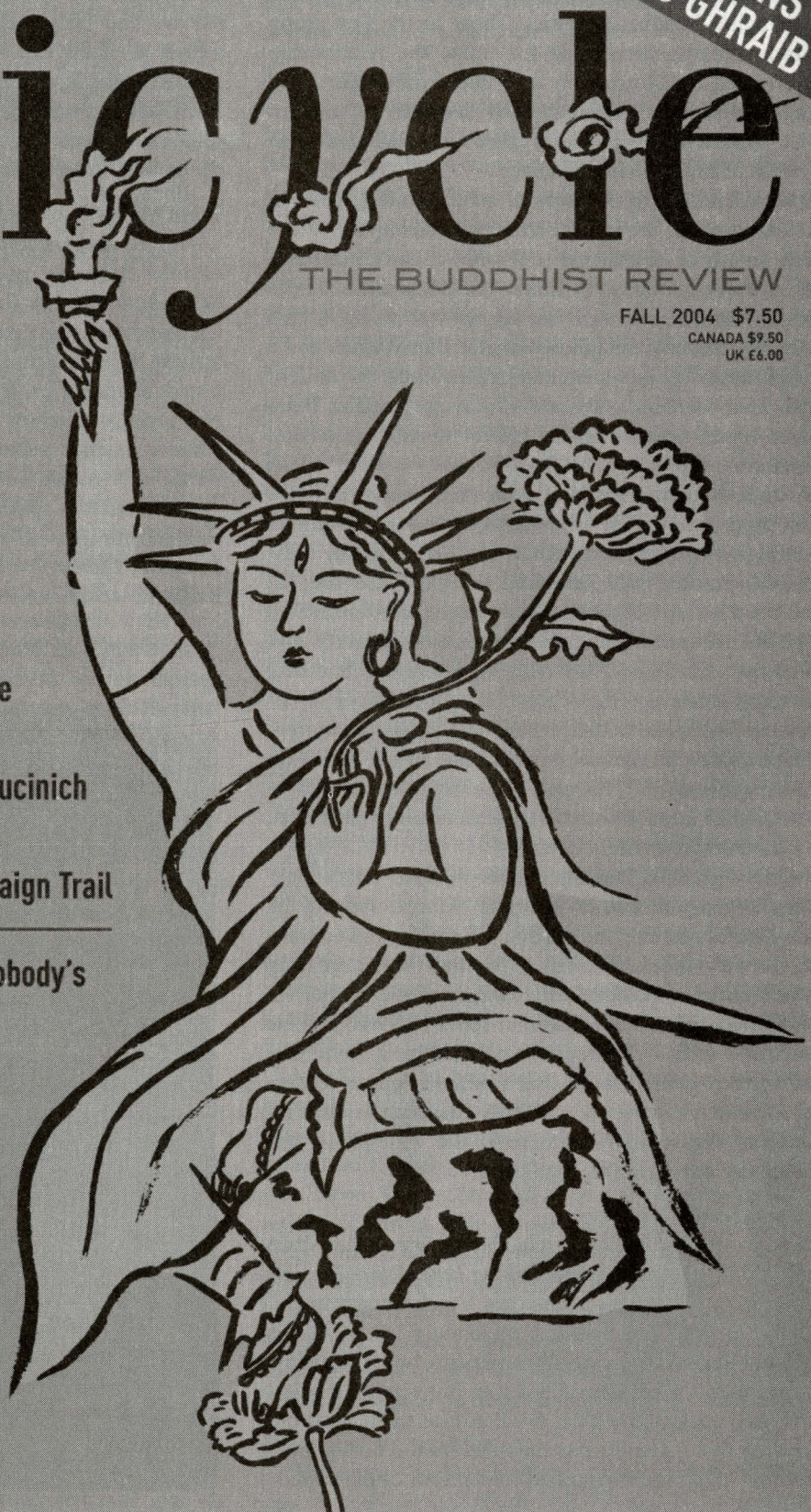
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From the Executive Director

A Vision for BPF

by Maia Duerr

When I was invited to take the position of executive director, I spent quite a bit of time reflecting on what I love about the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and its mission, and the vision I had for the organization and the BPF community. Although this was my own personal process, it also emerged from years of communion and conversation with BPF staff, board members, and chapters, as well as with colleagues in other spiritually rooted social justice groups. So while the vision is personal, it feels collective as well. I'd like to share the three parts of this vision with you.

1. BPF as a healthy, honest, and happy organization.

As some of you know, the past few years within the BPF office have been marked by transition and challenge. I am making it a priority to make sure lines of communication are open and candid, and to offer leadership in the office within a context of collaboration. I realize that we may not always live up to this ideal, and my intention is to be receptive to feedback when things aren't working. All of us on the staff and board share these intentions, and I am happy to report that the atmosphere in the office these days is marked by stability and harmony.

As a social justice organization, we also take heed of Thomas Merton's words: "To surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many people, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his/her work for peace." Along with the rest of the staff, I believe that every time we do a task with care, attention, and equanimity—be it answering a phone call, entering a name in the database, or running a meeting—that energy permeates all our actions and makes our work for social change much more effective.

We begin most of our meetings with a few moments of silence, we try to set aside 15 minutes each day to practice sitting meditation together, and we use forms such as the council circle process to help us practice deeper levels of listening and communication. We want to "be the change we wish to see," in Gandhi's words, to create a work environment that embodies the qualities we want to cultivate in the world: action balanced with reflection, respect, and lovingkindness.

2. BPF as an international organization that effects change in the world with compassion and skillfulness and empowers others to do so.

I envision the Buddhist Peace Fellowship as a powerful force for change in the world, and as the hub for an international community of people who want to bring together their dharma practice and their passion for social justice. I see BPF being able to catalyze thousands of Buddhists to gather at marches and vigils, to write and call legislators on issues, and to become politically literate and skilled in the

use of organizing tools and techniques. I also see us offering the activist community a sustainable way of working for change, one grounded in wisdom and compassion. At the heart of my own inquiry is the question, "What would a Buddhist model of community organizing look like?"

We are currently deciding which issues to focus on in 2005. We welcome your thoughts on this process, and invite you to participate in our BPF online membership survey (www.bpf.org). One focus issue will almost certainly be nuclear disarmament, as 2005 marks the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I have a vision of hundreds of BPF members from all over making a pilgrimage to the Nevada Desert test site to offer a strong witness for peace.

In the years since BPF was founded in 1978, a number of wonderful socially engaged Buddhist groups have formed. Many of these groups are our partners in creating a more compassionate world. We believe that BPF is unique in its emphasis on addressing systemic change and translating dharma practice into action. This past year, we have encouraged members to engage with the political process, and to take their practice out into the streets. One example is the BPF Voting Rights Practice Group in Jacksonville, Florida, where dharma practitioners offered solidarity and advocacy to voters at risk of being disenfranchised.

Another commitment I am making is to hold a BPF Gathering sometime during this upcoming year, where we can all practice and learn together.

3. BPF as an organization with sufficient resources.

Like many other nonprofits, BPF works hard each year just to get by financially. My vision is that our financial resources and our budget will become a source of empowerment for our work rather than a limitation. A wonderful precept from Roshi Bernie Glassman's Peacemaker tradition says: I vow to not have a mind of poverty. To me, this means not acting from a mindset of scarcity, but rather trusting that we will be provided with just enough resources to do what needs to be done. And of course, this is an area where your support can make a real difference.

We already appreciate the generosity of donors who are helping to support our programs in peacework and prisons. They are also making it possible to upgrade some of our office equipment so that we don't spend hours in front of our ancient copying machine. (Time for contemplation is good, but there are better places to do it!)

For all the parts of this vision to manifest, we need to do our best to listen to our members and chapters, and to be responsive to your concerns. We are currently evaluating our office systems to determine how we can do a better job in this area, and do things like making sure your phone calls are answered by a live person whenever possible.

Thank you for entrusting your faith in BPF thus far. I am heartened that each of you is walking on this road with us, and I invite you to help make this vision become a reality. ❖

Chapter News

Our BPF chapter round-up for this issue runs down the left coast, from Seattle to Mexico. Perhaps next issue we'll go to the right. In addition to these reports, we've heard from BPF members across the U.S. who worked on voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, particularly in the swing states of Oregon, Nevada, and New Hampshire. Thanks to all who dedicated themselves to this work.

In **Seattle**, chapter member Rick Harlan and others organized events to coincide with Amnesty International's seventh annual National Faith in Action weekend on the death penalty (October 22–24). The chapter sponsored a showing of *Deadline*, a documentary film about Illinois governor George Ryan's dramatic decision to grant clemency to 167 death row inmates. The film was followed by a panel discussion with BPF, Amnesty International, the Freedom Project, and the Washington Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. The weekend concluded with an interfaith sunset gathering and potluck, where all had a chance to sign the Declaration of Life statement.

The **Portland BPF** chapter organized a small event to mark the occasion of 1,000 American soldiers dying in Iraq. They gathered a group together with the goal of folding 1,000 paper cranes to bring to a candlelight vigil. Chapter contact Heidi Enji Hoogstra writes, "We didn't quite get 1,000 done, but the crane-folding event at the library

attracted 29 people from a mere week's notice via e-mail networks, and people were sending me cranes in the mail."

From **Sacramento, CA**, Beverly Taylor writes, "We have a relatively small core group but, as is likely the case with other chapters, a much larger group within the local Buddhist community provides an amazing level of support when we undertake projects. Currently, we're assisting with a Habitat for Humanity home under construction, sponsoring a weekly sangha meeting at Folsom State Prison, and maintaining our presence at various peace events in the area. We also periodically run drives to collect clothing and bedding for shelters around town."

The **Tassajara** chapter, in a Zen monastery nestled deep in California's Ventana Wilderness, met in October. Chapter contact Judith Randall reports that the group made plans to participate in the Jizo Project (organized by Chozen Jan Bays and Great Vow Monastery in Oregon to take Jizo images to Hiroshima in August 2005), prison correspondence, and diversity/multiculturalism training. Each person wrote one intention for peace and justice; these were posted at the monastery.

On September 26th, **BPF-Los Angeles** celebrated its one-year anniversary with a potluck dinner and discussion about future directions. Penelope Thompson gives us some highlights of the first year: the chapter organized a clothing drive for the homeless of downtown L.A., had BPF information booths during Thich Nhat Hanh's and the Dalai Lama's visits to southern California, conducted a vigil and meditation at the Hollywood Army Recruiting Center, and offered a workshop on deep listening practices at the Fellowship of Reconciliation's conference in L.A.

On May 2, the chapter participated as a group in the annual L.A.-wide interfaith volunteer activity day known as Big Sunday. The event was sponsored by Temple Beth Israel and Community Advocates. Last year 2,500 volunteers from 70 groups worked on 105 separate projects around L.A., including building houses for Habitat for Humanity, beach cleanup, and graffiti removal. This year, the BPF group worked on tree planting and cleanup around the L.A. basin.

The chapter is currently developing discussions between people from different Buddhist traditions, about socially engaged Buddhism and the diverse practices that guide the more than 120 Buddhist sanghas in Los Angeles.

In **Mexico City**, Ginger Clarkson reports, "We are tiny as a chapter but very committed to the dharma in action." Ginger co-leads the BPF chapter there with Vicky Gurza. They are focusing on building up a sangha of about 50 students and faculty at la Universidad de las Americas-Puebla and offering dharma talks in Spanish about right speech and right action. Ginger is also involved in environmental protection issues. Vicky helped plan His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visit to Mexico in October. ❖

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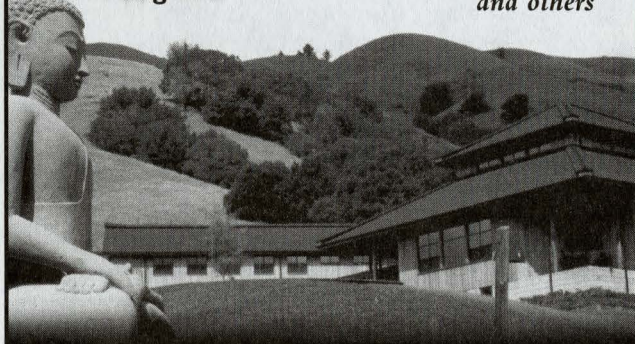
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Compiled by Maia Duerr, Chapter Coordinator

Prison Project Report

The Politics of Death:

National Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty

by Diana Lion

The U.S. national election has just been decided, and we still have as a president the man who signed 153 death warrants for executions when he was governor of Texas. The mood of this divided country keeps shifting as we hear news of more Iraqis and Americans killed, more Palestinians and Israelis killed, more Sudanese dying. There are deaths by fire, deaths by natural disaster, deaths in traffic accidents. And of course deaths from cancer, heart disease, and old age are plentiful too. So why on earth would we want to spend an entire weekend focusing specifically on the death penalty?

A few years ago at a rally in Sacramento, California, I heard Greg Wilhoit speak about his five years on Oklahoma's death row, and how he came to be there after *not* murdering his ex-wife. He had been a law-abiding man and staunchly pro-death penalty, who felt out of place on death row. After all, he was innocent, so surely he was different from the other residents there. Over the years he got to know his row mates, and grew close to one man in particular. They shared a lot of stories and rough times, so it hit him hard when the day arrived for his friend to be executed. He suddenly realized that although his friend was guilty, the man he knew was not the same one who had committed the crime. And that while the friend had perpetrated a crime and Greg had not, they were much more similar than different. He realized that his support for the death penalty had crumbled away without his being aware of it. He now opposed executions, but no matter what he believed, his turn was coming.

A few years later, DNA testing helped release Greg Wilhoit from death row. He has been without a stable home since, though he gives out his sister's phone number in Oklahoma to people who want to reach him. He has not built an industry around himself, or made a lot of money on the lecture circuit. However, he has been available to talk at rallies opposing the death penalty in the U.S., to lend a human face and voice to the politics of executions.

The day I heard Greg Wilhoit talk, he was humbly dressed and spoke haltingly from the stage. He was clearly not a professional speaker. What he offered was his experience and his obvious pain. He spoke for many women and men who could not tell us their stories. He held the audience spellbound. Though I was surrounded by a crowd of listeners, I've never felt so intimate with a speaker as I did that day.

The race of the perpetrator and of the victim, the locale of the crime, and the accused's ability to pay for a good lawyer all affect whether someone will be arrested and brought to trial, and what verdict and sentence they'll receive. As of this writing, 117 persons who received a death sentence have been

exonerated and released from death row. Other innocents have already been executed; more still languish on death rows throughout the country, hoping for justice.

In Buddhism, we have Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings, Ashoka's edicts, and the examples of Angulimala and Milarepa—about the harm that comes from killing. All wisdom traditions revere life. Amnesty International recognizes this, as it invites congregations all around this country to participate in its annual National Weekend of Faith in Action (NWFA). They encourage each group to focus on ending the death penalty in whatever way works for them. Each year, BPF publicizes NWFA to chapters and practitioners around the country. This year, BPF folks in many places—including Seattle, Washington; Vermont; Manzanita Village and other sanghas in California; and Puebla, Mexico—held educational retreats and workshops about the death penalty. Many people have emailed to say that they are carrying the Declaration of the Preciousness of Life card (available on the BPF Website). It declares that if the bearer is murdered, the victim does not want the murderer to be executed.

The dharma reminds us to be grateful for this precious human birth, and to extend our gratitude outward. We welcome you to plug into the growing network of dharma practitioners who are trying to change the entire conversation. For me it is not enough simply to stop executions. Remembering that complex causes and conditions lead to each crime, we need to use the notion of interdependence to revamp the whole criminal justice system. Let's turn from killing people who have done terrible things to rehabilitating them, and rehabilitating the whole society that contributed to their actions.

As the *Metta Sutta* says:

*Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings,
Radiating kindness over the entire world. ❖*

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

New: BPF e-Newsletter. Want to stay up-to-date about BPF and the world of socially engaged Buddhism between issues of *Turning Wheel*? Subscribe to BPF's new monthly e-newsletter. Sign up at www.bpf.org/html/get_involved/mailling_list/maillinglist.html.

Free Dharma Book. *Right Understanding in Plain English: The Science of the Buddha's Middle Path.* 176 pp. Send \$4 to cover printing and shipping costs to: Vipassana Foundation, 3200 McLeod Dr. #300, Las Vegas, NV 89121. Now on the web: www.vipassanafoundation.com.

BPF publications: *Making the Invisible Visible*, writings by people of color and their white allies about healing racism in our Buddhist communities. \$6 plus postage; order directly from Sheridan Adams, <metta108@sbcglobal.net>. ***Safe Harbor***, ethical guidelines, process, and resources for Buddhist communities. \$7 (includes postage), available from BPF, 510/655-6169; bpf@bpf.org.

GROUPS

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

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

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

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

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

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



From the postcard collection of Susan Moon

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From an old postcard: "Our Village," by Wisland Diri, 12

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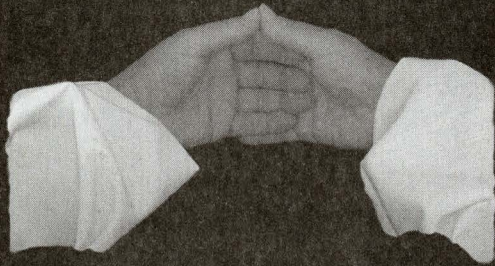
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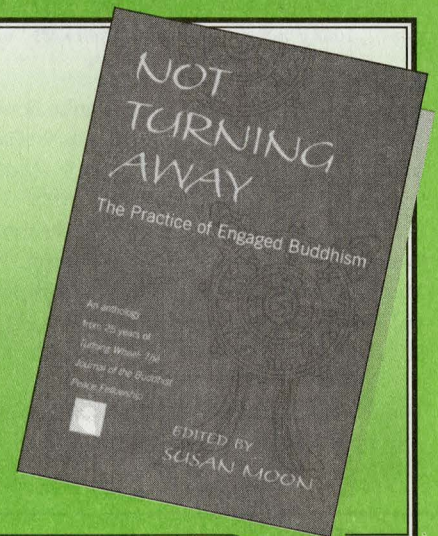
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