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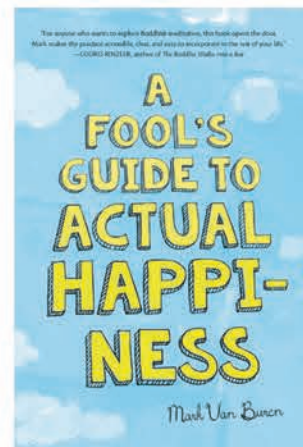
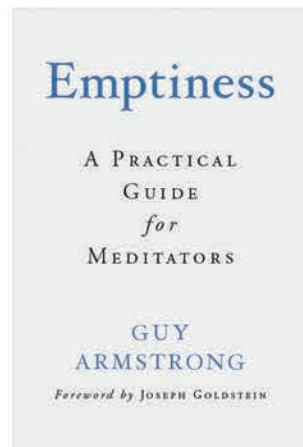
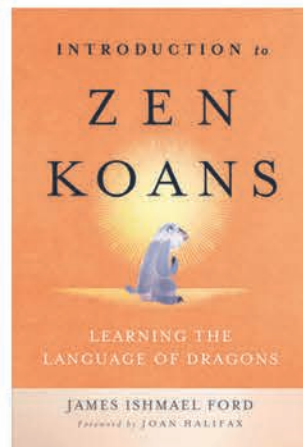
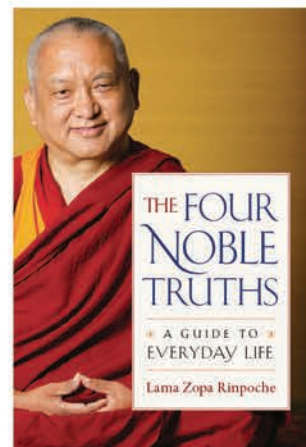


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NEIL MCKINLAY is a partner, parent, and senior teacher in the Dharma Ocean lineage. He teaches throughout the Pacific Northwest and regularly leads residential and online retreats with international participation.



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Photograph by Katrin Sauck

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Bottom: Photograph by Nick Brandt. Top: Photograph courtesy Lubos Belka, Tibetsky buddhismus v Burjatsku.

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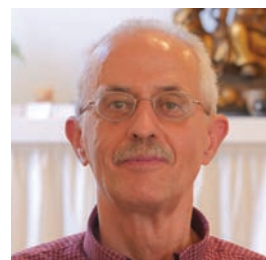
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AUGUST
Training in Tenderness
 Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

Someone hurts us, and we close our hearts. Or we nurse a grudge against them, growing more and more resentful. We all have stubborn habits that are supposed to protect us from injury, upset, or failure. But in most cases, our defenses fail their purpose, instead preventing us from building meaningful connections and reaching true happiness. In this series, Tibetan Buddhist teacher Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche shows us how to reorient ourselves toward *tsewa*, the tender and open heart that is an innate human quality. Once our impediments to *tsewa* are removed, we become equipped to realize our full potential as warm and loving beings.



SEPTEMBER
Waking Up by Breaking Down Barriers
 Kurt Spellmeyer

Meditation can be painful. Especially if it's practiced for long hours in a Zen retreat. But that's not why Rinzai Zen teacher Genki Roshi once described meditation to his student Kurt Spellmeyer as "dying on the cushion." In this series, Spellmeyer, now a Zen priest, takes a closer look at what exactly "dies" on the cushion—our sense of self, whose death allows us to exist in perpetual harmony with the surrounding world. When meditative insight rids the self of barriers, what remains is an open gate of awareness and communication.



OCTOBER
Reshaping How We See Ourselves
 Qalvy Grainzvolt

Everyone has a story about who they *really are*. Depending on how we write our stories, they can take a heavy toll on our mental and spiritual well-being—or they can liberate us. Shinnyo-en Buddhist priest Qalvy Grainzvolt shares how the stories of those we look up to most—the Buddha, his disciples, or other role models—can help us inform and rewrite our self-narratives in ways that inspire confidence, compassion, and freedom from cages of our own making.

Photographs by (L-R): Michael Velasco; Tom Levin; Kelly Campbell



Akong: A Remarkable Life

/ filmclub



AUGUST
AKONG: A REMARKABLE LIFE
 Directed by Chico Dall'Inha
 2017 / UK / 74 min.

The story of Tibetan Buddhism's emergence in the West cannot be told without acknowledging the life of the late Chöje Akong Tulku Rinpoche (1939–2013). In 1959, when tensions between China and Tibet came to a head, 19-year-old Akong Rinpoche, his close friend Chögyam Trungpa, and 200 other Tibetans embarked on foot on a dangerous journey to northern India. With historical footage—including scenes from this 10-month trek across the Himalayas—and recent interviews, this documentary celebrates Akong Rinpoche's lifelong commitment to share the Buddhist teachings with many thousands around the world.



SEPTEMBER
THE NEXT GUARDIAN
 Directed by Arun Bhattari and Dorottya Zurbó
 2017 / Bhutan, Hungary / 74 min.

Teenage brother and sister Gyembo and Tashi belong to a family that has cared for a Buddhist temple in the Bhutanese mountains for more than a thousand years. With the family legacy weighing heavily on his shoulders, Gyembo is torn between his own aspirations and his father's wish that he commit to monasticism. Meanwhile, Tashi struggles to find her way as an athletic girl in a culture with rigid views of gender. The siblings must rely on each other as they—and the country they call home—navigate painful questions of identity and modernity in a globalizing world.



OCTOBER
IN EXILE
 Directed by Tin Win Naing
 2016 / Germany, Myanmar / 72 min.

Documentarian Tin Win Naing has made great sacrifices to oppose social injustice. In 2009, two years after filming political footage during Myanmar's Saffron Revolution, the political dissident was forced to flee his homeland, leaving his wife, children, and friends to seek asylum in neighboring Thailand. Naing's award-winning documentary, inspired by his own experiences of hardship and persecution, chronicles the lives of fellow Burmese migrant workers who struggle to keep their morale and livelihood amid the grueling working conditions on the Thai plantations where they eke out a living.



POST A COMMENT



A Practice of Distinction

Thank you so much for this wonderful, wise, and timely article by Peter Doobinin on mindfulness practice as the Buddha taught it, which was not as a passive activity (“Reclaiming Our Agency,” Summer 2018). Your article makes it very clear that while all forms of mindfulness practice, including the purely secular, are to be celebrated, the Buddha’s version, which can lead to complete liberation, ought to be cherished.

—Kevin Knox
Tucson, AZ

Calling for Burmese Self-Reflection

Matthew Gindin’s “The Rohingya Are Not the Only Ones” (Trike Daily, June 15, 2018) is a must-read that puts Myanmar’s ethnic inequities in historical context and underscores the dire need for self-reflection within its Bamar Buddhist majority (and, I would add, within the Burmese diaspora). I hope to be a part of this self-reflection for years to come.

—Khin Mai Aung
Brooklyn, NY



Dharmic Takeaways from #MeToo

Some readers of Noelle Oxenhandler’s “Mind the Gap” (Summer 2018), a Buddhist take on the #MeToo movement, were motivated to publicly reflect on their own sometimes ambivalent experiences.

When I was 13, a 33-year-old man made a pass at me while he was teaching me how to ballroom dance. We kissed, but I pushed him away. Far from being traumatized, I felt like an adult. Right after the guy left I brushed my teeth to get the taste of the kiss out of my mouth. Was I “ready” for that experience? Physically, no; but psychologically, yes. What I take from this article and the dharma in general is the message that we should not let strong negative experiences with very real negative consequences define or solidify us. Thank you.

—Veena Gokhale
Montreal, Canada

As I approach 70 years of age, I’ve learned a good deal about men through working as a mentor for Boys to Men USA. I don’t see the elderly men in black berets who “thwacked” the author on the “rump” as acting out of erotic desire. Rather, I surmise that their actions were a sad attempt to show that they were still men. These were men who were not raised in a culture or time that taught them all that a man can be—in other words, someone whose identity is built not on the disrespect or dismissal of others, but on his own inherent goodness.

—Alex Rounds
Takoma Park, MD

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INVITATION TO REFLECT ON THE BUILDING OF SHINCHOJI, THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF SHINNYO-EN

In 2018 Shinnyo-en practitioners around the world honor the construction of the first Shinnyo-en temple, *Shinchoji*, an emblem of their spiritual foundation.

Shinnyo-en’s Founder, Shinjo Ito, had left his career as an engineer in 1936, and he and his wife, Shinnyo-en Co-founder, Tomoji Ito, dedicated themselves to Buddhist practice and study in the Daigo branch of Shingon Buddhism.

This first Shinnyo temple, called *Shinchoji*, was

a modest, wooden building with no boundaries between the Ito’s private living quarters and the spiritual training rooms.

Those who sought guidance were welcomed in as if it were their own home in a spirit of trust and acceptance that remains an important feature of the Shinnyo sangha. The Ito’s were convinced that guiding a person toward Buddhahood requires the same patterns of care and commitment as raising one’s own children.



Shinchoji, circa 1938



Shinso Ito
Head Priest, Shinnyo-en

“In this 80th anniversary year we invite all people to reawaken the foundation of their spiritual practice, in the spirit of a caring family and community, and to make a new start in serving others. Reflect on what you can do, today, to overcome differences and work together for the future of humankind and the earth.”

A Way Through

I have noticed that when events in the world promise danger and pain, it is common for Buddhist publications—and I include *Tricycle* here—to run articles that offer advice for “practicing in difficult times.” And while I see the value in that, I would not want to suggest that the misfortunes that afflict us are somehow exceptional. They are not. War and persecution and poverty and injustice have always been with us. This is, after all, samsara. But they are not the whole story. There is also the story, one told perhaps less often, of how human beings, in contending with the wreckage produced by our own sheer folly, have found ways to join together to find our best selves. We all share a history, at times hidden, of building over and over again the fragile cultural scaffolding by which we bring our caring—however imperfect—into the world.

Lately I feel as if I’m living under a dark cloud extending out beyond the horizon; as if we were all enshrouded in a cold and unlovely mist. Most of the people I know have similar feelings of near-despair. I hope this doesn’t sound like a complaint; it isn’t. There are simply times when optimism about the course of things is in short supply. In such times, feelings of sorrow, anger, despondency, and the like are actually signs that one is alive. It hurts to feel this way, and so we tend to want to shunt the darkness aside and move past it somehow. Yet as Tibetan teacher Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche tells us, there is much spiritual value to be found in sadness (Trike Daily, June 27, 2018).

In a *Tricycle* interview several years ago, the American Zen teacher Lew Richmond offered a reformulation of Buddhism’s three marks of existence—non-self, impermanence, and suffering. It goes like this: “Everything is connected; nothing lasts; you are not alone” (Summer 2010). Here we find some redemption; if we are all suffering, Richmond tells us, we are all in the same boat, and in this we can

begin to see a way through together. It brings to mind Joanna Macy’s counterintuitive truth that in honoring our despair, we discover our love for the world (Summer 2012).

I don’t want to suggest that we should repress the grief or anger we feel when we witness grievous harm. Something in us gets deadened in that process. We grieve because we care, and when we grieve widely, when our grief extends to include the suffering of others who are far from us, we tap into what is best in us. The capacity to grieve widely is something that comes with being human—along with keeping our hearts open against our more immediate instincts in the face of an unpredictable life, as Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche teaches (“Opening the Injured Heart,” p. 34). Our ability to both grieve and stay open becomes apparent to us when we are able to move beyond selfish concerns and the limits of self-centered vision. We care because to be alive is to be embedded in a multitude of relations from which we gain support and to which we give support.

I am by nature suspicious of simplistic or formulaic advice about how to navigate the world’s complexities. But I believe—or rather I trust—that in receiving and giving care, in appreciating and aligning with its outward movement, we find the guidance and direction we need to take steps, however modest, forward. As we do this, we find ourselves.

And with that, if only for a moment, the clouds disperse and the world shines forth. This is something to be treasured. Now, today, there is much work to be done. But there has always been much work to be done. And there is some measure of solace to be found in knowing that we are joined to countless others who have come before us and to those who are yet to come.

—James Shaheen, Editor and Publisher

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ATIA SATTAR

Atia Sattar is an assistant professor of writing and gender studies at the University of Southern California, where she is also the founder of the People of Color Meditation Group. Atia describes the challenges she has faced as a person of color in predominantly white sanghas (p. 62).

CURTIS WHITE

Curtis White is a novelist and social critic. His most recent books are *We, Robots: Staying Human in the Age of Big Data* and *Lacking Character*, a novel. He offers a trenchant review of the recent Netflix documentary series *Wild Wild Country* (p. 86).



EMILY SHUR

Emily Shur is a Los Angeles-based photographer whose work has been exhibited in New York, San Francisco, London, and other cities, and in Humble Arts Foundation's biennial exhibition *31 Women in Art Photography*. For this issue she photographed the Philosophical Research Society's library (p. 24) and a sample of the historic texts it preserves (p. 46).

BERNADETTE JIYONG FRANK

Born into a Korean family in Tokyo, Japan, raised in the US, and based in Germany for a number of years, Bernadette Jiyong Frank, a photographer, painter, and public artist, currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Pieces from her exhibition *Spaces in Between* accompany the feature article "The Wisdom of Uncertainty" (p. 72).



PAUL HOSTETLER

Paul Hostetler is a freelance illustrator and designer who currently lives in Washington, DC with his wife, an herb garden, and a black cat named Edgar. In his spare time, he dabbles in mushroom hunting, comic books, and vegetarianism. Appropriately, he illustrates a Tibetan vision of a hell realm for meat eaters (p. 78).

Photographs by (top to bottom): Jonathan Kim; Georganne Rundblad; Emily Shur; Goetz Frank; Cameron Hostetler



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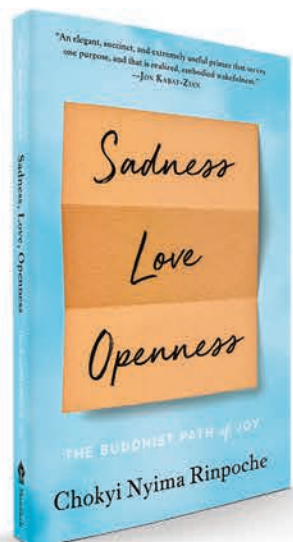
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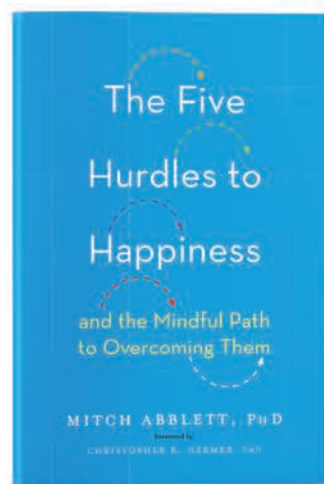


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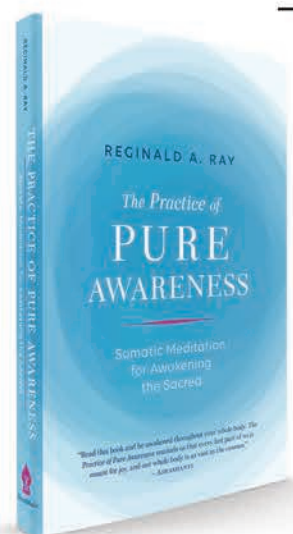
Sadness, Love, Openness Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche
 “My friend and teacher Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche is a seasoned and authentic Dzogchen master. He has written a book that throws a lifeline to all of us struggling in the sea of ignorance, desire, and hatred. Rinpoche takes us through the stages of Buddhist practice leading to the joy and freedom of the Great Perfection, Dzogchen.”

—Richard Gere



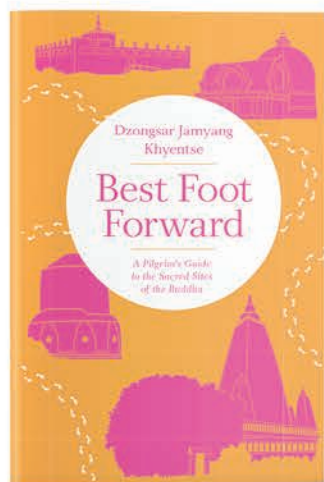
The Five Hurdles to Happiness Mitch Abblett
 “This is a lovely, profound book. It takes the Buddha’s ancient teachings about the five primary blocks to happiness and inner peace and applies these to our modern, busy, stressful lives.”

—Rick Hanson, PhD, author of *Buddha’s Brain*

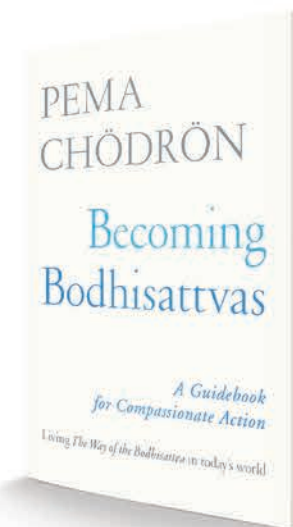


The Practice of Pure Awareness Reginald A. Ray
 “Read this book and be awakened throughout your whole body. *The Practice of Pure Awareness* reminds us that every last part of us is meant for joy, and our whole body is as vast as the cosmos.”

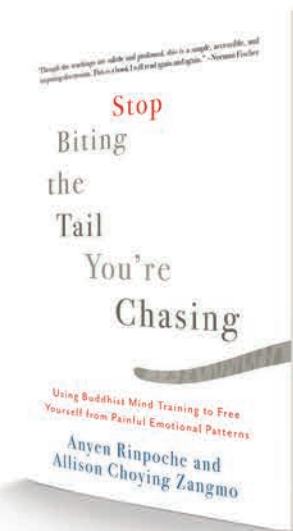
—Adyashanti



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Stop Biting the Tail You’re Chasing Anyen Rinpoche and Allison Choying Zangmo
 “The lojong [Mind Training] teachings on working with destabilizing emotions are Tibet’s great gift to a world in desperate need of them. Though the teachings are subtle and profound, this is a simple, accessible, and inspiring discussion. This is a book I will read again and again.”

—Norman Fischer

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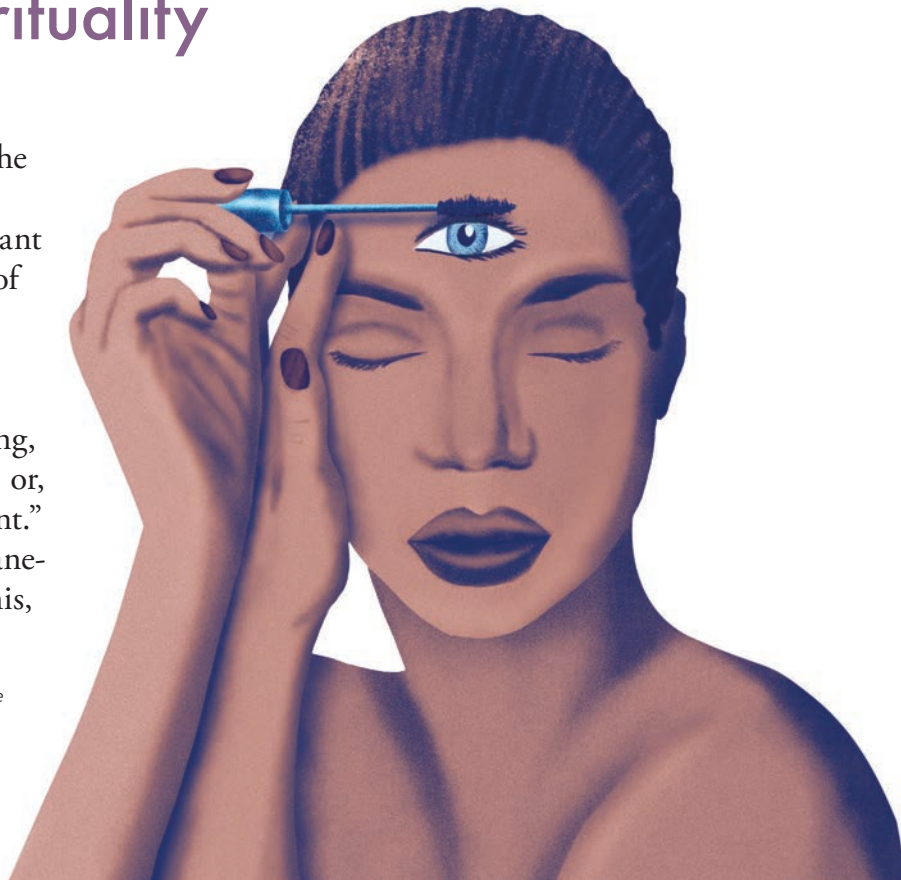


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Everyday Spirituality

We have an absolute life and a relative life—the eternal and the everyday—that exist together without separation. It's important to recognize this dual quality of our nature, otherwise we'll attach to one side without noticing or appreciating the other. We should avoid thinking, "Daily life is more important," or, "Spiritual life is more important." We live in both realms simultaneously, and if we don't notice this, we will be off balance.

From *A Sense of Something Greater: Zen and the Search for Balance in Silicon Valley*, by Les Kaye and Teresa Bouza © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Parallax Press (parallax.org). **Les Kaye** studied with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and is the head teacher at Kannon Do Zen Meditation Center in Mountain View, California.



The Heart of Meditation

What is meditation? Please try this example out. While you're reading, be aware of your breathing. Once you've made that adjustment—being aware of breathing and aware of reading—see if you're more grounded, more able to connect personally to what you're reading, more available to digest whatever's especially true for you.

Good news! You can do this all the time! You can breathe while you sit; you can breathe while you walk. You can breathe no matter where you are or what you're doing—in a car or in an elevator, washing a dish or waiting in line. You're breathing! Our mind wanders, but our

body's here and now, breathing. Conscious breathing can be our anchor. We can get dragged back into the past, which can lead to depression, or we can become anxious about the future, which can lead to fear. Conscious breathing returns us to the here and the now, where we really belong. It's a process requiring care, like training a horse: a slow learner in the beginning but, eventually, a champion.

From *Pause, Breathe, Smile: Awakening Mindfulness When Meditation Is Not Enough*, by Gary Gach © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Sounds True (soundstrue.com). **Gary Gach** is an author, translator, poet, and teacher living in San Francisco.

SUBTLE SURPRISES

A true practice is a repeated activity with mystery. We pick something that suits us and we do it over and over again, but it's really not so much because we think we are going to get it perfect, or even exactly right. It's more because the repetition silhouettes the changes, and the format of constancy lulls us into the best surprises when the internal continuity breaks up. Because we keep doing the same thing, the fact that it's never the same keeps yielding the surprise we need.

From *A Buddhist Journal: Guided Practices for Writers and Meditators*, by Beth Jacobs, PhD © 2018. Reprinted with permission of North Atlantic Books (northatlanticbooks.com). **Beth Jacobs**, PhD, is a clinical psychologist, a lay teacher in the Soto Zen tradition, and the author of four books on writing and Buddhism.

TO PRACTICE IS TO TRANSFORM

No matter what Buddhist practices you do, training and transforming the mind is always the ultimate goal. Perhaps you are doing special Buddhist ritual practices or specific meditations. Whatever you are doing, if there is no inner change, no transformation, then this isn't truly a Buddhist practice. Without inner transformation you are cheating yourself, and maybe cheating others too.

From *Karmamudra: The Yoga of Bliss*, by Dr. Nida Chenagtsang © 2018. Reprinted with permission of SKY Press (skypressbooks.com). **Dr. Nida Chenagtsang** is the cofounder and medical director of Sorig Khang International, which trains students in Tibetan medicine.

Exonerating Pleasure

It is important to understand that there is nothing wrong with experiencing pleasure. The path to awakening does not involve torturous self-denial and asceticism; the Buddha opposed such activity. Pleasure is not a problem. We run into trouble when we become attached to the pleasure and to people and things that bring it. It's the attachment, not the pleasure itself, that leads us to lie to get what we want, to steal others'

property, or to kill to protect our possessions or honor. So the trick is to experience the pleasure without clinging to it, being depressed when it's gone, or trying to recreate it later.

From *The Compassionate Kitchen: Buddhist Practices for Eating with Mindfulness and Gratitude*, by Thubten Chodron © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Shambhala Publications (shambhala.com). **Thubten Chodron** is a student of H.H. the Dalai Lama and is the founder of Sravasti Abbey in Washington State.

Looking Beyond the Nose

The opposite of death isn't life but birth. The door swings both ways: we enter, live for a time, and then exit. We take our first breath and, not so long after, take our last. In between is our lifetime, basically a momentary display of color, sound, movement, feeling, awareness, and complex dramatization in which we're ever so briefly immersed. We might pity insects that have a maximum lifetime of just a few days, but we're in the same basic position from the perspective of what animates the infinite galaxies of form. Recognizing this at our core is immensely and wonderfully humbling; we see our extraordinary tininess and brevity in the boundless presence of all that is, and we end up not in despair or existential shadowlands but in deeply sobering awe, embodying an openness that holds it all.

From *Bringing Your Shadow Out of the Dark: Breaking Free from the Hidden Forces That Drive You*, by Robert Augustus Masters, PhD © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Sounds True (soundstrue.com). **Robert Augustus Masters**, PhD, is an integral psychotherapist. His many books include *Transformation through Intimacy and Spiritual Bypassing*.

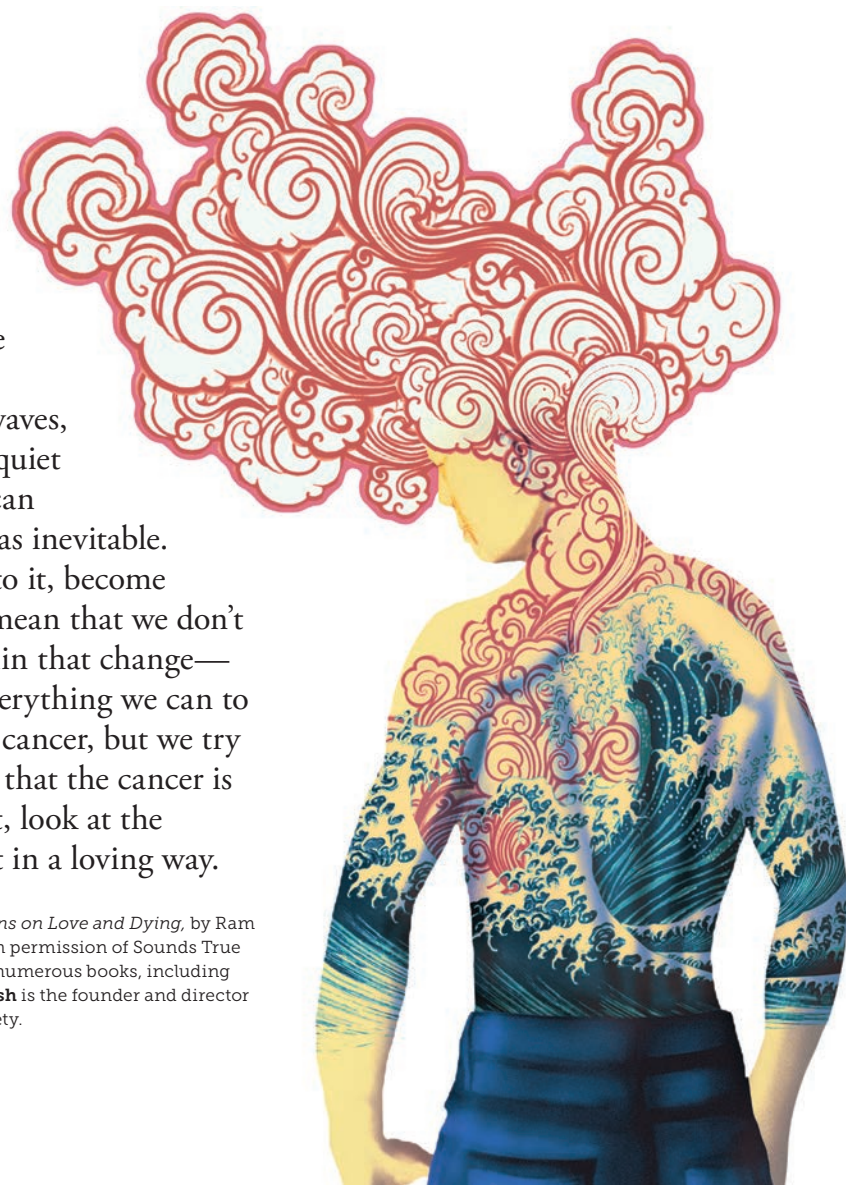
Illustrations by Mirko Cresta



An Agent of Change

We resist change. We fear the unknown. But everything is changing all the time—the waves, the clouds, and us. If we are quiet and still in the moment, we can witness change and accept it as inevitable. We can learn to surrender into it, become friends with it. That doesn't mean that we don't work to relieve suffering within that change—we might, for example, do everything we can to heal ourselves or others from cancer, but we try not to deny or become angry that the cancer is there. We can acknowledge it, look at the choices we have, and then act in a loving way.

From *Walking Each Other Home: Conversations on Love and Dying*, by Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Sounds True (soundstrue.com). **Ram Dass** is the author of numerous books, including the spiritual classic *Be Here Now*. **Mirabai Bush** is the founder and director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.



Always Aspire

A prayer or chant is a way of creating an imprint in your mind to one day perceive and experience something favorable. It's a way of actively setting aspiration through a process of cultivation and familiarization. What you *think* you *become*. If I take refuge in my unworthiness, I engender unworthiness, I stew on unworthiness, and I turn my attention toward and fill

my lifestyle with actions that reinforce my unworthiness. However, if I take refuge in my basic goodness, I cultivate kind thoughts, I balance my emotions, and I practice a lifestyle consistent with healthy pride and mutual respect. In so doing I remember (become mindful) that I'm fundamentally good, decent, and worthwhile.

From *Gradual Awakening: The Tibetan Buddhist Path of Becoming Fully Human*, by Miles Neale, PsyD © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Sounds True (soundstrue.com). **Miles Neale**, PsyD, is assistant director of the Nalanda Institute for Contemplative Science and coeditor of *Advances in Contemplative Psychotherapy*.

Illustration by Mirko Cresta

Passage into the Infinite Mind

Tom Kenyon

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EDWARD SIMON

AGE
PROFESSION
LOCATION

49
Jazz pianist and composer
Emeryville, California

As a native of Venezuela who first came to the US at the age of 12, how were you first drawn to Buddhism? Maybe 20 years ago I realized that I could try to become the best musician in the world, but it would never truly satisfy me as a human being. I got to a point where I was feeling a great deal of dissatisfaction in my life, and thanks to that, actually, I found my way to Buddhism.

The four immeasurables—lovingkindness, compassion, rejoicing for others' fortune, and equanimity—were very inspiring for me. You start to spread lovingkindness toward others and acknowledge the fact that we are all seeking the same basic human desire to be happy and free from suffering. It helped me connect on a very basic level with other people and other beings.

How has it influenced your musical career? The way Buddhism began to influence my writing and composing was very unintentional on my part. I realized that if you want to be better at what you do—no matter what that may be—you want to start by being a better human being. Once I found the Buddhist path, I began wanting my music to bring more joy into people's lives, which I hadn't been as consciously aware of before. Of course, you can't expect everyone to like your music; everyone has different tastes. But as we learn in Buddhist practice, intentions are very powerful—if they are good, they'll have a positive effect on those around you.

You're known for combining jazz and classical genres with Latin American music. How do you do this? What do you take from each genre? For me, musical composition has been developed to the highest degree of sophistication in the classical genre. On the other side, the art of moment-to-moment improvisation has been developed to the highest degree in jazz, where a conversation takes place at a very high level between performers. Over the years, through both playing and analyzing the compositions of great classical composers, you learn how to develop the notational skills in musical form to convey your message in a clear way. When you have both a tune that's well-written and skilled impro-

"Once I found the Buddhist path, I began wanting my music to bring more joy into people's lives."

visers, then you have the best of both worlds, classical and jazz. The result is quite wonderful.

Latin American music is like the heart: it's where emotion comes out. The feelings are there and ready, and we let them pour out. In that sense it's very connected to the body. I've also continued to draw from this genre's sense of rhythm, which, with its African influence, is rich and infectious.

You feel those rhythms with your body as opposed to the intellect? Exactly. Our music in Latin America—particularly in Caribbean nations like Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Venezuela—is very much connected to dance; that connection has never really been lost. It was there in the beginning stages of classical music and jazz, but as these genres evolved they developed into something else, and the dance aspect was no longer as important.

Who are some of your musical idols and Buddhist mentors? The Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh continues to inspire me. I've learned from his books and had the great opportunity in 2013 to attend a Summer Opening retreat at Plum Village in France, Thich Nhat Hanh's main center. That was an amazing experience; I don't even know how to describe it. "Amazing" isn't the proper word. You just really felt like you were with someone who truly embodied the teaching in every moment.

In music I continue to idolize Miles Davis as well as some of the musicians who surrounded him, like the saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter and the keyboardist and composer Chick Corea. I think Shorter and the pianist Keith Jarrett are two of the greatest jazz improvisers of our time.

I've heard musicians talk about having out-of-body experiences or states of complete presence while onstage that sound very similar to certain meditation effects. Have you experienced anything like this? Yes, I sure have had experiences like that. One concert comes to mind with the American jazz flutist Herbie Mann. I think this was at a jazz festival in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, when I was in my early twenties. I just remember feeling like the whole self disappeared while I was playing. I felt like I was so connected with the moment and the music that I was one with it; it was like I was not there at all, yet I was fully there. It was very joyous.

Did you try to replicate that experience? Back in those days I would. Every so often we would have a night where everything just flowed naturally and organically and we were all connected as a band. Everything happened exactly as it should have, with a sense of effortless-ness. There was the natural tendency to want to replicate that on the following night or in the next concert, but of course it never actually happens. In fact, in the effort of trying to do that, you lose it.

It sounds like a form of attachment to a singular experience, with craving and grasping for more. Absolutely. Over time you learn instead to just let go—to let that evening of music be whatever it's going to be. But early on it would be a cause of suffering, because I would end up comparing the second or third night to that one night that was so incredible. I'd think, "Oh, my gosh, I don't like the way I played tonight," or that the music didn't sit on the same level. The comparison is really inevitable, particularly in an artist's early stages of development, but it left me with a bad feeling.

You grow through that stage, though, and you learn that there's no use in trying to replicate that one night. That one night was then and there, and it's gone. What's happening *now* is what we have here in *this* set of circumstances; you'd better just make the best out of it. ▼

—Gabriel Lefferts, Associate Editor

Yellow Springs Dharma Center



Tricycle talks with Katie Egart, Buddhist chaplain and Yellow Springs Dharma Center trustee:

The Yellow Springs Dharma Center offers teachings and practice instruction in Vipassana, Zen, and Vajrayana. How was this multi-sectarian approach adopted, and why is it important to the Center? The Center was established by people who practiced in those different traditions and wanted one place where everybody could sit. Because we're in a very small town in rural Ohio—Yellow Springs has less than

CITY
TRADITION
YEAR FOUNDED
NUMBER OF MEMBERS
MEETING PLACE

Yellow Springs, Ohio
Vipassana, Zen, and Vajrayana
1993
100
Center-owned residential home

4,000 people—it made sense to have one place that people could come to.

We don't all share the same teacher in one school, and our teachers live elsewhere, so we've had to adopt a very strong board—of seven to ten members usually, with representatives from all three traditions—to decide on what teachers to bring in, what retreats to hold, and so on. Our commitment is to keep the integrity of each tradition. This isn't a mishmash; there are three distinct paths. But we talk to each other, plan together, and operate the Center together.

How do you help newcomers explore Buddhism's various schools? When people come in, they're usually trying to develop a meditation practice, so we suggest they make use of the Center's daily sittings at 7:00 a.m. and p.m. These are very simple: come in, take a seat, and maintain silence for 40 minutes. We give instruction in basic meditation (following the breath) and a brief review of the three traditions at two orientation sessions each month. After that we encourage them to come Saturday mornings for *zazen* [Zen meditation], Sunday mornings for Vipassana, or special days for Vajrayana practice.

Should the students eventually commit themselves to a particular practice? We don't put that view out there. Teachers will often talk about that, but [commitment to] a particular teacher or path is not so much our goal for new students as the discovery of the dharma in general. If somebody starts practicing Zen, they don't need to align themselves with our teacher; they can have their own. What we're concerned about is that the teachers that we bring in are authentic.

How has the Center chosen its teachers, and who are they? After Rebecca Bradshaw from Insight Meditation Society led the Vipassana retreat for a couple of years, the group felt she should be our designated teacher. The same thing happened in Zen with Daniel Ter-

What's it like to run a dharma center in rural Ohio? Yellow Springs is the home of Antioch College and a very progressive town full of artists, healers, and ecologically-minded folks. We've been really blessed to be fully supported in town, where diversity in all ways is a strong community value. When we did a major capital campaign to buy our building, many community members who were not part of the Center provided generous donations. Ohio doesn't have many Buddhist organizations, especially compared to the coasts, so people come with more curiosity than expertise, you could say.

Are there times throughout the year when the whole sangha comes together? If so, what's that like? Is it ever awkward? I can recall many meet-and-greet tea events at dharma centers that were quiet enough to hear a pin drop. Every year we observe Vesak, the holiday marking the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. Our celebration includes rituals and chants from each of the three traditions, ending with an all-sangha potluck. Since Yellow Springs is a small town, we have many connections to

each other in the larger community, so no, it is not awkward. But it can be interesting to discuss the teachings of each tradition as it comes up in the book discussions we run. That helps us not get attached to our individual views! ▼

—Gabriel Lefferts, Associate Editor

Tricycle wants to learn about your sangha! Write news@tricycle.org to be considered.



Katie Egart, Center trustee

rigno Roshi [a teacher in the Diamond Sangha tradition and dharma heir of John Tarrant Roshi]—we invited him for a couple of retreats and wanted to designate him as our teacher—so those nominations went before the board and were approved. We have lots of other visiting teachers who are also decided by the board. Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche, the founder of Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Nepal, is one of our guiding teachers, but we also offer Dzogchen practices from Chogyal Namkhai Norbu; Dzogchen teachings are linked to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.



David Orr

The Los Angeles native photographs rare Buddhist manuscripts and reenvisions them as abstract mandalas.

Angelenos have a well-kept secret.

A 20-minute drive from LA's Hollywood Hills, tucked away on a quiet corner in Los Feliz, is the Philosophical Research Society (PRS), a nonprofit educational institution that houses an impressive collection of books and artifacts. Ever since its doors first opened in the 1930s, history junkies and truth-seekers from all faiths have made their way there to leaf through rare works from some of the world's finest thinkers and far-out mystics.

For the last two years, the PRS Library has been a second home to artist-in-residence David Orr. An LA-based visual artist, Orr spent countless hours photographing one-of-a-kind religious and philosophical texts from the center's archives. He then digitally recombined the results to create his latest exhibition, *Illumined*, an abstract series of mandalas on display at the library's new art gallery through September 16, 2018.

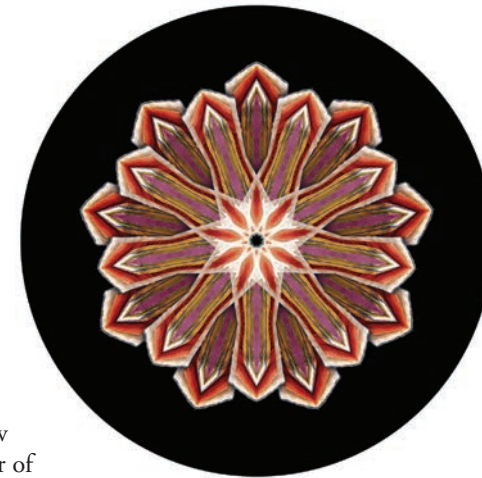
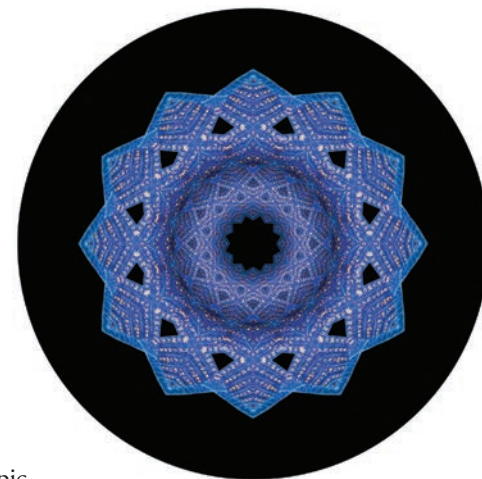


Top: Visual artist David Orr in the Philosophical Research Society's library

Above: *The Embekka Alankaraya (II)*; based on 19th-century handwritten Sinhalese manuscripts

Right: *Daihannya-kyo Sutra (The Sutra of Great Wisdom)*; based on a Japanese manuscript page; gold ink on indigo-dyed paper, 1185-1392

Below: *The Prajnaparamita Sutras*; based on a handwritten 18th-century manuscript with silk panels on cover board



Orr's kaleidoscopic images—which refract words from sages such as Pythagoras, Plato, the Buddha, Confucius, Aristotle, Jesus, and Muhammad—explore the wide-ranging “belief systems we build to make sense of the world,” Orr told *Tricycle*. Dye-infused onto 30-inch black aluminum discs, pages of timeless wisdom are transformed into mind-bending shapes.

Part of what spurred this particular project, and what drew Orr to Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing ten years ago, was the Buddhist tradition's emphasis on finding your own path through radical inquiry, a theme that runs through Orr's art and practice. Back in the 2000s, his hunger for higher truth led him to study the teachings of eminent Zen masters. But reading paperback translations of sutras didn't satisfy. He wanted to see the originals.

As the artist began working hands-on with Theravada and Mahayana scriptures at PRS (with support from an “understandably apprehensive” library staff), he was struck by their diversity. Handwritten Japanese manuscripts were bound with indigo-dyed paper and gold ink, while others, like the 18th-century copies of the *Diamond Sutra* and *Heart Sutra* from Tibet, were buttressed with wooden panels and wrapped in silk cut from priests' robes.

Bringing these distinct physical qualities to the foreground was a starting point, explains Orr, whose next step was multiplying the photo-

graph of the text by a number symbolically associated with each tradition. Once these factors clicked into place, Orr felt he had constructed a compelling visual, “a whole greater than the sum of its parts” that would bring viewers into a space of contemplation and wonder.

Figuring out ways to handle the sacred texts without damaging them was an ongoing head-scratcher for Orr. “I had to be extremely careful,” he said. “I didn't want to be the guy who cracked a thousand-year-old sutra.

“When you are representing an entire worldview with a single image,” he continued, “you may not agree with it, but you have to treat it with the respect it deserves.” ▼

—Julia Hirsch, Web & Online Learning Manager

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THE WORLD OUT THERE

A Call to Conscience

BHIKKHU BODHI

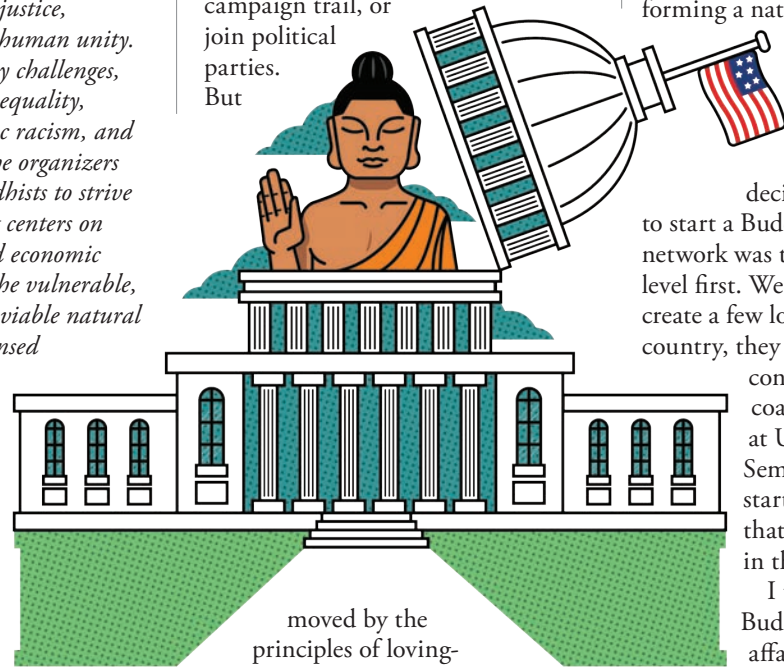
On February 3, 2018, over 150 Buddhist activists gathered at New York's Union Theological Seminary to begin creating a coalition dedicated to the struggle for greater social justice, environmental care, and human unity. In the face of today's many challenges, including war, income inequality, persistent poverty, systemic racism, and ecological degradation, the organizers called on New York Buddhists to strive for a vision of peace "that centers on racial, social, gender, and economic justice, the protection of the vulnerable, and the preservation of a viable natural environment." The condensed remarks that follow were given by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi at the close of the day's deliberations.

There is a widespread attitude among Buddhists, especially Western Buddhists, that politics is an arena to be avoided as if it were a toxic pit. It's seen as a detour from our spiritual quest, a distraction and an entanglement, a falling away from our aspirations for purity, enlightenment, awakening, and liberation. But in the face of today's multiple crises, we can't turn away. Yes, politics is often corrupt, dirty, and divisive. Elections and contests over policies are often driven by the craving for power or by the desire of egocentric personalities to shine in the spotlight. But politics is also the field where the great moral issues of our time are being debated and decided. The shame of systemic racism, the treatment of immigrants, climate disruption, healthcare, war and militarism—all these crises come together in their deep, compelling, moral dimensions on the stage of national politics.

For this reason, if we are to fulfill

our ethical responsibilities, it's not enough simply to adopt the Buddhist precepts as guides to personal conduct, live a life of moral integrity, and cultivate thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion in the comfort of our meditation halls. It's crucial for us to enter the sphere of action. This does not necessarily mean that we should endorse candidates, follow them on the campaign trail, or join political parties.

But



moved by the principles of loving-kindness and compassion,

by our commitment to justice and equity, we must come forward and oppose oppressive institutions and systems and challenge harmful laws and policies. In their place, we must strive to create a social order rooted in a moral vision, an order that embodies love and compassion and provides opportunities for everyone to flourish.

After the election of Donald Trump, the Buddhist chaplain at Duke University, Sumi Loundon Kim, asked whether I thought it was time for Buddhists to form a progressive coalition to advocate on public affairs from a Buddhist point of view. I told her that such a coalition was now a crying need. Around the same time, Reverend William Barber, the co-director of the Poor People's Campaign, gathered signatures from 2,500

clergy for a letter petitioning Congress about Trump's cabinet appointees. There were plenty of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim signatories, but I could find only one Buddhist on the list. It seemed that in such a critical situation, Buddhists were "missing in action."

Soon thereafter, Sumi and I spoke to a few other Buddhist activists and held several discussions about forming a national Buddhist public affairs alliance, but we found it wasn't easy to mobilize people on the national level.

Therefore, we decided that the best way to start a Buddhist social action network was to operate on the local level first. We hoped that if we could create a few local groups around the country, they would eventually connect to form a national coalition. Today's meeting at Union Theological Seminary marks the starting point for an effort that we hope will bear fruit in the future.

I think it's crucial that as Buddhists we look at public affairs from the perspective of a *Buddhist conscience*. I use the word "conscience" to mean the use of one's moral ideals, one's commanding moral commitments, as a lens through which to examine the daunting political, social, and economic problems that we face as a society and a nation. We begin with a critical assessment of our challenges, examining their underlying webs of causation, and then formulate an alternative vision of the way things *should be*, of how systems and policies should be transformed to correspond to our deepest, most heartfelt moral convictions. With such a vision in mind, we can act to translate our convictions into realities.

It's in the political field that this transformation must take place. It is here that decisions are made about who will get health care and who

will be dropped, who will receive basic social services and who will be left to fend for themselves, about who will live and who will die. It's here that budgets are drawn up that either direct funds to schools or invest more in new weapon systems. It's here that we determine whether to make the transition to clean energy or continue burning fossil fuels. These issues mark a critical intersection of the moral and the political, and to push them aside is, in my view, to renege on our moral responsibilities as followers of the Buddha's path of limitless compassion.

The word that I see as best defining our present need is *solidarity*. Solidarity means a deep identification with those who face persecution, oppression, and marginalization, who daily struggle against the diminishment or denial of their humanity. We see such tendencies here in the United States in the criminal justice system with its police violence, frantic shootings, and mass incarceration of black people; in the rounding up and deportation of immigrants; in heartless laws that force people into homelessness and hunger; in tax policies that may well result in some 13 million people losing their access even to minimal health care.

This marginalization and dehumanization of people is occurring not only on our own soil but also around the world. Even though we focus on local and national issues, we also have to understand the global ramifications of U.S. policy. Runaway militarism goes back decades to previous administrations representing both major political parties. Our policies, though packaged in the wrappings of good intentions, though stamped with praise to freedom and justice for all, have too often brought death and misery to hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

To give an example, a few days ago I read an article in the online news publication *The Intercept* about a US

drone attack on a group of Afghan farmers who had gone to the nearby town to purchase groceries. They were on their way back to their home in a hired van. The attack killed 14 people. Just one little girl, 4 years old, survived. In the attack she lost her parents and younger brother and other relatives, and now has to face the rest of her life without her immediate family. Imagine how we would feel if something like that happened to us or to our own families. But because it happened somewhere far away from us, to nameless brown people on the other side of the world, we hardly hear of it in our newspapers or the mainstream media.

However, events of this sort should stir our conscience and move us to act together to change our policies locally, nationally, and globally. We must strive to create a world based on the realization that every human being has inherent dignity. We must pursue a policy agenda that recognizes that all people have the right to live safely, to meet their basic physical needs, to fulfill their potential, and to pursue the goals that give their lives value.

Today's meeting might be considered the starting point for the emergence of a collective Buddhist voice of conscience—a *conscientious compassion* by which our innermost conscience responds to the vast suffering of the world. In the weeks and months ahead we must continue the work that started here today. As Buddhists we have much to offer. We must contribute our clear insights, special contemplative tools, and compelling moral convictions in the task of transforming and uplifting our society and the world. We must join hearts and minds—with each other, with those of other faiths, and with those of a secular orientation—to bring forth the kind of world that corresponds to our deepest moral aspirations. ▼

Bhikkhu Bodhi lives and teaches at Chuang Yen Monastery in Carmel, New York. He is a translator of texts from the Pali canon and the cofounder of Buddhist Global Relief.

NEW & NOTABLE

A Painless Present

BY ROBERT AUGUSTUS MASTERS

Whoever we are, wherever we are, we inevitably experience pain. Yesterday's pain may still be occupying us, and tomorrow's pain too, together amplifying today's pain. We don't get what we want, and there's pain; we get what we don't want, and there's pain; and even when we get what we want, there's pain, if only because of how things change and how little in control of this we are.

Just as inevitably, we tend to store as much as possible of our pain in our shadow, finding strategies to numb, bypass, or otherwise get away from our pain. The more we try to flee the felt presence of pain—whether through denial, dissociation, or distraction—the more deeply it takes root in us, and not just in our shadow. So what are we to do?

The bare-bones answer begins with *turning toward our pain*, which means directly facing and feeling the raw reality of it. Then eventually we move closer to our pain, step by mindful step, gradually *entering it*, bringing our wholehearted awareness into its domain. And we start to recognize that *in order to emerge from our pain, we have to enter it*.

Often when we say that we're in pain, we're not really *in* our pain but rather only closer to it than we'd like. We're then in a sense still *outside* it, still cut off from its depths, still removed from its deeper interior.

But, we may ask, isn't the point to get rid of pain or to at least get away from it? After all, isn't pain already unpleasant enough? Why make it worse by moving closer to it, let alone entering it? These and similar questions are quite understandable, given our commonplace aversion to pain, be it physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. The very notion of turning toward our pain and getting close enough to it to start knowing it well may initially

seem counterintuitive, foolhardy, misguided, or masochistic.

There's no need to shame ourselves for turning away from our pain. It's enough to simply recognize such evasion for what it is. With this recognition we can bring in a compassionate exploration of the roots of such behavior, remembering and feeling our early life efforts to get away from our pain, efforts that might have helped us survive very difficult circumstances but that no longer serve us.

In turning toward our pain there's great freedom—a freedom that grounds us in our core of being. As we slowly but steadily undo our various ways of fleeing our pain, the energy we've invested in getting away from our pain—as opposed to simply *being with our pain*—is freed up, becoming available for us to use for truly life-giving purposes. Turning toward our pain doesn't increase our pain for very long, and actually decreases it relatively soon, mainly because we're no longer paining ourselves by putting so much energy into trying to get away from it. Also, turning toward our pain, thereby making more room for it, focuses and *expands* us, depressurizing and easing us, however slightly.

Being with our pain doesn't mean passively submitting to it or letting it run us but rather staying present with it, neither getting lost in it nor dissociating from it. It's easy to get overwhelmed by pain, spinning down into it as if being drawn down an energetic funnel toward a darkly contracted vortex. It's also easy to launch ourselves so far from it that we all but lose sight of it, settling into exaggerated detachment.

Remaining present with our pain may be far from easy, but with practice it's quite doable. And the more consistently present we can be with our pain, the less it pains us. It may still hurt, but we don't mind as much, for we're more able to hold it, to both contain it and express it under certain conditions (as when emotional release is clearly called for).

Despite pain's ubiquitous presence,

day in and day out, our usual responses to it keep us from knowing it very well. It's not that there aren't times when it's entirely appropriate to get away from or take a break from pain, such as when it's debilitating or sharply out of control. But it's still entirely worthwhile learning how to simply *be with our pain*, staying present as possible in the midst of it.

There are many kinds of pain—physical, emotional, mental, psychological, existential—each of which has many qualities (such as density, texture, shape, and movement) that are all in flux. But the essence of each kind of pain is a compellingly felt sense of unpleasantness or discomfort, ranging from irritability to agony. That essence is what we encounter, hold, and become intimate with as we work with our pain, knowing it in both its detailing and its core reality.

To turn toward our pain is to begin unhooking ourselves from our distractions from it. It's natural to seek distraction from our pain. Such evasion can take many forms—ranging from intellectual to pharmaceutical to erotic—any of which can easily dominate us, thereby disconnecting us from living a deeper life, if only by keeping us in the grip of conditioning. The process of unhooking from these distractions is itself inevitably painful for a while, mostly because it hurts to wean ourselves from what we're habituated to doing. But soon it begins to feel OK, even when we're still hurting. The closer we get to our pain, the greater are the odds that we'll be able to skillfully relate *to* it rather than *from* it. When we thus relate *to* our pain, cultivating intimacy with it, *we start liberating ourselves from our pain and from the painful consequences of avoiding our pain.* ▼

From *Bringing Your Shadow Out of the Dark: Breaking Free from the Hidden Forces That Drive You*, by Robert Augustus Masters, PhD. © 2018. To be published by Sounds True in October 2018.

GOOD WORK

What Our Memories Make Us

BY PAMELA GAYLE WHITE

SOURCE OF ALL BLESSINGS you bless us with memory—that sacred ingathering of the past into the present that allows us to recognize faces, learn poems by heart, find our way back when we are lost, and bring forth old and new from its nearly inexhaustible store. . . .

—From *99 Blessings* by Brother David Steindl-Rast

Faye had advanced pancreatic cancer when I visited her in my role as a hospice chaplain. Our staff doctor said that her life expectancy was months, or maybe weeks. A sensitive, sophisticated woman in her early 70s, Faye was a very successful architect who had once caused a much-publicized local scandal when she and a significantly younger social worker—married to someone else and the mother of two small children—ran off and disappeared for a month together. When they returned, Faye went back to her job and the social worker went back to her family. The community never learned where they'd been.

When our paths crossed, Faye was dealing with frequent bouts of nausea and abdominal pain. Our visits took place when she was still well enough to sit in her armchair and share her stories. She'd begun to write a memoir and was taking a poetry class. She was interested in discussing spiritual paths. We didn't speak of her death; we spoke of her life, of memories, secrets (including the tryst), and the knowledge she was eager to accumulate.

Then one afternoon she asked me about the other patients I'd seen that day. Carefully concealing his personal details, I told her about a young man I'd visited that morning whose cirrhosis was killing him. I used this opportunity to speak openly with Faye about dying for the first time. "It's droll. Everyone assumes that it's easier to let go when you've lived a full life,

like I have, than when the promises of years to come are cut short," she sighed. "I disagree. That young man hasn't had time to gather so many memories, delights, or regrets. But I have. So many memories. What am I to do with the memories?"

I cautiously brought up the idea of beginning to triage, and to let go of nonessential things such as certain keepsakes and memories, but Faye directed our conversation back to life review. And although her question had intrigued me, I willingly accompanied her wherever she wanted us to go.

When people age with memories more or less intact, remembering can be a dreadful burden, laden with fears and regrets, or a precious refuge to come home to. I'm ever so grateful for happy memories that I can revisit on demand. Memories like staying with my beloved grandmother in Florida, playing Scrabble together, and finding words like SEQUOIA. Memories of Gendun Rinpoche and the weight of his hands on my head as he prayed blessings into my heart-mind. Of nieces and nephews and the wonder of meeting them for the first time. Of an extraordinary unplanned pilgrimage in north India. Of riding a docile draft horse through a beech forest in a warm drizzle, no other humans around. Of loving and sometimes hilarious vignettes with family, friends, teachers, animals. So many memories.

What will happen to these memories when I die? Will they be a burden or a refuge? According to the later schools of Buddhist philosophy, everything we perceive leaves an emotional and possibly experiential trace in our mind's ground consciousness, or *alayavijnana*. The accumulation of traces is likened to a field holding an incalculable number of seeds that sprout and make their way into instinct and consciousness when the proper karmic conditions are gathered. The mechanisms are complex. Different schools have



different takes on precisely how the process takes place, but it's easy to imagine that there are myriad memories stored in the mind—from this lifetime alone—like so many bubbles in a bottle of Perrier, just waiting for their moment to surface.

Think about what triggers unbidden memories—a whiff of aftershave, a tickle, a street corner, a long-forgotten song, the taste of a madeleine (as I write this, a bubble floats up and I suddenly remember the eggs I've put on to cook: they are now super hard-boiled)—and how difficult it is to corral them. Which of these memories will the approach of death bring to the surface of consciousness? The warm, comforting ones, or their dark kin manifesting in distressing shapes of longings for dreams unfulfilled, losses, anger, guilt, jealousy, pain, regrets, and fear?

When teaching about death, Shamar Rinpoche sometimes told the story of a Tibetan man who came to the lamas, breathless and distraught, seeking help for his dying father. The old man, a butcher by trade, had been agonizing for days, crying out for help because he imagined he was being attacked and trampled by the yaks he had slaughtered.

What seeds have all of my memories sown? What can I do today to prepare the ground so that my dying thoughts are not of the harm I've done intentionally (will I be assailed by the ghosts of murdered woodworms, fleas, and ticks?) but of my teachers and my practice?

In meditation, we train in letting go of thoughts of the past and future as they arise, and in tuning in to full,

immediate presence instead. In tandem with letting go and being present with what is, we can also train in nurturing positive seeds by making habits of such practices as purification, merit, and aspiration. Cultivating these seeds of goodness is called the "power of sowing white seeds."

Hopefully, these white seeds—and not the dreaded weed seeds—will be the first to sprout, unfurl, and develop when our time comes. So many memories. May they help us "find our way back when we are lost." May they become so many blessings that unfailingly guide us along our paths. ▼

Pamela Gayle White is an interfaith chaplain who lives in central Virginia. She is also a dharma teacher and translator in the Bodhi Path network and a *Tricycle* contributing editor.

LIVING BY THE CANON

Time to Wake Up

BY ANDREW OLENDZKI

Isn't it about time somebody got awakened? Buddhism is all about enlightenment, right? The whole point is that it's possible for ordinary human beings to entirely free their minds of greed, hatred, and delusion, once and for all. The Buddha did it. A lot of his followers did it. Presumably people have been doing it for 25 centuries. Who among us will fulfill the promise of this path and free our minds from suffering?

Many people are practicing Buddhism quite diligently these days by living lives of moral integrity, developing their minds through meditation, and gaining wisdom and understanding. A vast number of Buddhist texts are readily available, well translated, and freely accessible online. Teachers, meditation halls, study groups, and communities exist in great abundance and are within easy reach of most global population centers. So why haven't we encountered more arahants,

bodhisattvas, or buddhas? After all this practice, when does the show go on?

This is actually an old question that has been asked by Buddhists for centuries. It seems that during the Buddha's lifetime there were many awakened ones, a fact attested both by the teacher himself and by the poems left behind by the first generation of his followers. Some say it was easier to accomplish the goal when the Buddha was alive, both because he was such a good teacher and because people were inspired by him to apply themselves with great commitment and energy.

Many Buddhist schools have expanded upon that view, saying that the dharma, clear in the early days, has been gradually diminishing with each generation as the message becomes more garbled, practitioners less capable, and the overall conditions of a "degenerate age" make it almost impossible for anyone to attain full awakening. Even so, surely *some* beings should be able to access awakening, the complete cleansing of the mind of toxins in one lifetime. And by this I mean full awakening, such as that which Gotama experienced under the Bodhi tree, not the "stage one" of stream-entry, or the opening of the "dharma eye" when one glimpses the truth that "whatever is of the nature to arise, is also of the nature to cease." These experiences probably do happen more commonly today, but they are only early stages of a much more profound process of awakening. Some place enlightenment on a continuum and would count even these entry-level experiences as "awakening." Once the stream has been entered, it is inevitable that one will be carried on to the full libera-

tion of the mind from suffering, so we might as well consider the task accomplished with the first stages of insight. And, of course, if indeed we all have buddhanature and are all in some important sense already awakened, then the whole question becomes irrelevant; perhaps even raising the issue demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding. But labeling stream-entry as "awakening" strikes me as akin to an alcoholic saying he has already attained sobriety and just happens to be in the "falling down drunk most nights" phase of the process.

Still others may find the value of the Buddhist tradition to lie not in its final accomplishments but in its beneficial contributions to an ongoing process. It is enough to bring interdependent thinking to solve environmental challenges, lovingkindness to heal racial bias, compassion to help those in need, and insight into the constructed nature of it all to enhance social justice and bring about positive global change. So what if no individuals are *really* awakened, since Buddhism is contributing much of value to our collective awakening?

But surely Buddhism can be held accountable for its promise to bring an end to suffering. Whenever a medicine is developed to cure an affliction, we expect to see its effectiveness demonstrated by the fact that patients have actually recovered. If the medicine of the dharma indeed heals the unhealthy roots of habitual human behavior, however, we have yet to see this demonstrated sufficiently in our own time.

I am among those who think awakening is attainable, even in this modern secular age, but it requires

a level of commitment that few are willing to make. The teachings are rooted in an ascetic culture, and we generally want our Buddhist practice to enhance our life rather than challenge it. Sooner or later someone will have to demonstrate that awakening is possible. So Maitreya, wherever you are, it's time to step forward and show us how it's done. ▼

Andrew Olendzki is the senior scholar at the Integrated Dharma Institute.

GARDENING

An Alchemy for Regeneration

BY WENDY JOHNSON

This spring I journeyed to San Francisco to celebrate the 48th anniversary of Earth Day with dharma friends practicing at the San Francisco Zen Center. We began the day sitting in meditation, establishing our internal dedication to peace and nonviolence, the theme of our time together.

The SFZC is no stranger to violence. In 1979 one of our young students was murdered on the streets of San Francisco not far from the downtown temple we call City Center. Four decades later, inner and outer actions dedicated to peace for all beings continue to be at the core of the sangha's embodied Zen practice.

Our Earth Day celebration was followed by lively dialogue on the art of engaged peacemaking and a chanting and planting ceremony held in City Center's inner courtyard.

At the center of this urban temple a stately Japanese maple tree grows more than three stories tall, spanning heaven and earth. A Zen friend reminded me that this iconic maple was originally gifted as a tiny bonsai plant to Zen priests Lou and Blanche Hartman, two of the most beloved teachers to have practiced at SFZC. Concerned that their small bonsai required more open air, Blanche transported the muscular little maple out to the courtyard

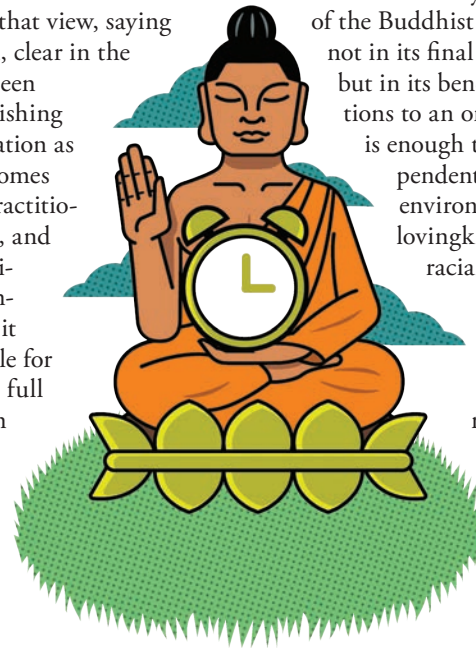


Illustration by Christian Dellavedova

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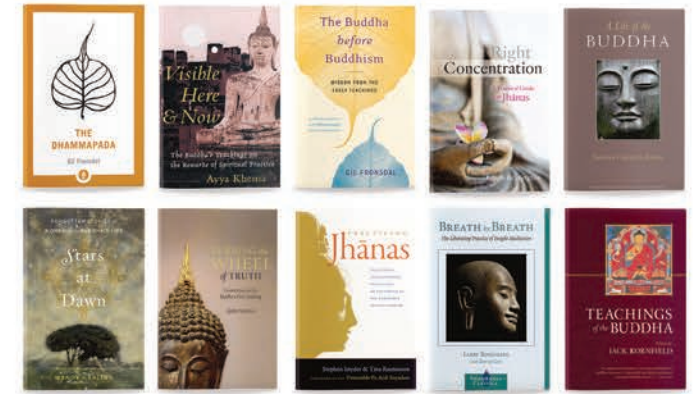
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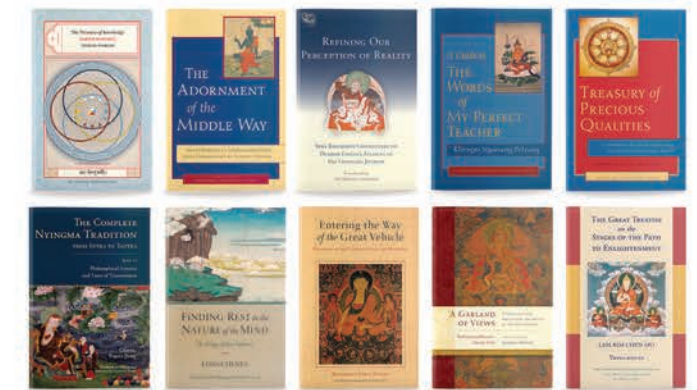
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garden, where it soon shattered its miniscule container, taking deep root in the heart of the temple garden.

Our Earth Day ceremony unfolded in the green and dappled domain of this now-mighty Mahayana maple. We scattered fragrant flower petals at the root of the tree, chanting the *Metta Sutra* of loving-kindness and offering homage to the stream of ancestral plant, animal, and human teachers who fearlessly and compassionately open a path of practice beyond all concepts.

After chanting, we dug into the dark spring earth and planted lavender for compassion, rosemary for wisdom, and white sage for clarity of heart and mind. A few of us continued to sit in silence under the courtyard maple after the ceremony, as a vibrant Earth Day march for life surged through the streets of San Francisco surrounding us.

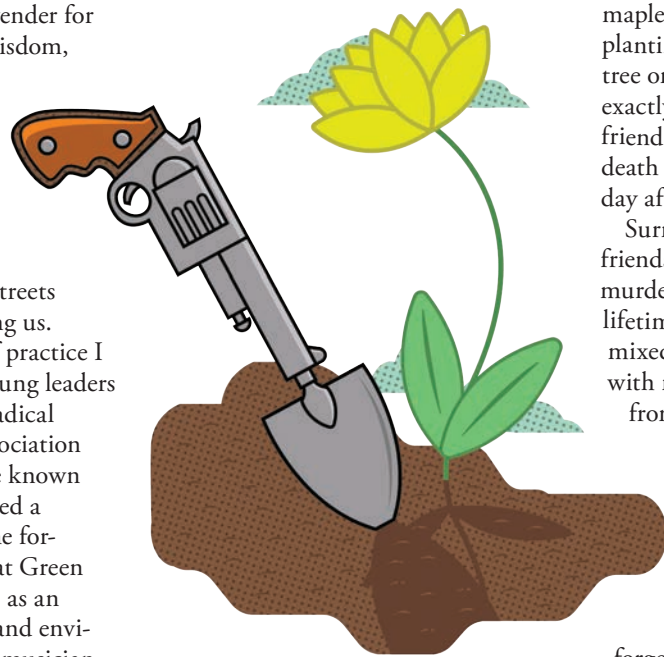
During this Earth Day of practice I often called to mind two young leaders who inspire me with their radical nonviolent activism. My association with Kyle Lemle, whom I've known since he was a child, deepened a number of years ago when he formally entered Zen practice at Green Gulch Farm. He now works as an ardent community forester and environmental activist. A gifted musician, Kyle serves as founder and co-director of the Thrive East Bay Choir, a socially active vocal group in Oakland, California, where he lives at the dynamic intersection of spirit and service.

Kyle met Brontë Velez in 2016 when each was awarded an inaugural nine-month-long Spiritual Ecology Fellowship. The daughter of a dedicated Atlanta pastor, Brontë is an emergent poet and artist committed to restorative justice in her own black, brown, and indigenous communities.

Working and practicing together, these two young leaders founded Lead to Life: A People's Alchemy for Regeneration. Animated by a common commitment to nonviolence and the conceptual disarmament tradition known as Swords into Plowshares, Brontë and

Kyle had a clear vision of transforming actual weapons of destruction, primarily firearms, into digging shovels to be used for ceremonial tree plantings at sites long impacted by violence.

In a nation where more than three hundred million firearms are in civilian hands and guns have been responsible for one and a half million deaths over the last five decades, the young founders of Lead to Life wasted no time in realizing their vision. Passionate and practical, they had a dream. Fully awake, they manifested that dream.



On April 4, 2018, the fiftieth anniversary of the shooting assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Lead to Life took its first action in Atlanta, Georgia, where a Minnesota-based metal artist transported a cache of legally disabled guns and a portable foundry furnace. For a week, active faith, creative ceremony, and powerful resistance and resolution wound together in a dynamic braid to unite the city. Bernice King, the youngest child of the King family, picked up a handgun for the first time in her life and delivered the weapon to the heat of the refiner's fire. The gun became molten metal and was transformed into a digging shovel just a few blocks away from the tombs of

Dr. King and Coretta Scott King.

That week, Lead to Life melted 50 guns into 50 shovels, and with the will of peaceful nonviolence 50 new trees were planted in Atlanta. To initiate this effort, a young cherry tree was dedicated at the King Center for Nonviolent Change with the blessings of two 16-year-old African American students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where a mass shooting caused the deaths of 17 people on February 14, 2018.

In the cool shade of the courtyard maple I imagined fiery Brontë planting a young Eastern Redbud tree on the streets of her home city, exactly where her 21-year-old close friend, X'avier Arnold, was shot to death by a 14-year-old boy on the day after Christmas, 2013.

Surrounded by family and friends, and grieving for a teenage murderer now serving three lifetimes in prison, X'avier's mother mixed a handful of her son's ashes with raw soil that she had gathered from a lynching site in Roswell, Georgia. The beloved

community gathered close around her. There in the heart of Atlanta, they opened the ground and planted X'avier's memorial tree, using a new shovel forged from weapons of destruction.

With inner disarmament we also need external disarmament, the Dalai Lama taught at the University of Virginia in November 1998. The person who is your enemy today, he added, "if you treat them well, the next day will be a good friend." This radical insight fills my heart and mind. Buddhist practice and the work of nonviolence can never be separated. They are fused together with spiritual insight and dedicated action and enlivened by a continuous alchemy for regeneration. ▼

Wendy Johnson is *Tricycle's* longest-running columnist. She is a lay dharma teacher and the author of *Gardening at the Dragon's Gate: At Work in the Wild and Cultivated World*.

Illustration by Christian Dellavedova



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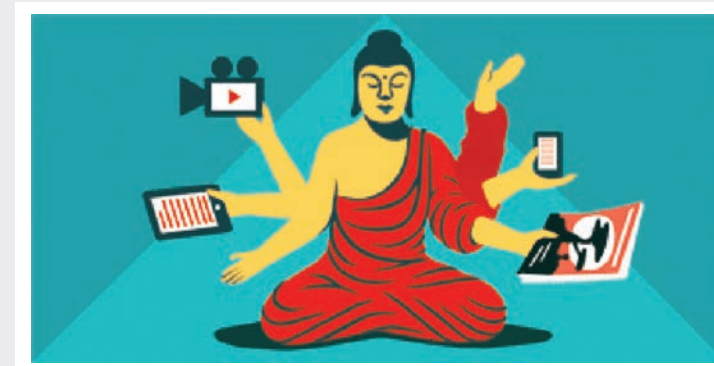
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OPENING THE INJURED HEART

*The way to live with joy in a painful world is not by
shutting down or closing off—just the opposite.
A Tibetan teacher shows you how.*

BY DZIGAR KONGTRUL RINPOCHE | ARTWORK BY DAVID DREBIN

I'd like to talk to you about a profound quality that we all have: the innate tenderness of our own heart, or *tsewa* in Tibetan. When it is warm with tenderness and affection toward others, our own heart can give us the most pure and profound happiness that exists and enable us to radiate that happiness to others. That happiness is right here within us. It is not something on the outside for which we need to search and strive. We don't need to get several university degrees, work hard, and save up a lot of money to buy it. We don't need special opportunities or amazing luck. We only need this heart, which is right here within us, accessible at all times.

This may sound too simple—even simplistic. If happiness is so accessible, then why are so many of us unhappy? And if we do experience periods of happiness, why is our happiness so unreliable and difficult to maintain? The reason is that although this joyous, warm heart is part of our nature, most of the time its glow is hidden from us.

One of the most common impediments to *tsewa* is holding

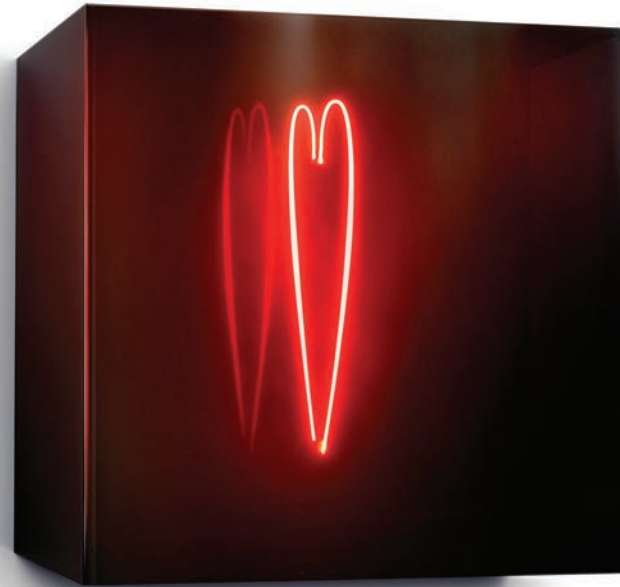
a grudge. If someone has caused you pain, it's challenging to keep your heart open to that person. Even worse, a grudge against one person or a few people can turn into a much bigger form of resentment, such as prejudice toward an entire group of people or animosity toward the entire human race. It's not uncommon for a few experiences of being hurt to block all flow of tenderness from a person's inherently warm heart.

If you shut down your heart because of past injuries, life becomes a painful ordeal. Even if you hold a grudge against just one person, anytime you think of them or recall the time you were hurt, you will suffer. Since you have no control over when these thoughts will arise in your mind, you will always be susceptible to sudden pain. And if you resent many people, whole groups of people, or humanity at large, you will be that much more susceptible. There is no peace in such an existence, no matter how good your life may look from the outside.

To let go of our grudges, we must understand that we are not stuck with them. We have two choices. The habitual option

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The past has already been lived. It doesn't have to be relived.



is to keep holding on—to keep depriving ourselves of the oxygen of tsewa. The other way is to make whatever effort it takes to let go and thereby restore the naturally exuberant flow of love to our heart. We may believe we're protecting our heart by shutting it down, but that is a confused way of thinking. Trying to protect ourselves in this way ends up being what harms us the most. There is a classic analogy: If an arrow wounds you, you can blame the one who shot the arrow for your injury. But if you then take that arrow and grind it deeper and deeper into your wound, that is your own doing.

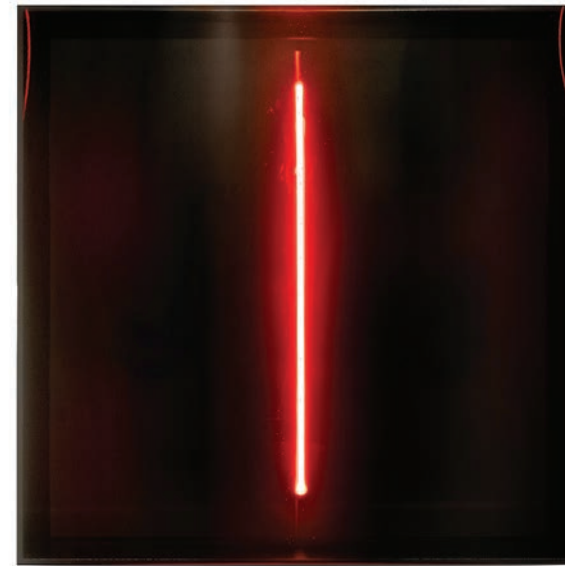
The past is important, but not as important as the present and the future. The past has already been lived. It doesn't have to be relived. To sacrifice the present and the future by reliving past injuries is not the way of the sages. When we find ourselves caught in a grudge, we should notice how we are perpetuating the past. Something has happened, and we have put together a whole story around it that we repeat to ourselves over and over like a broken record. And we tend to be so stubborn about these stories: "This is what happened, and there's no other way of looking at it." In this way, we continue to grind the arrow into the wound. Our mind and heart are frozen around this issue. How can we breathe our oxygen of tsewa in such a state?

Closing our heart because of a grudge doesn't harm only ourselves. Our negativity affects the people around us, such as our family and friends and those who depend on us. It makes it harder for them to be close to us, to feel relaxed in our presence. Though we may not act out with physical and mental abuse, our internal unhappy state distresses others, especially our children, who can perceive us in a less conceptual, more

energetic way. On the other hand, overcoming our resentments and fully reclaiming our innate tsewa—our birthright to feel love and tenderness toward all—brings tremendous benefit to others. In the present, those around us feel our warmth, which in turn induces their own tsewa to flow. And in the long term, our tender heart is the seed of realizing our full potential to benefit others by attaining enlightenment.

Some grudges are easy to overcome, but with others, it may seem almost impossible to let go. Perhaps someone has let us down again and again. Perhaps someone we were kind to has hurt us badly. Perhaps someone has been cruel to us and shown no remorse. But whoever these individuals are and whatever they did, we have to keep in mind the bigger picture of what's at stake: our wish-fulfilling jewel of tsewa. Sometimes it takes a lot of work to overcome resentment, but we are capable of doing that work as long as we are motivated. And we will be motivated as long as we understand there's no good alternative.

Keeping your heart closed toward others who have hurt you is the natural result of perpetuating your negative story lines. It can seem like a satisfying way of repaying the injury. Perhaps unconsciously, you are thinking, "This person did this to me, so I'm going to get him back by maintaining a cold grudge in my heart." Maybe your negative thoughts will make your enemy suffer. Maybe he will even come to you and beg for forgiveness on his knees! But even if your "best-case scenario" miraculously occurs, will it restore the mental and emotional balance you've lost while depriving yourself of tsewa? Will it bring you the peace and joy you long for every moment of your



existence? Or will you have just caused yourself a lot of extra suffering that continues to disturb you like a hangover? And if the improbable desired outcome of your story never happens, how long are you willing to keep grinding the arrow into your wound?

These are questions you must ask yourself in your darkest hour, sincerely and objectively. Being objective will require you to step aside from your emotions and prejudices and look at the bigger picture. If you have observed the glories of the tender heart in your own experience, how does the possibility of fulfilling your story line compare? How does it compare to watering the seed of tsewa and watching it grow and grow until you realize your potential to become a buddha? Would you really prefer to collapse into your small, contracted self and its relatively minor concerns? Would you like that to be the dominant habit of your mind and heart?

If we ask ourselves these questions, we will inevitably conclude that keeping our heart closed is an unproductive way of working with our stories. A more intelligent way is to put the story in a bigger context. What is the one fact about every sentient being that never changes? It is our constant wish to be happy and free from suffering. The infinite differences in how we appear and how we behave are all temporary because they come from temporary conditions. Almost all of these conditions are beyond our control. They are based on other temporary conditions, which are based on more conditions, and so on. But underneath this limitless display of interdependence, we are all the same. No one is permanently one way or another—good or bad, right or wrong, for us or against us.



When we hold a grudge, however, we see everything through the lens of that resentment. We see other beings, who are equal to us at the core, as intrinsically selfish, inconsiderate, or just plain bad. They can even appear to us as permanent enemies.

Right now we may be having a lot of turmoil around one particular person. If so, we should ask ourselves, "Has it always been this way with them? If not, then what has changed? Have they really changed at the core? Or is it that temporary conditions have changed? Will it always be this way in the future, or does that also depend on temporary conditions?"

We will quickly realize that people and our relationships with them are always changing. There is no malevolent, unchanging person who has always been and will always be against us. So if the conditions are responsible for what has gone wrong, does it make sense to hold on to blame? The object of our grudge is, in fact, quite innocent, like a child. He or she only wants to be happy and free from suffering but unfortunately sabotages these desires out of ignorance. If we were under the same conditions, we would be acting in the same confused way. In fact, we ourselves, though we may be well educated in the dharma, also can't help harming others from time to time because of our own conditions. No sentient being is exempt from wrongdoing. But no one is intrinsically bad either. This is how we can understand things when we're not blinded by our resentment.

If our aim is enlightenment—or at least some form of spiritual growth—then any time we are hurt, we can view it as an opportunity. Now we have a chance to look at things in a different way, which is based on wisdom. We can choose not

to see the story with ourselves in the role of intrinsic victim and the other person in the role of intrinsic culprit. Both of us have the wish-fulfilling jewel of the tender heart, which gives us the potential to attain the ultimate state of happiness. But both of us, perhaps to different degrees, have let our jewel go to waste because of our ignorance. Either we haven't recognized our tsewa, we haven't appreciated it, or we've failed to take advantage of it because we continually get swept away by our habits. So far, our impediments have gotten the best of us. That is why we keep hurting one another. But now that we've encountered the Buddha's wisdom and skillful means, we can finally learn to open our heart to all, including those who have hurt us in this life. As we gain confidence in the power of our tsewa, we can even hold a special place in our heart for the former objects of our grudges. We can be grateful that they have helped to open our eyes to the cyclic nature of suffering and motivated us to expand our mind and try a different approach. And if they are continuing to hurt others out of the suffering of a closed heart, we can feel compassion for them. In this way, the pain we have gone through can be transformed from an impediment into a warm rain that nourishes our precious seed of tsewa.

Love is never the culprit. An open heart only provides joy, never suffering.

Another self-destructive story we may tell ourselves when we've been hurt is that our open heart itself was the cause of our suffering. This is a common scenario in romantic love, for example. In the beginning, our love is so innocent and trusting, but when things don't work out the way we had hoped, we can become bitter and jaded about love itself. We can blame love for our hurt and then have a hard time opening our heart toward others. But love is never the culprit. An open heart only provides joy, never suffering. If a few experiences of being disappointed make us give up on love altogether, our world will become dark and gloomy, even if everything else in our life works out the way we want. Therefore, to avoid this outcome, we have to investigate what has really happened, setting our story lines aside as much as possible. We need to look at cause and effect objectively, until we are able to blame whatever deserves blame—whether it's our unreasonable attachments, our expectations, or our lack of wisdom and skillful means. When we use our mind to prove love not guilty in this way, then our heart will once again be free to love—from one person, to many people, and eventually to all sentient beings.

A similar descent into jadedness can happen with children as they grow up. Young children who are brought up in good circumstances feel a lot of love for their parents, for the world, for their games and activities, and so on. They maintain this innocent openness until they get older and meet the complex reality of the world. Then the innocent phase comes to an end, and they are faced with a challenge. At this point, they need to develop wisdom to keep that warm feeling flowing in the heart. Otherwise, they may interpret their loss of innocence as evidence that they have awakened from some kind of self-delusion: "Now it is time to wake up and accept the grim facts of life, the harsh reality of the world," they may think. With such thoughts, it is natural for them to feel foolish about their naiveté and gullibility, and they may blame their disappointment on their openness of heart. The world is indeed full of harsh realities, but that is no justification for shutting down into our small, bitter self. On the contrary, the painful nature of samsara is the most important reason for us to find ways to keep our hearts continually warm with tsewa.

To reopen our heart after a deep hurt or a painful disillusionment can take a long time, even if we understand how necessary it is to do so. Even when we apply the effective methods of the dharma, such as those mentioned earlier, we may find that our thoughts still return to whatever self-destructive story we were telling ourselves. Because we have given a lot of energy to perpetuating these stories, there will

still be momentum for them to keep resurfacing and occasionally carry us away. We have to be patient with this process. In our mind, thoughts are continually arising and dissolving, arising and dissolving. The thoughts that make up the story behind our injured heart are no different. But if we just give these thoughts space to arise and dissolve, they will eventually wear themselves out. The story will lose its feeling of reality and it will no longer be able to convince us. The key here is to focus on our tender heart and not pay so much attention to the story. If we do so, our tsewa eventually will overcome our confused and limited way of looking at things. We will have more confidence in tsewa and thus more confidence in ourselves. This confidence will be invaluable in carrying us forward along our spiritual journey.

Although they may take a long time to let go of completely, the most painful forms of grudge or disappointment can be the easiest for us to make progress with. The acute pain they cause gives us a lot of incentive to work with them. But in addition to these more blatant hurts, we can hold on to other forms of resentment that also block the flow of tsewa from our heart.

One of the most common causes of resentment is when we feel our love and tenderness are not reciprocated. It's as if our tsewa comes with an implied condition—we can continue to keep our heart open only if the other party meets this expectation. This is not to say that reciprocation isn't important. Gratitude, appreciation, and the willingness to reciprocate are signs of good character. Those who are strong in these qualities are well respected, and deservedly so. Also, mutual reciprocity gives people a greater sense of solidarity with each other.

But none of this should make reciprocation a condition for our expressing tsewa. Parents are able to love their young children, even before good character has formed. If parents always needed reciprocation, they couldn't even begin parenthood. After all, babies do not reciprocate. We hope that our children will eventually become mature enough to know the value of gratitude and become worthy of our respect in this way. But until then, we never even think of making reciprocation a requirement.

When it comes to expressing our tender heart, we should try to have the same openness and tolerance that parents have with small children. This openness is based on appreciating tsewa as the source of all happiness, including our own. As the great sage Shantideva said, "If you make yourself a delicious meal, will you expect gratitude from yourself?" If you apply your power of discernment to your experience, you will see how tsewa is its own reward and how keeping your heart filled with tenderness is itself the greatest joy. If others respond well to your warmth, that is a bonus, but the continued flow of your tsewa shouldn't be based on the response.

If we can't recognize the joy in tsewa, it's easy for us to get confused about why we are keeping our heart open. Are we doing it because we want to be good, because we're "supposed to be" loving and compassionate? Are we doing it because of our ideas about karma, or because we've made some kind of commitment or vow? Are we doing it in response to some kind of pressure? If any of these become our primary motivation

for expressing tsewa, then we may well overlook how joyful it is to have a tender heart. Our love will be based on concepts, not on our deep, heartfelt connection to the source of everything positive in the world.

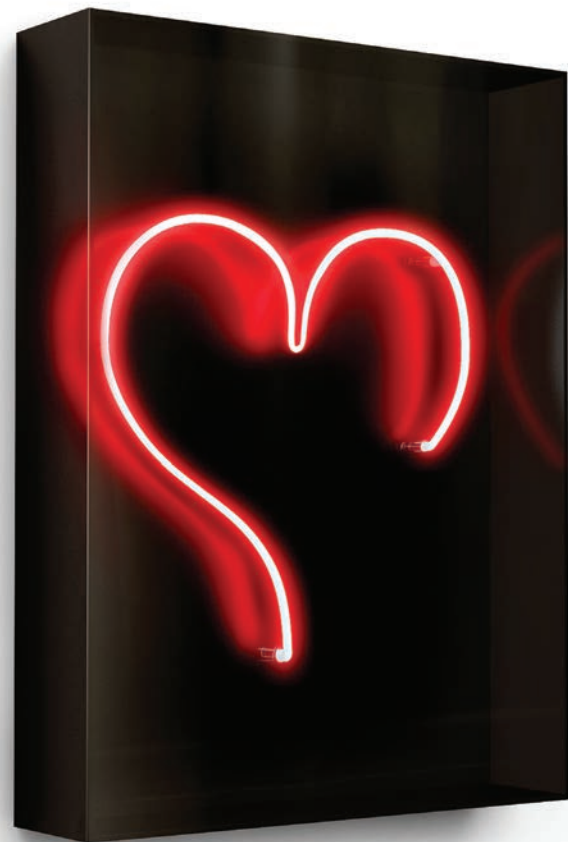
Sometimes we don't open our heart to others because we feel they are unworthy of our tender feelings. We are full of love and warmth, we think, but not everyone deserves our tsewa. Some people aren't pure enough vessels to merit our outpouring of love and affection. They lack this or that qualification. If we are not careful, our critical mind will come up with a long list of requirements. Then our tsewa, which has the potential to flow limitlessly, will be walled in by our biases. That is not intelligence; it is ignorance. When we let the natural expression of our tender heart be handcuffed to a set of qualifications, we are putting our small, confused self in charge. We are forgetting that all beings are equally in need of tsewa because all beings—ourselves included—are constantly longing to be happy and free from suffering.

We are also forgetting the equality of all beings when we allow prejudices to tighten our heart. We may block our tsewa because of religion, gender, nationality, cultural differences, political differences, race, species, and so on. These prejudices can be very subtle, manifesting as a slight contraction or a feeling of indifference. They may not stand out as anything worth noticing, much less remedying. But these subtle blockages hinder our tsewa, and thus hinder our own happiness and our path to enlightenment. Therefore, we need to apply continual mindfulness and vigilant introspection to make sure we don't come under the sway of any form of prejudice.

We need to be wary of closing our heart not only with people we know or encounter, but even with those we have never met or seen in person. It seems natural to withhold tsewa from a corrupt politician or ruthless war criminal that we read about in the news. But by doing so, we reverse our progress toward realizing the full capacity of our tender heart. Even if all our friends, or all of society, supports our closing down toward certain "evil" people, we have to put things in proper perspective, remembering the law of karma and choosing to have a bigger view of things. Otherwise, we won't be able to arouse genuine bodhicitta, the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings without exception.

The great Tibetan teacher Dromtonpa was once circumambulating a temple with a few of his disciples. Circumambulation is a traditional practice of showing respect to an object of veneration. At the outer edge of the circumambulation path, a stray dog was lying on the ground. Instead of walking down the middle of the path, Dromtonpa purposely went around the dog so as to include it in the circle of veneration. When one of his disciples asked him why he was paying such respect to a stray dog, Dromtonpa said, "I'm not paying respect to a dog. I'm paying respect to a being whose nature is enlightened." This is how a sage sees other beings. However they may temporarily appear or behave, all sentient beings have the seed of enlightenment in their tender heart. Their innate tsewa may be thickly obscured, but it is still there. If we look at things from a wider perspective, we will know that there is

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Creating a Confident Mind

How to behave more like a lion and less like a dog

BY PHAKCHOK RINPOCHE
AND ERRIC SOLOMON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK BRANDT

As a small child I was chosen, in a traditional Tibetan fashion, as an incarnation of a highly respected and powerful meditation teacher. When I went to school in the monastery, my professors had big expectations for me. They put a lot of pressure on me to live up to the example of this great master from the past. But rather than rise to the occasion, I, like many teenagers, rebelled against all the expectations and pressure. I just became more and more angry about everything and everyone. Behind my back, the other monks called me the “anger ball,” and when I was in a bad mood everyone tried to get as far away from me as possible. It was no fun.

I thought, “Your idea that I am an incarnation of some meditation teacher doesn’t mean anything to me. I don’t even know if I believe everything the Buddha says.”

Even though I was studying lots of philosophy, which I found gratifying to my intellect (it was like solving a difficult puzzle), I didn’t seem to be getting a direct experience of the meaning of the great works I was studying. This only angered me more and made me think I wasn’t really much of a Buddhist, let alone that revered old meditator everyone said I was supposed to be. In fact, the only use I had for philosophy was that I got better and better at debate, and so I could easily defeat my peers, which gave me a great opportunity to channel my aggression toward other people. I guess beating them at debate was at least better than punching them out, which was a constant theme of my fantasies when I was 17.

Eventually I couldn’t keep it all bottled up anymore, so I went to my main meditation teacher, a great master named Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, and told him how I felt. His response was to teach me a meditation practice on lovingkindness. He told me that every day I should strongly wish that everyone could be happy. And then, to take that further, imagine that everyone was becoming more and more happy. Not just one or two people, but *every single person*.

I practiced like that every day. And it seemed OK at first. My anger was subsiding. But then one day I asked myself, “Why do I need to wish for everybody’s happiness if *they* don’t really care about *me*? Why should I care about them? What’s in it for me?”

This way of thinking only managed to irritate me even more. I also noticed that while my anger grew, any feelings of contentment and joy completely evaporated. I was becoming more and more miserable. I took a close look at myself and started comparing myself to my teacher. My parents and my teacher’s generation were refugees who escaped Tibet and settled in exile in Nepal and India. They had to go through tremendous hardship, leaving their homeland and adapting to a new country. My teacher particularly had to leave everything behind and spent most of his life in extreme poverty, lived very simply, and had very challenging health problems. I, on the other hand, had a nice place to live, plenty to eat, and many of the creature comforts of modern civilization. Yet he was always

Lioness Against Dark Foliage, Serengeti, 2012 | © Nick Brandt, courtesy of Edwyn Houk Gallery, New York



radiating so much peace and joy that I loved to just sit in the same room as him. I figured it was worth speaking to him some more since not only did other people want to avoid me but I could barely stand being with myself.

I went to him and asked what I should do about my seemingly infinite capacity for anger and aggression.

His reply: “Stop behaving like a dog. Behave like a lion!”

“What does that mean?” I asked. “Should I roar? How will that improve my life and calm my mind?”

“When you throw a stone at a dog, what does he do?” he asked.

“The dog chases the stone,” I replied.

He said that was exactly what I was doing, acting like a dog—chasing each thought that came at me. I considered that for a moment. It was indeed true that when I had a thought—for example, “That person pisses me off”—I would chase after it. Without even noticing, I would dwell on that thought, looping it over and over again, justifying it, coming up with all the reasons to be angry, and, in so doing, I would become the thought. Rinpoche pointed out to me how I was chasing after my angry thoughts, just like the dog chases after the stone.

“When you throw a stone at a lion,” he continued, “the lion

easier to forgive and, more importantly, forget. You won’t be overpowered by the rawness of the emotion because you won’t let it establish itself, you won’t cling to it.”

My teacher cautioned, “However, if anger arises, and you are aware of it, and it doesn’t disappear, that means you are still subtly holding on to it.”

I kept practicing, and gradually my anger became less and less powerful. I still would get annoyed, but I didn’t feel like I had to punch someone or shout at them. I was a teenage monk, and this practice saved me. Meditation made my mind much more flexible.

Most people think that thoughts and emotions are the enemy of present-moment awareness, and that negative emotions in particular are the enemy of interconnectedness. But we can use thoughts and emotions, even the bad ones, to actually bring us into the present moment. We can overcome our negative emotions not by rejecting them—trying to push them away—but by skillfully using them. Having thoughts is a natural consequence of having a mind. Since it isn’t really possible to block thoughts, when we meditate we don’t struggle against our thoughts by suppressing or blocking them. Instead we use an object to rest our attention on, neither pushing thoughts away nor engaging them further.

Most people think that thoughts and emotions are the enemy. But we can use thoughts and emotions, even the bad ones, to actually bring us into the present moment.

doesn’t care about the stone at all. Instead, it immediately turns to see who is throwing the stone. Now think about it: if someone is throwing stones at a lion, what happens next when the lion turns to look?”

“The person throwing the stone either runs away or gets eaten,” I said.

“Right you are,” said my teacher. “Either way, no more stones!”

After my teacher told me to stop acting like a dog and to be more like a lion, I was a little bit embarrassed that my teacher thought I was like a dog. But as I looked at my own mind, I noticed more and more that I was acting like the dog. I chased every single thought, especially the angry ones!

So I went back to my teacher and asked him what to do. He said, “Instead of chasing the anger, grabbing it, and holding on, just be aware. Just be very gently aware of the anger instead of getting involved. Don’t reject it, but don’t dwell on it either. Just turn your attention to look gently at the thought. At that moment of turning inward to just observe, the thought will dissolve. At that moment, just exhale and rest. Then after a moment or two, it will come back. So just turn to observe it again. It will dissolve. Keep practicing like that and the power of the anger to ensnare you will be weakened. Then it will be

Rather than using an object such as the breath as a support for meditation, however, we can actually use the thoughts themselves. This is a more direct method for treating thoughts with equanimity. By learning to place our attention directly on a thought without holding on to it, we can use a thought as support for meditation rather than an opportunity for distraction. We just watch each thought as it rises and then falls away.

For example, when we go to the beach we notice everything going on there. Maybe a family is having a barbeque picnic, or a group of teenagers is playing volleyball. Farther down the beach you might see a pair of lovers on a stroll. At that moment you don’t feel like you need to get involved in any of the activity. You don’t get up from your beach chair to cook burgers for the family having the picnic. Even if you like the game of volleyball, you don’t just jump into the middle of the game and spike the ball to the opposite side of the net. And for sure you don’t knock one of the lovers over to steal a kiss from the good-looking one left standing, no matter how sexy that one looks in that bathing suit. You are aware of everything, yet you don’t cling to any of it. You are not overly involved.

When we know how to look at a thought in meditation without thinking further about the thought, our relationship to the thought changes dramatically. First of all, in the state

of meditative awareness, thought loses its power to distract us, just as when we see a picnic at the beach we don’t become involved in the picnic itself.

Before I introduce the method I was taught for using thoughts and emotions as an object for meditation, there is something else I should mention that we gradually begin to notice when we practice in this way. Namely, when our meditation practice is a little bit stable and we turn our attention toward the thought, it immediately *dissolves*. A small space opens up between thoughts. In that natural space, we are still aware, still present and knowing, and we are not distracted.

At first, the space between thoughts disappears almost immediately because another thought arises to fill it. At that moment we can just turn our attention to that thought too and it disappears just like the previous one. When we practice in this way, the length of time between thoughts slowly grows.

If we remain for a few moments in the natural space that appears between thoughts, in those moments we experience meditation *without an object*. In that space, we are aware, completely present, and not relying on placing our attention on an object. As we become more and more familiar with this state, the state itself becomes the support for the meditation. But in the beginning, we rest in the space between thoughts as long as it lasts—and for most of us the time will be very short. When the next thought arises, we react with equanimity and just observe it.

A thought might bring us to non-distraction, but at the moment the thought dissolves, it is simply the non-distracted mind itself that is the support for meditation. Nothing else is needed. When we have confidence in the method, even challenging thoughts and emotions strengthen our dignity. They strengthen our ability to rest our attention on the present moment rather than succumbing to negative thoughts and emotions.

EXERCISE #1

Using Thoughts and Emotions as an Object

If you have a hundred thoughts pass through your mind in the space of a minute, it means you have a hundred supports for meditation.

—Gampopa

Begin by focusing on the breath.

Notice what is happening in your mind; notice your thoughts. Don’t think about your thoughts, just notice them.

As a thought arises, just observe the thought. If you don’t start thinking about it, the thought will dissolve. For a moment there will be natural space; just rest in it until the next thought arises. If you find you are thinking about thoughts, at that moment of recognition, turn your

attention to the present moment.

After a while, if you find you aren’t able to watch a thought without getting involved in it, go back to focusing on the breath.

End the session by considering your heartfelt aspiration for everyone to be happy, to have the causes of happiness, and to be free from suffering and its causes.

EXERCISE #2

Using Thoughts and Emotions as an Object—Watching the River

This practice is quite radical because instead of regarding our thoughts as an obstacle to remaining in mindful awareness, we take the thoughts themselves as a support for resting in the present moment. However, in the beginning, thoughts and emotions may come so fast and furious that it seems like there’s no space between them. That’s because we have a subtle habit of clinging to each thought or emotion as it passes through our mind. In this case, practice “watching the river” by watching the flow of thoughts, rather than the thoughts themselves. When you look at a river, your eyes don’t get distracted by each portion of water as it passes; it just flows by. The river is the flow. If there were no flow, we wouldn’t call it a river.

In the same way, just rest your attention on the flow of the river of thoughts and emotions, instead of following each individual thought as it passes. That way you will gradually become accustomed to watching a thought rather than clinging to it, habitually thinking about the thought as it arises. By contrast, as we get used to watching the flow, the spaces between the thoughts will naturally reveal themselves.

So in this way, thoughts themselves become remedies for subtle involuntary thinking; they are an antidote to the unconscious habit of thinking about thoughts, which is just a kind of clinging.

Don’t cling to or try to follow each thought.

Just observe.

Whatever arises in the mind, just watch it come and go, lightly, and without grasping.

When you do this practice, you don’t need to become like a cat waiting outside a hole for the mouse to show, ready to pounce. Don’t wait, ready to pounce on the space between thoughts as soon as it arises. If you practice in that way, you’ll succumb to thoughts such as “Oh, there is the space! I must rest in it,” which means you are filling the space with another thought. The best way is to rest in the space. Remain spaciously, whether there is any space between thoughts or not. Practice without any goal of finding a space. If a space comes, remain present in the moment. If a thought comes, remain present,



Lion Before Storm II, Sitting Profile, Masai Mara, 2006 | © Nick Brandt, courtesy of Edwyn Houk Gallery, New York

observing it. Either way, *you are relaxing the clinging.*

You don't need to do this only during formal meditation sessions. You can do this practice almost anywhere, especially when you feel overwhelmed by too many thoughts. Just take a mini-break. It is good if you can first get the hang of it in formal meditation sessions, because then it will be easier to take advantage of a mini-break. Try taking a few moments during your day to look at a thought instead of clinging to it.

As we practice these exercises and get used to resting in the space between thoughts, there will be no need for a meditation support (for example, focusing on the breath), because we are fully present and aware. That space is usually quite short, but over time we become more and more stable in it.

There could still be a subtle problem, though: we may start thinking that thoughts are bad and that we have to enter into a thought-free state to be really meditating. Or perhaps we feel we need a thought so we can look at it and then rest in its dissolution. Of course, when we think like this we are still under the influence of hoping for certain circumstances and fearing not getting them. Although by using thoughts and emotions as support we have begun to turn the mind toward the stone thrower, it is still a little indirect.

As we gain experience in meditation practice, we become more and more familiar with the awareness that notices whether

we are distracted or not. We begin to see that we know we are distracted without having to have a thought such as “Yikes! I am soooo distracted.” The *knowing* quality of our mind does not depend on our thinking—we can be aware, know what is happening, without having to rely on thought. That moment of noticing that we are distracted is not based on *thinking* about whether we are distracted. That moment of knowing is a moment when we are free of distraction and fully present. In the beginning it may only last a few instants.

Like a lion not bothering to look at all the stones but rather turning to look in the direction of the stone thrower, instead of looking at the thoughts we can look at the maker of thoughts—awareness.

When you turn the mind to look at the knower of a thought, you are becoming like a lion looking at the stone thrower. At that instant of looking toward knowing, you can just

let go and rest;
let go of being present; or
let go of knowing.

At that moment of letting go, you are in mind's nature—awareness itself. The nature of mind—awareness—is always available whether there is a thought to be known or not.

What does it mean to let go? It means to just let the mind

be, however it is. Don't concern yourself about whether or not you're noticing the knowing or if there is a natural space. However it is, just allow the mind to be that way. One way to think about letting go is to use the analogy of someone who comes home after a long hard day of work. After a long day at work, completely exhausted, they drop into their favorite chair and let everything go. So just drop everything and rest like someone at the end of a long day of work. At that instant of letting go, you are aware, completely undistracted.

You need to have dignity to let go of clinging: the confidence that letting go is the way to practice, the confidence in knowing that what appears in the mind can be just like writing on water. When you write on water, it's there for an instant and then naturally disappears. When you cling to thoughts and emotions, it seems like there are all kinds of disturbances. But when you have dignity—the confidence to let go—there is no disturbance; thoughts and emotions naturally dissolve without any effort.

When anger arises, instead of chasing it, look at the knowing of the anger, let go, and rest. You can learn to practice that way in any situation, while completely engaged in life. Engaged, but not forgetting that it is just writing on water, remembering to look toward the knowing and letting go. You look at the anger and see the baseless aspect of the anger, then let go into the space of not finding any basis for the anger.

Anger is sometimes the thought “I am angry” and sometimes it is just an agitated, restless sensation in our body. Either way, we look toward the knowing of the thought or the knowing of the sensation, then let go. Our habit is to chase the anger, to get right into it, justifying the anger or rejecting the anger. So we need to be aware of how it works, how the habit kicks into action.

When you are aware, you can catch the habit before it fully kicks in. Instead of habitually being like a dog chasing stones, you habitually become like a lion, using awareness as your object, rather than thoughts or emotions. When a thought or emotion comes, you naturally turn toward the knowing of it and let go.

EXERCISE #3:

Awareness Meditation

This is meditation without the support of an object. We do not depend on any object to meditate, yet we are present and undistracted.

Start with your usual meditation method.

After a while, when you have settled into the practice, drop the method and allow yourself to be aware of whatever it is you are aware of. Maybe there is a loud racket outside the door, a fragrant aroma that entered the room, a tickle just under your shoulder blade, or even a rising thought.

Now turn your attention inward, toward what is know-

ing the sound, smell, or sensation. At that moment, let go and rest within the natural space of awareness. Allow awareness to be aware of awareness.

At that moment of turning toward knowing and then letting go, you are naturally present, not lost in thinking about thoughts. Awareness itself is free of focus, aware without being aware of something.

When you try to do this exercise, you may think, “I don't see awareness.” But that instant of knowing you don't see *is* awareness. Otherwise, how could you know? It isn't that we are going to see some *thing* anyway. We just notice that we are aware. If we notice we aren't noticing that we are aware, at that instant of noticing, that *is* awareness. This practice is only difficult because we want to see something. But that subtle sense of noticing that you are aware is the very essence of radical happiness.

As you do these practices, you will become more and more familiar with awareness—the nature of mind. This nature is not altered, improved, or stained by whatever appears to it. The capacity to know, even in dullness, is not made better or worse, by any thought, emotion, or sensation that is experienced. Clouds, rain, all manner of storms can appear in the sky, and yet the sky is never actually harmed or improved.

If you have a dirty washcloth, it may look like the dirt is part of the washcloth itself, and yet after the cloth is thoroughly cleaned you can see that the cloth itself was never touched by the dirt. In the same way, as we become more familiar with our own natural awareness, we can see that although many negative, stormy thoughts and emotions might arise, the knowing quality of mind doesn't change.

This stainless quality of the aware aspect of mind is something you can gain confidence in. No matter what happens, there is a fundamental part of you that is never touched or harmed in any way. By learning to focus your attention on noticing awareness, you can experience this stainless aspect of mind for yourself. Dignity in your nature is having confidence in the stainless quality, the method of noticing awareness, and the experience itself.

Mastering this lion-like dignity is the heart of radical happiness. Most of us spend an entire lifetime chasing thoughts and emotions like a dog, never finding complete satisfaction. Yet, with a *slight but radical* shift of attention, we turn toward the stone thrower—awareness itself. Radical happiness is about developing dignity, becoming like a lion—understanding our natural awareness, gaining confidence in it, and turning toward awareness instead of toward habitually rising thoughts and emotions. It's a little bit subtle and may take some time, but once you get the hang of it, it is a treasure no one can steal away. And that treasure is the result of a radical transformation in how we view ourselves and our world. ▼

From *Radically Happy: A User's Guide to the Mind*, by Phakchok Rinpoche and Erric Solomon © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Shambhala Publications (shambhala.com). **Phakchok Rinpoche** is a Tibetan Buddhist teacher in the Nyingma and Kagyu lineages residing in Kathmandu, Nepal. **Erric Solomon** is a Silicon Valley tech expert, author, and meditation teacher.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU READ



As the dharma is made relatable to modern Western culture, do Buddhism's foundational texts risk becoming obsolete?

In early 2017, Nikko Odiseos, president of Shambhala Publications, expressed concern about the transmission of Buddhism to the West. His primary consideration, as posted on Lama Dechen Yeshe Wangmo's online resource *Vajrayana World*, had to do with "how we read, what we read, and who is reading—or not."

Every year, dharma students in the West gain access to a trove of newly released books about Buddhism. These books—connecting dharma to relationships, the workplace, and child-rearing, or interpreting Buddhism through the lens of neuroscience, psychology, and physics—attempt to adapt Buddhist teachings in ways that make them relevant to modern life. Such adaptation is not unique to today, nor is it unique to the West; the desire for guidance in the affairs of contemporary life has pervaded the history of Buddhist expansion from one culture to another. This spiritual adjustment has been possible, however, because cultural interpretations of the dharma have been grounded in Buddhism's foundational texts.

Historically the domain of monastics and religious professionals, the in-depth study of sutras, koans, and influential treatises has always been a stronghold of dharma practice and transmission. But in modern Western culture, where monastic ordination is rare and the practice of meditation is for many the sine qua non of what it means to be "Buddhist," is there even much interest in

what the traditions' foundational texts have to say? Translators' efforts have made such sources increasingly available to English-speaking students, but according to the president of Shambhala Publications, sales of these works are low—and not growing.

Last fall, *Tricycle* spoke with Nikko Odiseos; Myotai Bonnie Treace, Sensei, former vice abbess at Zen Mountain Monastery and founder of the Hermitage Heart Zen community in Asheville, North Carolina; Reverend Marvin Harada, Jodo Shinshu Buddhist minister at the Orange County Buddhist Church in Anaheim, California; and Daniel Aitken, CEO and publisher of Wisdom Publications, to understand what the Buddhist schools' foundational texts are, why they matter in the context of cross-cultural dharma transmission, and how they can be a vital part of the Buddhist experience in modern Western settings.

—Gabriel Lefferts, Associate Editor

Let's start by defining terms. What do we mean by "foundational"?

Daniel Aitken (DA): There are a few ways to think about foundational texts. The first is to think of them as a tradition's authoritative voice on an important philosophical idea or central practice. In the Tibetan tradition, for example, certain Indian texts form the underlying basis for a deeply established curriculum of study, known as the five great subjects, that covers topics ranging from rules of discipline to valid cognition and the characteristics of emptiness. Such a text would be Nagarjuna's *Root Verses on the Middle Way*, for example, or Chandrakirti's commentary on Nagarjuna's text. Another way to think about foundational texts is that they provide a prerequisite knowledge for the study of advanced texts. Just like we need a certain level of study before we jump into a class on quantum physics, there are books that prepare us for advanced subjects. Again, in the Tibetan tradition an example would be the Seventh Karmapa's text on logic and epistemology. Such texts belong to a different set than a work like Nagarjuna's *Root Verses* but can be considered equally foundational. Or a text might be considered foundational because the Buddha or the founder of a lineage taught it.

Nikko Odiseos (NO): The answer to this varies a lot not only among traditions but also among specific lineages in those tradi-

tions. For someone who is practicing from the early, South Asian schools that look to the Pali canon as authoritative, engaging the suttas is crucial. Rather than just hearing what the eightfold path is as a list, the reader gets a much fuller, more practical, human sense of its components through reading the literature. Even for nonmonastics, the Abhidharma's collection of texts that map the activity of consciousness and the Vinaya [monastic rules] collections are also important, but they tend to be less accessible.

Practitioners from East Asian traditions rely on such texts as the *Diamond Sutra*, *Lankavatara Sutra*, and *Flower Ornament Sutra*, as well as the later Chan and Zen literature. Tibetan lineages, which in practice tend to favor commentaries and later expositions over sutras and tantras, emphasize works such as Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher* or Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim chenmo* ["The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment"].

But really, compiling lists of foundational texts for each tradition or even subtradition is hard, because there is so much variation.

Reverend Marvin Harada (RMH): The primary texts in Shin Buddhism are the three Pure Land sutras, which were selected out of all the sutras in the 12th century by Honen Shonin, the teacher of Shinran Shonin, who was the founder of our school. The main one is the *Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*. The second one is the *Meditation Sutra*, and the third one



Traditionally bound Cambodian Buddhist texts

travelib / Alamy Stock Photo

is the *Amida Sutra*. I find that many Shin Buddhists focus on studying Shinran's opus *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, but in fact that text is all based on his study of the *Larger Sutra*, so to me it's more important that we study the *Larger Sutra*.

How important is it that contemporary dharma practitioners engage with these kinds of texts? Traditionally, deep study has been mainly limited to monastic environments. In the West, there is a much larger lay population.

Myotai Bonnie Treace, Sensei (MBT): Right—so in addition to the many different strands of traditions, there are also several kinds of individuals *within* a tradition. There is the religious professional—a category that is understood differently in different lineages, schools, and orders—and there are also lay practitioners at varying levels of seriousness.

In the early eighties I worked with John Daido Looi Roshi on developing the curriculum now taught at Zen Mountain Monastery, which emphasizes both deep and broad exposure: the recorded sayings of masters, the koan collections, and the monastic codes, as well as the interpretive literature that goes beyond the fundamental genres, such as the capping verses for the *kirigami* [commentaries on esoteric medieval Soto Zen verses given during dharma transmission]. We also study the sutras, in part because so many of the koans refer to them. The curriculum includes classes, workshops, intensives, and individual study over a course of ten to fifteen years. We don't have that structure at Hermitage Heart; I send students who have that level of dedication to the monastery.

Broadly speaking, I think that's where we need to respect the role of the monastic institutions as a kind of university; their continuity, steadiness, and size means they have the educational resources that can't really be replicated by small centers.

DA: If we're talking about a serious Buddhist practitioner who is committed to progress on the path, then I think a certain amount of foundational text study is required. But it's also not just *what* you study, but *how*—how your study is structured, and the order in which ideas are presented to you. I think that's super important. One of my teachers, a Tibetan, once said, "You shouldn't study dharma like a yak eats grass—a little bit over here, a little bit over there."

NO: I think it's a question of quality versus quantity. In other words, the monastic model should still very much

"It's not necessarily the volumes of books you read, but how carefully you study even one book."

be applied here—that's the sense of slow, deep study of a particular text until you "get" it. Reading a book from front to back and then moving on to the next one is not something that I think most—or any—of the traditions would encourage.

Then again, there is the enormous problem of not having any institutions that support an evolving Buddhist culture and instead trying to adapt our existing ones, like academic universities, to this moving target.

I cannot think of a place where Buddhism successfully gained a foothold without institutional support, which tends to mean monastic support, often but not always with state sponsorship. In the West there is no state sponsorship; while Western monastics permeate many practice communities and centers of study, there is not yet—nor does it seem we are likely to see—real institutional support for the wider, highly diverse, and mostly lay world of Western Buddhist practitioners. Academia has had something of a role in filling this vacuum, but the scholars tend to look at Buddhism from the outside with a critical eye and with an impetus to say something innovative or new about something very old, so that by definition they do not fill many of the functions that more traditional supportive institutions have served.

RMH: One teacher said to me, "It's not necessarily the volumes of books you read, but how carefully you study even one book." I took this advice in my approach to the *Larger Sutra* study class: we go character by character, line by line. We only get through maybe a few lines in each class meeting, with the help of a commentary from the 1950s by the Shin Buddhist minister Reverend Haya Akegarasu. We've been going at it like that for ten years now. It's a small class, maybe 10 or 12 individuals, who I'd say are the more devout members that are seen by others in the community as role models.

NO: Recently I was talking with a *khenpo* [a Tibetan Buddhist scholar] who came from Larung Gar in eastern Tibet, one of the largest Buddhist institutions in the world. He outlined

13 core texts that are still used in a lot of the monastic colleges in Tibet, particularly those in the Nyingma tradition. A lot of these texts we actually have translated into English now. I asked, "So what's the order you teach them in?" And he said, "There's no way you can just write down what this curriculum is and simply reproduce it." This is because the method is so different from just having a list of books that you go through and check off. It's a much more immersive, engaged experience.

They do things in a way that's similar to what Rev. Harada was describing—they take one particular text, like *The Way of the Bodhisattva* or *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, and they reteach it year after year. And after each daily or weekly teaching, those attending break into groups and talk about the text and review it. And when they return to it the following year, they've put it into practice, which means that when they hear it again, they're hearing it in a new way. It's a very different model from what we have here.

This brings up in particular the role that publishers play. Publishers collect material and make it available in the general marketplace, but should they collaborate with teachers to structure how readers approach what is published?

DA: I'd say that's the next move. We've gone from whatever's on the shelf at Barnes and Noble to having everything available at once on Amazon. There are two problems that come along with that change: First,

how can I find the book I want? And second, what should I read next? Those two things are the next big challenges for publishers—guiding readers to help them find the text their teacher is directing them to read and study, and helping them wade through all of the material and decide what to read and study next. I think that's the role of the Buddhist publisher now—advised, obviously, by lineage teachers.

NO: It's tricky. A lot of that is the job of the teachers and the sanghas themselves: to define the order and structure. There are things that we can do—we have lots of readers' guides up on our site, and interviews with translators and things like that—but I don't see us as arbiters of deciding what to push. Our goal is to make texts available, so that when people do turn to them or do become interested in them, they're there. That said, we don't do much liturgical material—we leave that to the sanghas.

We should also recognize that each tradition has its own way of developing a student's relationship to foundational texts. I'm thinking of the Tibetan tradition, for instance, where a student's relationship with their root teacher has as much significance as, if not more significance than, their connection to the historical Buddha. In that context, the way authority is given to certain texts and teachings is going to be very different from, say, how this takes place in Theravada Buddhism.

Photograph by Emily Shur; text photographed with permission of the Philosophical Research Society



Prajnaparamita Sutra in 8,000 Lines, late 18th-century handwritten Tibetan manuscript

NO: I've definitely seen lamas in the West who were pushing people more on the practice side and discouraging them from reading some of these foundational texts. For that particular sangha or student, that advice is primary, because it comes from their teacher. If someone is particularly prone to getting hung up on logic and stuff like that, a teacher who has spent time with that student and really knows them might guide them in a different direction. It's all very contextual.

MBT: The relationship between practice and study can work both ways. I remember that many years ago sutra and koan study were very limited because of what was translated and available. You would receive a koan, but parts of it weren't translated, so you could go off in a direction with it that was misguided because you didn't quite un-

derstand what the question was, what the koan itself was asking. That has changed now, and that's significant.

derstand what the question was, what the koan itself was asking. That has changed now, and that's significant.

There are times when you say to a student, "No reading—nothing but this koan until another word is given." You ask them not to relieve any of that pressure, and that's it. But there are also times when there is no issue with a student's having understanding as well as insight.

Do you think that the study of foundational texts is necessary for Buddhism's full transmission to the West?

NO: I do think that whatever constitutes a successful transmission of Buddhism on the level of society and not of an individual will involve deep engagement and absorption in the textual traditions that have come down to us over the centuries. Does every person who wants to be a serious practitioner need to do it? I don't think so. But

from the standpoint of establishing a settled American or Western Buddhism, I do think it's absolutely important.

RMH: Yes, I think it's very important. At most of our temples, the ministers are trying to conduct some kind of a study class for their members. I myself mentioned the study group I started for the *Larger Sutra*, which I did for very selfish reasons—I wanted to study the text in more depth myself and I thought teaching a class would force me to study since I'd need to prepare the materials.

Of course, not everyone can go into that kind of in-depth study, but we need some individuals, both laypeople and teachers, to do so. Then they can share their insights from those texts by writing their own secondary sources.

Speaking of secondary sources, how do you see the relationship between the study of foundational texts and that of more popular books from modern teachers—books that are typi-

cally geared not toward traditional Buddhist thought but rather toward the immediate concerns of practitioners?

RMH: I think the popular books are just as important as the foundational texts. A popular or secondary sourcebook can introduce the depth and breadth of a foundational text teaching, and the average person who has not studied that text can be inspired or motivated to study it as a result. Without such books, the important Buddhist texts might remain only on the shelves of Buddhist libraries, never being studied or read.

NO: Contemporary presentations are particularly important, as they are the place where many people begin. There are many great examples of contemporary teachers, people who are invariably well trained in a specific tradition, who write powerful books that reach beyond

the confines of that tradition and the surrounding culture to speak directly to our own experience. With the best of these kinds of works, a reader can deeply internalize the meaning through reading, reflecting, rereading, practicing, and so on, and this can have a profound impact on them, whether they self-identify as Buddhist or not.

But I do think there needs to be some caution. The Buddha is said to have given 84,000 teachings or paths. Of course, the precision of the number is not important; rather, the point is that there are teachings and techniques to address every neurosis, negative thought or emotion, and spiritual longing. So it's all there; it's not incomplete. How the mind works has not changed, so watering Buddhism down, cherry-picking it, or mixing it is a slippery slope to misinterpretation and ineffectiveness. The language can change or the metaphors and examples can shift to meet us where we are. With our iPhone-gripping hands, 24-hour news, Tinder-born relationships, and world of instant gratification, we may need to find new ways to make the points resonate with a new generation.

a rock that is one mile tall, one mile wide, and one mile long. The maiden descends from the heavens once every three years and brushes her gown on the rock: one kalpa is the length of time it takes for her to wear the rock down to nothing. Kind of blows the mind, right? That is why we take this definition not literally but metaphorically, meaning eons and eons of time.

DA: The Dalai Lama's approach to this question is admirable. He has said that if empirical observation contradicts a particular Buddhist account of the physical world, then the Buddhist position should be dropped. But perhaps the biggest challenge in transmitting the depth of Buddhist thought to the West is the lack of questioning concerning the assumptions that ground our scientific observations, such as physicalism—the proposition that everything is physical or follows from the physical. I believe that Buddhist texts have a lot to contribute to philosophical conversations about these kinds of fundamental assumptions.

“How the mind works has not changed, so watering Buddhism down, cherry-picking it, or mixing it is a slippery slope to misinterpretation and ineffectiveness.”

But the essence of the teachings should remain consistent.

The best of the contemporary presentations will, hopefully, eventually lead people to the foundational texts and their early and more recent commentaries. We as a publisher feel a responsibility to make sure that a Buddhist book project is not straying from the core views and practices of any of the lived traditions of Buddhism, as diverse as they are.

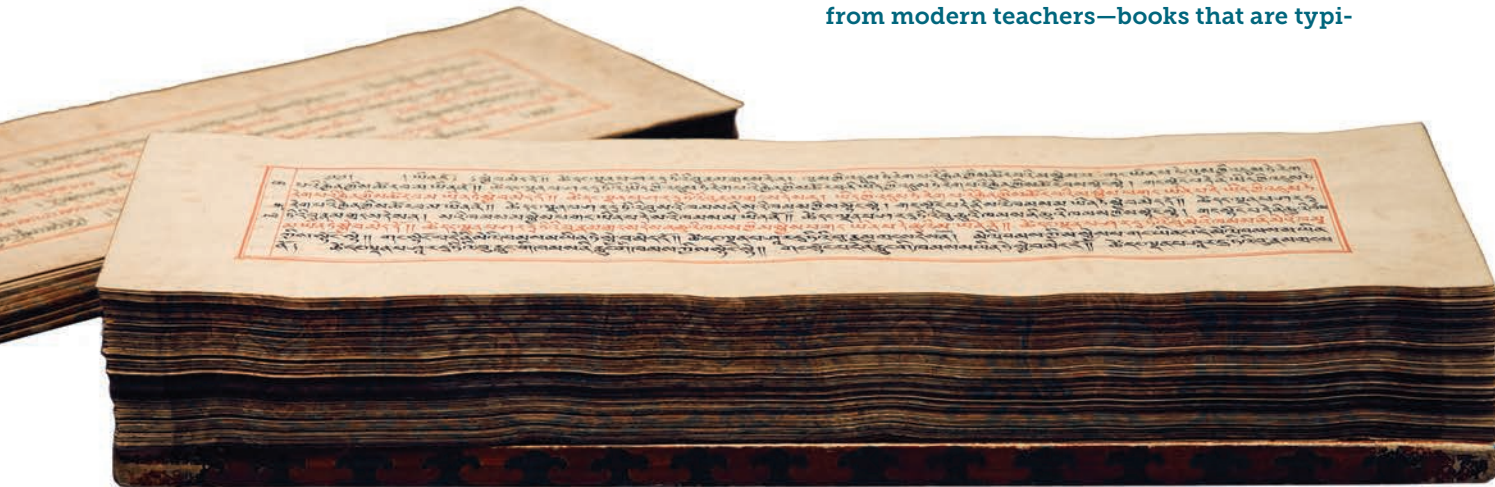
What about the challenges faced in transmitting the foundations of Buddhist thought so that they address Western currents of knowledge such as the academic study of history, pluralistic understanding, and natural science?

RMH: To me, there isn't a challenge in terms of Buddhism and the study of history, science, and so on. The teachings in the sutras are “timeless” teachings, but the expressions and words used in the sutras reflect a period of time and culture. We don't take the expressions and language of the sutras literally. One of the standard Buddhist explanations for the length of one kalpa is the time it takes for a heavenly maiden to wear down

NO: The biggest challenge is that the medium can easily become the message, so that we miss out on what was trying to be articulated in the first place. Why do Buddhists always need to validate Buddhism from the points of view of science or psychology? We do this all the time, over and over. Are we too insecure about our own logic and views of reality? I can see the value in drawing parallels, but having to justify Buddhist views on the basis of these traditions doesn't seem particularly helpful. And science, of course, has innumerable useful applications, but it is not really offering anything new in terms of helping practice. Close reading in a particular genre—for example, the Pali or Mahayana Abhidharma literature, followed by putting its insights into practice through repeated reflection and meditation—will give a practitioner a more solid understanding of the dharma than countless brain wave measurements can provide.

That said, one benefit of the pluralistic and scholarly approach is that prejudices within Buddhism are getting worn down. For example, there is an orthodox view in many Southeast Asian countries that while Theravada is based on the authentic teachings of the Buddha,

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Bidia Dandaron in tantric ritual dress

BIDIA DANDARON

Prisoner, lama, and “neo-Buddhist” heir
to a Russian dharma king

BY DOUGLAS PENICK

This is the second of a pair of Ancestors profiles about two 20th-century Buryat Buddhists: Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, who established an independent Buddhist kingdom in the midst of the Russian Revolution, and his heir, Bidia Dandaron. The first installment, “Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov: A Vanished Buddhist King,” was published in the Summer 2018 issue.

In the diamond of awareness,
All display: true, delusory,
Lovely, agonizing,
Each a path of wakening.

Spinning through seasons: birth and death,
Breath exhausts all it animates.

In every instant wakening,
Something falls away.

This is the inseparable body, speech,
and mind of **Vajrasattva**,
Appearing in all the realms of existence as
Yamantaka, Conqueror of Death.

Again we are looking into a tormented sea, swirling with fragments of papers, journals, whispered lies, beautiful visions, violent death, torture, desperate survival, petty viciousness, terror, ambition, rumor, idealism, myth, interpretation posing as fact. But within the seething murk, the roiling waves, we see rising from deep below, something, the outline of a miraculous being, luminous, gold, drawing us into the flood.

This is Bidia Dandaron, who lived in times that did not allow him the illusion that there was any path by which he could escape the immensity of pain inflicted in this world. He would find and teach a hidden way.

“Oh, the wonder of Vajrasattva,” Bidiadhara Dandarovich Dandaron exclaimed. He was not quite 60, but had broken an arm and a leg not so long ago. The injuries were barely healed when he was forced back on a work gang. It was his third and final incarceration; this time he was in a gulag at Vydrino on the southern shores of Lake Baikal. He was still teaching people who came to him in secret. He was a scholar renowned for his mastery of Buddhist and Western philosophy, but he now taught a path of Buddhist tantric practice entirely adapted to the brutality of the age. The world of monasteries, monks, and renowned teachers was completely gone.

VAJRASATTVA
a tantric deity seen as the
personification of innate
enlightenment.

Accounts of Bidia Dandaron's life and that of his teacher, Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, are somewhat haphazard, as one might expect after decades in which, throughout Buryatia, all Buddhist temples were destroyed, libraries sacked, and all who would have known about these men killed or scattered through the vast network of prison camps. Nonetheless, it is clear that Dandaron's path began when his father brought him to one of the most courageous and profound teachers in the history of Central Asia: Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov.

Bidia Dandaron was born in Kizhinga, Buryatia, on December 28, 1914. His mother was a dedicated Buddhist practitioner, the widow of a wandering lama, Dazarof Dandar. His stepfather was Dorje Badmaev, the closest disciple and dharma heir of the renowned Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, sometime abbot of the monastery Kudun Datsan and a holder of both the Gelug and Nyingma Tibetan Buddhist lineages. Dandaron's stepfather began teaching him from early childhood. When he was 3, a party of Gelugpa monks from Tibet came to inform Dandaron's family that their son had been recognized as the reincarnation of Jayagsy Rinpoche, Tsydenov's teacher and abbot of Kumbum Monastery in Tibet. They wished to take him to Tibet for training, but Tsydenov and Bidia's stepfather felt that it was better for the boy to stay in Buryatia. The monks departed; monastic officials later recognized an alternative candidate.

Dandaron continued to live and study with his parents in Soorkhoi, where a small community of practitioners lived under Tsydenov's auspices. During this time, a number of anti-Bolshevik armies, some little more than bandit gangs, crisscrossed Siberia and the Mongolian steppes, each trying to secure its own base to resist the Red armies who were taking over Russia.

In 1919, in an effort to help 13,000 Buryat families who had requested his protection, Tsydenov took the extraordinary step of proclaiming a Buddhist kingdom under his rule as a *chakravartin*, or dharma king. His government contained strong Western influences. A constituent assembly was elected by popular vote, and all the government ministers were elected from that body. All laws were made in accord with Buddhist doctrine; nonviolence was the law of the land, and its people were exempt from being drafted into any of the surrounding armies.

Rations were barely edible, calculated to keep prisoners on the edge of starvation.



Ozerny labor camp



Russian convicts' sleeping quarters in a Siberian prison camp

Top: ITAR_TASS News Agency / Alamy. Bottom: Photograph by William Henry Jackson c. 1895, Everett Collection / Alamy



Bidia Dandaron holding a *dorje* and skull cup, two Vajrayana ritual items

Tsydenov, despite the death of Badmaev, his disciple and successor, in 1919, was able to maintain this kingdom for a year. Then he was taken prisoner by Ataman Grigory Semyenov's agents and moved further into northern Siberia. In 1920, while still in prison, Tsydenov decreed that Badmaev's son, Bidia Dandaron, should succeed to this title and throne. Soon after, the Soviets captured Tsydenov, and he was never seen again.

Dandaron was 7 when Tsydenov left, but he did not forget him, although he never pursued any claim to Tsydenov's title. Apparently he and his mother moved to Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia, where Dandaron continued Buddhist study and practice and at the same time attended the state secondary school, where mathematics, sciences, and, of course, commu-

nist doctrine made up a great deal of the curriculum. How proud his teachers must have been that someone with such a primitive background was capable of mastering the languages and scientific knowledge needed for acceptance into the Aircraft Device Construction Institute in Leningrad. There Dandaron studied aeronautical engineering from 1934 to 1937.

During this time, he got married and had two children. He also audited classes in Tibetan at the Oriental Studies Institute of Leningrad State University. The depth of his understanding and experience in Buddhist teachings as well as his openness to Western analytical methods made a great impression on many of the students and faculty members. He deepened his study of the Tibetan language with the distinguished Russian scholar Andrei Vostrikov, with whom he became particularly close.

In late 1937, toward the end of the great wave of Stalinist purges, Dandaron was arrested as a Japanese spy and an agent of an alleged "pan-Mongolian conspiracy." This was part of the Soviet's unrelenting effort to erase any religion that could serve as a focus for nationalist sentiment.

Shortly after Dandaron's arrest, Vostrikov was taken into custody and executed. Dandaron was sentenced to a six-year term of hard labor at a camp in Siberia. His wife and children were allowed to accompany him, but she was released after several months. She had pneumonia and died, as did one of the children.

All of the forced labor camps in the vast Soviet Gulag system required that days be spent in heavy manual work such as mining, road construction, ditch digging, or forestry in the most extreme weather conditions. By night, prisoners were packed into bunks in wooden dormitories; the stench was overwhelming. Rations were barely edible, calculated to keep prisoners on the edge of starvation. There was no sanitation to speak of. Discipline was arbitrary and brutal. Violence was unceasing. Death rates were, as intended, high.

As one who managed to survive, the Polish-French writer Jacques Rossi explains in his "encyclopedia dictionary" *The Gulag Handbook*: "The Gulag was conceived in order to transform human matter into a docile, exhausted, ill-smelling mass . . . thinking of nothing but how to appease the constant torture of hunger, living in the instant, concerned with nothing apart from evading kicks, cold, and ill-treatment."

Another survivor, the Russian author Varlam Shalamov, wrote, "All human emotions—love, friendship, envy, concern for one's fellow man, compassion, longing for fame, honesty—had left us with the flesh that had melted from our bodies."

Photograph by Vladimir M. Montlevich; courtesy Vladimir M. Montlevich, Bidia D. Dandaron - Izbrannye stantsii

“Dandaron is a hero, unburdened by the horizons of dogma.”

Dandaron lived under these conditions for six years. He was often tortured and permanently bore the scars inflicted by the back of a Cossack's saber. Nonetheless, he found ways to continue his meditative and yogic practices, study books that were smuggled in to him, send and receive an occasional letter, and teach fellow inmates how to meditate despite the extreme nature of their situation. He was released in 1943.

The next five years were marked by a temporary softening of the government's attitude toward religion. The Ivolginsky and Aginsky monasteries were reopened under the supervision of government agencies, although “wandering lamas” taught and performed ceremonies privately. Dandaron was able to renew some of his former friendships in both Leningrad and Ulan-Ude. He resumed his work translating texts, and small groups of Western and Buryat practitioners began to meet with him.

Dandaron was arrested again in 1948 and given a ten-year labor camp sentence. This time, the overall conditions were evidently not quite so harsh as during his earlier confinement. He also benefitted from the companionship of certain Buryat lamas and Western philosophers who had been swept into the government's net. Dandaron considered himself particularly lucky to be able to study Kant while imprisoned with the Russian-Lithuanian philosopher Vasily Seseman and became increasingly interested in the conjunction of Western and Buddhist thought. He was also able to write a wide range of articles and commentaries, but most of these were intercepted and destroyed.

Dandaron now attracted disciples from Buryatia, Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia, many highly educated in a wide range of subjects. These fellow prisoners became his most loyal adherents, and they became what was later called the core of the “Sangha of Dandaron.” He taught what he called “neo-Buddhism,” whereby he explored ways of combining Buddhism with European philosophy and science.



Bidia Dandaron in Moscow, 1956

His group viewed practice and study not as an exterior pre-occupation but as an investigation of the inner ways in which Buddhist practice and thought illuminated and were illuminated by their lives in the labor camp. It was, as Dandaron said, the collective karma they shared with the Soviet world as a whole.

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev gave his famous “secret speech” in Moscow before the 20th Communist Party Congress, repudiating the excesses of Stalin's cult of personality in general and, more specifically, the mass imprisonments in the gulag. Within a year, Dandaron found himself rehabilitated and released.

He joked that “for a Buddhist journeying from one incarnation to another, it was very useful to be born in Russia.” He would add, laughing: “Note that I say a Buddhist and not Buddhists.”

In 1957 Dandaron renewed his contacts in Leningrad, but friends and colleagues were unable to find him a permanent position there. He was, however, able to find work at the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences in Ulan-Ude. There he worked with three other Buryat lamas to catalogue and oversee the preservation of the large number of books that had formerly been part of monastic libraries, most notably on the topics of the

Tibetan Kangyur [collected sutras] and Tengyur [commentaries]. He traveled frequently to Leningrad and there, by a stroke of luck, met George Roerich, son of Nicholas Roerich, the famous painter and theosophical philosopher. George Roerich was, in his own right, a great and widely traveled Tibetologist, and the two began working closely together, producing a large number of scholarly papers. It was a great blow, both to Dandaron and to Buddhist studies in Russia, when Roerich died suddenly in 1960. Nonetheless, Dandaron continued to produce studies in Buddhist religion and history as well as Tibetan-Russian translations of Buddhist texts. He also wrote essays exploring ways in which Buddhist concepts could enrich and develop Western philosophical and scientific thought, and reciprocally how Western thinking could find a place along the continuum of classical Buddhist concerns. These essays were privately printed and secretly distributed in *samizdat* form.

At the same time, a group of students continued to gather around him, some formerly from the camps, others from the academic world. Sometimes he would go to Leningrad, and sometimes the students would take the weeklong train ride to visit him in Ulan-Ude. Dandaron commented: “It's not that students are coming to me in Ulan-Ude; it's Buddhism that is moving westward.”

His tantric teaching at this time was focused on the practice of Yamantaka, Conqueror of the Lord of Death. Though these have always been secret teachings, Dandaron seems to have emphasized an approach in which all the bardos, all the transitions in life—dream, meditation, death, and rebirth, all the unending transitions in what we call existence and nonexistence—are each and every one a path of enlightenment.

In a talk printed in Moscow in 1970, Dandaron began with these words: “Our knowledge is limited by the boundaries of samsara and by the manifestation of nirvana, each of which has its own limits, namely the limits of our system of time and space and the physical world order in which we move. About such knowledge in any other time or era, we must admit that its substance and character are unknown to us.”

“Buddhism,” he said, “has neither place nor time nor epoch. Buddhism journeys on, unaware of peoples, countries, climates, revivals or declines, societies or social groups. This does not mean that Buddhism denies such things. Buddhism denies nothing. This means that Buddhism itself is not aware of them. Such things are not its concern.”

“Dandaron is bodhisattva-mahasattva. He is a hero,” said his student, the philosopher Vladimir Montlevich. “He was unburdened by the horizons of dogma. He tore that away. He also intuited the needs of our time, and in this he was exactly what he said: a neo-Buddhist.”

Dandaron had always been viewed with suspicion and dislike by members of the Buryat Communist Party in Ulan-Ude. He upheld traditions that they wanted to leave behind in their effort to find a modern identity. They expected him to show the Russians that people of the steppes were as capable as anyone of contributing to modern communism.

But he had betrayed them. Late one night, young Buryat communists destroyed the stupas he and his followers had built in honor of his teacher, Samdan Tsydenov, and his stepfather, Dorje Badmaev. No doubt they were also behind the denunciations that led to Dandaron's arrest and the charges that were laid against him in Leningrad in 1972.

On December 27, 1972, Dandaron was tried in Ulan-Ude under article 227 of the Soviet criminal code. He was accused of leading a Buddhist sect that participated in “bloody sacrifices” and “ritual copulations” and of attempting to “murder or beat former members of the sect who wanted to leave it.” Further charges included “contacts with foreign countries and international Zionism.” In the end, most charges were dropped, but the contentions that the “Dandaron Group” held prayer meetings and had an illicit financial fund, and that Dandaron acted as “guru” to the group were accepted without proof. Four associates—Yuri K. Lavrov, the painter Aleksandr Ivanovich Zheleznov, Donatas Butkus, and the philosopher Vladimir Montlevich—were subjected to psychological examination, found to be mentally ill, and sent to psychiatric institutions (from which they were soon released). Dandaron was sentenced to five years' deprivation of freedom under conditions of forced labor in a “corrective labor colony” at Vydrino, near Lake Baikal. Despite his age and failing health, he was required to do heavy physical labor.

In the bleak life of the camps, a world devoid of comfort, privacy, silence, consolation, or future, stranded in an expanse of hardened mud, dry grass, and impassible forests, beneath a horizonless sky of roiling gray clouds, Dandaron proclaimed the name of Vajrasattva. He was allowed an occasional visitor. It was said that for those who heard him directly, the effect was like a sudden clap of thunder, a bolt of lightning, a sudden opening in the sky. Some reported that those who were nearby but did not hear him directly sensed a momentary, almost painful, joy, a near but not quite accessible bright expanse hidden within clouds and beneath the plains.

Around this time, Dandaron recognized that all Vajrayana practices could be explored in the single deity of Vajrasattva. He evolved a method of practice with both a purifying aspect and a complex visualization with an outer form and an inner mandala. These, he said, were the intrinsic forms of all-pervasive radiance that extended through all of space to dissipate the ignorance and suffering of every living being.

At times, Dandaron would sit unmoving, while his breathing and his heartbeat would stop. As his followers said, he was in samadhi, a deep state of meditative concentration.

In late 1973, he fell and broke an arm and leg. He was forced to return to work before they were healed. He spoke of wanting to build a round white temple to Vajrasattva on his release. Dandaron said: “I unite all schools.”

On October 26, 1974, at the age of 59, again his heart and breathing stopped. He sat motionless for a long time but did not return to this life. The prison authorities would not say where his body had been buried. Nonetheless, the inspiration

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Old Tibet Meets the American Midwest

A charismatic Ohio-born lama brings the dharma to the Buckeye State.

BY MARY TALBOT | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW SPEAR

On the first day of Losar, the Tibetan Lunar New Year celebration, the February sky hangs low and leaden over Columbus, Ohio. A steady downpour of icy rain has bogged down traffic, and members of Columbus Karma Thegsum Chöling are trickling in for what was supposed to be an 8 a.m. prayer retreat. They take off their wet boots and assemble in the basement of Congregation Tifereth Israel, a synagogue whose members have hosted the group since shortly after an arsonist's trash bin fire in 2016 incinerated the 19th-century wood frame church that had been the group's home for 26 years.

The fluorescent-lit room is outfitted with meditation cushions, thangkas, and long, low tables where students unpack ritual instruments and take prayer books out of yellow silk wrappings. A shrine is piled with Losar offerings, most traditional, some not: every item of food brought into Tifereth Israel must be kosher, so next to the tormas [ritual statues] and water bowls are stacks of packaged matzo, Kedem tea biscuits, and a bottle of Manischewitz Concord Grape wine.

One of the last to arrive, a few minutes past eight, is Lama Kathy Wesley, Columbus KTC's resident teacher and a group member since its inception in 1977, when she was 23. Wesley, a third-generation Columbusite, is tall, with short,

graying brown hair, wire-rim glasses and a wide grin. She wears a version of Tibetan robes designed for lay lamas and sensible shoes. "So sorry I'm late! Traffic!" she announces, shaking the rain off her parka. "But good for all of you for coming! The Tibetans say that what you do on Losar, you do for the rest of the year. So by coming to practice you're getting a great start!"

By taking part in this Losar retreat, the members of Columbus KTC are furthering a process that has unfolded, and continues to unfold, across the country and all over the world. The transplantation of a practice tradition that speaks to the human condition, from ancient central Asia to a basement room in Ohio, led by a woman with a quintessentially American style, is really nothing out of the ordinary. It is happening for a perfectly mundane reason: people face the same suffering and turbulence of mind, and have the same desire for lasting happiness, wherever they are, and throughout time. Granted, this group, and this lama, have the privilege of representing the original point of contact between the Karma Kagyu tradition and the Midwest. And the roots of that hybrid are growing ever deeper.

Wesley's entrance is a taste of the kind of unfettered enthusiasm I will come to recognize as her M.O. That morning, and at all the gatherings I witness where Lama Kathy is in attendance, she seems to be the happiest person in the room. She has a gentle, welcoming



Lama Kathy Wesley stands on the grounds where Columbus KTC once stood. Since January 2016, when an act of arson destroyed the temple building, the sangha has sought funds to rebuild.

authority and a penchant for goofiness that infuses her teaching, which often involves explaining each step of a practice and its significance, as she does with the morning's *Green Tara* invocation. Later that weekend, in the course of a refuge ceremony, she turns to the rows of Buddha and deity statues, waves at them and, in a cartoonish voice, squeaks, "Hi! These are your new friends!" Turning back to the refuge takers, she adds, "They really are your friends."

GREEN TARA

One of many manifestations of the female buddha Tara, a widely worshipped deity in Tibetan Buddhism hailed as "the mother of all buddhas," associated with all forms of enlightened activity and revered as a protector of her devotees.

They represent your own potential for buddhahood. What could be better?"

Wesley's sense of humor and lack of pretense, even when describing arcane Vajrayana practices, has been an effective vehicle for presenting the dharma. It works because it is grounded in 40 years of intensive religious practice that began when she first encountered her teacher, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, in 1977. Khenpo Rinpoche, a

scholar and meditation adept in the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, came to the United States in 1976 at the behest of the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa to help establish a center in upstate New York, near Woodstock. At the age of 94, he is still the head resident lama at the monastery, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra (KTD), and has been widely recognized for decades as an awakened master.

Their meeting was one of those seemingly preordained flukes that often mark the beginning of lifelong student-teacher relationships. At the time, Wesley had recently graduated from Ohio State with a degree in journalism and was working as a rookie reporter at the *Newark Advocate*, the local paper for a town about 45 minutes east of Columbus. While casting around for story ideas one day, she saw an ad for a lecture by a Tibetan lama and decided to cover it.



Sangha members' prayers and wishes for the Tibetan New Year

Khenpo Rinpoche had been invited to Newark by a resident Buddhist couple who'd met the 16th Karmapa in New York in 1975. The story goes that when the late Karmapa learned the couple was from near Columbus, he decided it must be an auspicious place to teach the dharma because its name suggested another major meeting of worlds: Columbus's "discovery" of America. The Karmapa didn't end up visiting until much later, but he sent his emissary, Khenpo Rinpoche, the very next year.

Wesley describes seeing Khenpo Rinpoche for the first time as "a total upheaval. Here was this incredibly wise and compassionate person with a gentle but powerful strength that you could just feel. I suddenly knew what I wanted to be when I grew up." After interviewing him for the paper, Wesley asked some of her own questions about meditation and felt an instant recognition of his answers about the dharma. "People cry when they meet Khenpo Rinpoche. It's a thing. I cried when I met him, too." Two months later, she took refuge as a Tibetan

Buddhist and became a founding member of Columbus KTC, the first of what are now 24 affiliate centers in the United States.

That sense of recognition, says Wesley, was both surprising and not—religion had always attracted her. Her father, an auto mechanic, and her mother, a part-time clerk at a drugstore, had raised Wesley as a Catholic, and she attended parochial schools. "I was a happy Catholic. I loved going to church and praying." But by the time she got to college, her faith couldn't satisfy her interior questioning and a growing need to find peace. "The church was a karmic seed for which I'm very grateful," she says. "Who knows: maybe if I'd met a good Jesuit priest, like the current Pope, who could have helped me live my best life, I might still be a Catholic."

In the beginning, KTC was a loose and revolving group of five to ten people, convening in living rooms to study, meditate, and chant together. Under Khenpo Rinpoche's direction, Wesley began the Karma Kagyu tradition's form of Ngondro, a set of preliminary practices that require the completion of hundreds of thousands of prostrations, prayers, and mandala offerings:

"I'm one of those people who doesn't realize I can't do something, so I do it."

it took her five years to finish. As the group grew, to 15 and then 20, Khenpo Rinpoche asked her to teach meditation. By 1990, with Wesley as administrative director, KTC consisted of 30 regular members and was ready for a permanent home, so KTC purchased the church in West Columbus.

In 1993, Khenpo Rinpoche inaugurated the first traditional Tibetan three-year retreat in the US, at a specially-built hermitage called Karme Ling in Delhi, New York. For Wesley, there was no question that she would undertake the retreat, in spite of the fact that she worked full-time and was married. "I'm one of those people who doesn't realize I can't do something, so I do it." Wesley's husband of 45 years, Michael, a US Postal Service employee at the time, gave his blessing. "Marriage is a choice you make every day, even several times a day," says Wesley. "Mike was willing to keep making that choice."

Though the three-year retreat was a new project for KTD, Khenpo Rinpoche made sure it cleaved as closely as possible to the thousand-year-old traditions on which it was based. "Basically, we lived like monks and nuns, except with no interruptions," says Wesley. "We were in our rooms for ten hours a day, practicing." And every night of those three years, the retreatants slept sitting upright in the traditional Tibetan

meditation box. Summing it all up, she says, the experience "taught me how to practice for the rest of my life. It taught me that the only thing I have is my mind, and that the state of my mind in the present moment is what matters."

"It was very intense," recalls Jemi Steele, a teacher in Colorado Springs who was part of that first group. "But there was a lot of humor, and when one person was having a hard time, the others would support her." (Men and women lived and practiced in separate quarters.) Steele remembers that Wesley's playfulness—wearing striped socks to pujas, hanging a picture of Mr. Rogers in her room, singing show tunes—was a great energizer. "Kathy was always bursting into that song from the show *Kismet*—"Stranger in Paradise." She was game for anything. Rinpoche would put things on our plate and we had to figure them out. And Kathy would say, 'OK! Let's figure this out!' She had a very can-do spirit."

When she finished the retreat, Khenpo Rinpoche asked her to assume the role of resident teacher for Columbus KTC and gave her three rules to follow. "First he told me, 'If someone asks you something and you don't know the answer, tell them 'I don't know but I'll find out.' Don't ever forget those three magic words: I don't know.'" In Wesley's earliest days of teaching, that meant countless letters to Rinpoche, and countless letters back. "I became a recitation device—repeating what Rinpoche taught me. The more I repeated it, the more it stayed inside."

The second and third rules were "Don't put on airs; be natural." Check. And "Stay with the list." The list was a roster of topics and texts that still form the curriculum for study at KTC. The responsibilities that lay ahead were daunting, says Wesley, "but I thought, if Rinpoche had confidence in me, if he knew I could do it, then I could do it. I'm not an enlightened being, therefore it's not going to be easy and I'm going to make mistakes." An assistant to Khenpo Rinpoche offered some parting advice that Wesley quotes to herself daily: "You're not a big deal. The dharma is a big deal." That was huge for me. I live by that."

Every convert dharma group is a study in syncretism. Each has its own blend of regionalism and orthodoxy, shaped in turn by the style and personality of its leader and core members. Columbus KTC is no different (and for the time

being, part of that syncretism is a kosher altar). It doesn't take long to see how Wesley's accessibility and plainspokenness have made Columbus KTC the way it is today. And because the center is currently homeless, Wesley's engagement with her students and the structure she imposes are more important than ever. "What makes this place work is that there's a very clear path for students to follow and they get a lot of support," said Eric Weinberg, who runs the group's prison dharma program and sits on its board. "That, and the fact that Kathy has this great big heart."

Weinberg's introduction to KTC ten years ago was emblematic of Wesley's approach to new students. After decades of meditation and practice in a series of traditions, from Christian mysticism to Kundalini, Weinberg dead-ended. "I was just



At Columbus KTC's current interim location, a Jewish synagogue, all shrine offerings must be kosher.

incredibly unhappy. My wife could see it, my kids could see it. I was in a box and I didn't know how to get out. I needed lineage, bad." After attending a retreat taught by Tai Situ Rinpoche, a Tibetan master in the Kagyu lineage who was visiting Columbus, Weinberg decided to look into KTC. He called and left a message, asking to talk with someone about meditation, "but I didn't really expect a reply," he recalls. "Kathy called me right back. I told her all about my practices and what I'd done in the past. She said, 'Well, I don't know anything about any of that, but I think I can help you. There's just one catch: you'll have to start from the beginning.'"

The beginning at Columbus KTC is a graduated introduction to the Buddha's teachings as interpreted by the Kagyu

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BROWN BODY WHITE SANGHA

A meditation on mindfulness of the body brings to light the painful racialized experiences of many practitioners of color—a reality that white communities often fail to take into account.

BY ATIA SATTAR | ILLUSTRATION BY LOVEIS WISE

Skin color can be variable: blackish, brownish, yellowish, reddish, whitish. It's like a big bag of grain that takes the shape of what's inside. The largest human organ is the skin, with a surface area of about 25 feet. The direction is found both above and below the waist; it's located all over the body from face to feet to fingers, bordered by head hair, body hair, nails, and teeth.

—32 Parts of the Body: Guided Meditation 1 (Spirit Rock Retreat with Bob Stahl)



The meditation, the first of a series on the 32 parts of the body, was assigned as homework in a two-year course on the teachings of the Buddha in relation to diversity issues. We were studying mindfulness of the body—the first of four foundations of mindfulness described in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, an essential Buddhist scripture that lays out a roadmap to attain freedom from suffering by explaining how to establish mindfulness, or *sati*.

To develop mindfulness of the body, one needs to contemplate one's breath, bodily postures, activities, and anatomical parts, as well as one's imagined corpse—the body after death. The recorded meditation I was listening to at home asked us to contemplate the head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and skin. Heeding the instructions, I felt myself attuning to sensations I had never noticed before: individual shafts of hair along my scalp, the cold of my nails against their beds, the way my lips rest gently against my teeth. I passed through all of these reflections with little disturbance; then I came to my skin.

It was nothing short of a confrontation. Suddenly, contemplating my skin as a separate entity for the first time, I was struck by intense pain and aversion. I was livid, like a wronged child, and overcome by a wave of emotions—shame and rage,

them. As Venerable Analayo writes in his seminal text *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*, “A detached observation of the various parts of the body leads to the understanding that they are all of equal nature. Once one clearly apprehends their true nature, it becomes evident that there is nothing inherently beautiful in any particular aspect of the body. . . . The same contemplation is then to be applied ‘externally’ to the bodies of others.” Joseph Goldstein, in his series of dharma talks on the *Satipatthana Sutta*, says, “These are powerful meditations that begin to decondition our strong identification with the body and the suffering that results from that identification.”

But I find no guidance concerning how to navigate the challenges that arise in the process of discovering the racialized body and the painful secrets it unveils, of which there are so many. Here are some of mine: my conscious renunciation of Pakistani culture and religion as a means of coping with the events of September 11, which took place barely two months after I immigrated with my family to the United States at the age of 17. The violent jettison of my accent so that I could convince others, as quickly as possible, that I had assimilated into American culture—that I was no threat to

Nowhere does race blindness feel more hurtful than in well-intentioned white sanghas presently striving for diversity and inclusion.

but mostly pain—along with a barrage of recollections:

Vandalized college election posters, the brown faces of my sister and me crossed out while those of our white friends who were also running for student government remained untouched.

A conversation with a young girl on an airplane post-9/11 that began with the query “What race are you?” and ended with “No offense to you, but I hope all Pakistani people die.”

Questions from college-age students asking if I had ever met Osama bin Laden.

And most recently, the thick air of discomfort filling rooms of white, liberal, educated “allies”—at my workplace and in Buddhist practice spaces—when I articulate the pervasive suffering surrounding race.

I was straining to grasp and contain this influx of emotion. Meanwhile, the meditation moved on.

In my journey to be mindful and to clearly know my bodily experience, I am continuously confronted with my racialization, and the Buddhist teachings have left me thoroughly confused about how to deal with that. In my course of study, I have learned that the ultimate goal of mindfulness of the body is to cultivate a sense of erasure of physical distinctions and consequently the identities and hierarchies we assign to

them. My obstinate avoidance, for many years, of other South Asian persons as friends, let alone romantic interests. My nonchalant and cheerful observation to my closest (white) friend in graduate school that “sometimes I forget I’m not white.”

Nor is my Buddhist practice exempt from this kind of internalized racism. I find myself questioning whether my progress toward enlightenment is being crippled by my inability to “decondition [my] strong identification with the body and the suffering that results.” I find myself hoping that one day, I will finally be “over” the color of my skin—that being brown will no longer get in my way.

That day, as I sat listening to the guided meditation on the 32 parts of the body, my anguish was compounded still further by the fact that after the directive to contemplate the skin, the recording had nothing more to offer on the subject of skin color. How could that be all there was to say about such a complex issue? And why had I not been prepared for the upheaval it could and did cause? It was clear to me that any consideration of the weight of racial experience as it pertains to skin color had been totally overlooked—and in a class meant to deepen our understanding of diversity through the dharma, at that! In that moment, I was doubly wounded—but perhaps not surprised.

In my dealings with American Buddhist centers, unfortunately I have yet to feel interrelationship in a mixed-race group of fellow practitioners. Instead, I've continued to encounter people's preference for “race blindness.” And nowhere does it feel more hurtful than in well-intentioned white sanghas presently striving for diversity and inclusion.

For instance, when I am told my presence is gladdening in a predominantly white sangha, I feel a weight placed on my shoulders. My being in the room cannot and does not simply signify my desire to learn and hold space together. Instead, I am perceived as a representative and ambassador for people of color, with my words serving as lessons on how people of color think and feel. In these moments, I easily fall into my professional role as a university educator, wanting to ease the sangha into an understanding of racial suffering. And I do so always at the expense of myself, revealing past wounds that I must then attend to later and on my own. Almost always, the latter unearths more anger—certainly at myself, for minimizing my own suffering in my readiness to assuage the suffering of those who have “never thought about race before.” But I also feel anger at my teachers, regardless of their race, for failing yet again to adapt their mechanisms of instruction to make room for more divergent experiences of embodiment.

I have sat through several discussions on race, even in courses meant to take up such inquiries, where it seems the teachers' only goals are to provoke “thought” about racial issues. It does not take long to realize that such a mode of teaching aims to instruct white students only. As a person of color who does not need an organized discussion to think about the impact of racial identity politics—because I live it every day—my multidimensional embodied presence is flattened into that of an object meant only to provoke thought.

If the members of a mixed-race group are to openly discuss their experiences with issues of diversity—shame, guilt, pain, anger, delusion—shouldn't there be some attempt to ensure that they feel they are in a safe space to begin with, and then to skillfully weave their narratives together, provide insight, and offer a path forward? When I have informed teachers about my discomfort in these settings, I have occasionally been asked how to solve the underlying problem. Unfortunately, my racialized experiences do not in themselves amount to expert knowledge and training ability in practices of inclusivity and transformative action. Thus, by both the teachings and the communities who impart those teachings, I am left unmoored.

Distressing as it is, my personal racial awakening appears to be well-timed. Over the last several years, numerous writings have been published on the place of race in the Western dharma, particularly in the fraught historical, political, and cultural context of the United States. Writers such as Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, Reverend angel Kyodo Williams, Larry Yang, and Ruth King are giving voice to the unseen violence of racial suffering and the raw, anguished process of responding to it. The words of these teachers give solace that I am not alone,

that what I am encountering is equally a part of the path, and that the teachings of the Buddha can both hold and heal racial suffering. They provide me with a vocabulary to articulate and grasp what is arising.

In *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*, coauthor Jasmine Syedullah writes about how she unearthed and accepted her authentic, unapologetic, racialized self: “I did not realize that before I could decenter myself, there had to be a self to decenter. I would have to discover who I was beneath all that self-hatred. It did not feel like transcendence. It felt more like heartbreak.” And as I read Zenju Earthlyn Manuel's *The Way of Tenderness*, I realized that the negation of embodied identities in Buddhist circles inflicts harm as it denies even the powerful positive communal impacts these identities can have for people of color. “For many, spiritual paths should tend toward the invisible, the unseen,” she writes. “With this view it is easy to mistake a favorable blindness—not seeing skin color, gender, etc.—for seeing an invisible truth of life. . . . But the wisdom in my bones says that we need this particular body, with its unique color, shape, and sex, for liberation to unfold. There is no experience of emptiness without interrelationship.”

Recently, I have found a Buddhist community and a teacher of color who offer a refuge in which I can experience and process the discovery of these truths. Sitting with this sangha, surrounded by other people of color, I have finally experienced this interrelationship—a sense of lightness and kinship. Though brown embodiment has often manifested as a site of racialized suffering, it also paradoxically creates a sense of communal identity and camaraderie with other people of color, which I have grown to value. My racialized identity does not stand out; rather, it is embraced as part of the rich multiplicity of cultural and familial heritages present in the room. And we do not even have to talk about race to get there. Instead, I am simply able to relax without judging myself or assuming and experiencing the judgment of others. I now understand what it means to hold space together while being held. I sense in my bones the true meaning and value of sangha. Feeling safe and held, I have finally been able to ask myself what my authentic voice could even be.

The fact that the path to freedom from suffering begins with the body is not an insignificant matter. Even as one's mindfulness develops to incorporate and comprehend other key facets of human experience—feelings, the mind, and mental objects—the body remains the locus of self-realization. Yet as Zenju Earthlyn Manuel so aptly notes in *The Way of Tenderness*, the question remains: “What does liberation mean when I have incarnated in a particular body, with a particular shape, color, and sex, which can be superficially viewed as an undesirable, unacceptable, or ugly image of human life?” Sitting in this body now, I wonder how much more pain there is to unbury. I have so much to learn—about the dharma, and about myself. ▼

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HOW SAMAYA WORKS

Is samaya a commitment
to do whatever your teacher says?

BY KEN McLEOD
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SETH MIRANDA

“Do Western women really believe that they are breaking samaya if they don’t sleep with their teacher?”

I was taken aback by the question, posed by one of two Tibetan teachers I was talking with at a conference.

“Well,” I replied, “they probably do. After all, you are the teachers. You taught them that samaya means obedience to the guru and that sacred outlook means seeing the teacher as a buddha.”

“You have so much education,” he said, rolling his eyes. “How can you take that so literally?”

Appalled, I looked at the other lama. He just sat there, trying not to snigger.

I have had the good fortune to study and practice Vajrayana in the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism for more than a few years. Despite the sometimes yawning chasms in culture and thinking, I have come to appreciate the power and depth of samaya and sacred outlook as tools of practice. At the same time, I am dismayed at the way these tools have been exploited for individual and institutional agendas. In this article, my aim is to clarify what these tools are and how they work.

People engage in spiritual practice for different reasons. Some people practice to make their lives better by developing new skills or healing old wounds. Some want to participate in a community of people who share a common outlook on matters of the spirit—a congregation, or in Buddhist terms, a sangha. And for a few, spiritual practice is a response to a mystical calling to some kind of direct experience.

Practically speaking, all three motivations operate in most of us. Who wouldn’t like to function better in their lives? We are also social animals and enjoy the company of like-minded people. And, if you are reading this article, there is probably a mystic lurking somewhere in you. By a mystic, I mean someone who seeks a way to experience life that is not mediated by the conceptual mind.

Each of these motivations gives rise to a different set of behavioral guidelines. In the first case, the ethical principles are usually similar to those set for other professionals, such as therapists or doctors. In the second, agreed-upon values give rise to a shared moral sense that determines not only what behaviors are or are not acceptable but also who does or does not belong to the community. As for the mystic, it is hard to lay down clear guidelines, just as it is hard to do so for the arts, or for any practice or discipline that challenges social and cultural conventions. In this article, I am writing for the mystic in you, the part of you that seeks a direct experiential knowing of life, the universe, and who or what we are.

In the Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism, samaya and sacred outlook are two tools of practice that speak to that mystical calling. Misunderstandings abound here, particularly in the area of the teacher-student relationship.

Samaya is the Sanskrit word for commitment. In a Vajrayana

context, samaya is our commitment to awakening—to experiencing life directly, free from the projections of thought and feeling. It is also our commitment to use whatever we encounter in life to further that awakening. It has many facets: our commitment to our teachers, our students and our peers, our commitment to the forms and methods we practice, and our commitment to how we approach life.

Where samaya is a commitment, sacred outlook is a mystical experience. The Tibetan *dag snang* is also often translated as “pure perception,” but I prefer Shambhala founder Chögyam Trungpa’s rendering of the term as “sacred outlook.” It is how we experience life, the world, and what we are when we are awake. Words fail here. We have to resort to metaphor and allusion—the language and methods of poetry. For an example, the 11th-century Indian mystic Tilopa says in his *Ganges Mahamudra*:

Your body has no core, hollow like bamboo.
Your mind goes beyond thought, open like space.
Let go of control and rest right there.

Obviously, your body is not hollow. Nor do we try to make it hollow when we practice. But we can experience the body that way. Similarly, mind is not space, but we can experience it being like space. When such experiences arise, Tilopa says, “Let go of control and rest right there.” Only the last sentence is actual instruction.

In the same way, you hear or read that your teacher is buddha, you and everyone you encounter is your *yidam* or meditation deity, and everything that arises in your life is the activity of the protectors. These statements are not meant as instructions. They describe ways of experiencing life. When these kinds of experience arise, they are of such profundity that you are both completely present and deeply at peace, even if your life is a complete mess at the time. Sacred outlook refers to that transformation of experience, and the language used to describe it is poetic. It is not meant to be taken literally.

Samaya, then, is a commitment to sacred outlook, a commitment to experiencing your life as you would when you are



awake and present. It is not like the commitment not to take life, say. You can keep that commitment because you can decide not to take life. But to be awake and present in every moment of life? Most of us cannot just decide to do that. Even the 11th-century Indian master Atisha said that his lapses in samaya were like rain pouring down. Patrul Rinpoche, the 19th-century Nyingma master, wrote that maintaining samaya is like trying to keep a mirror clean in a dust storm. No matter what we do,

dust keeps settling on it! Perhaps it is better to think about samaya as our connection with awakening. We may keep losing it, but we keep coming back to it.

One of the key requisites for Vajrayana practice is that we have the emotional maturity to take responsibility for our actions and decisions. Another key requisite is that we have an experiential relationship with emptiness; that is, we know what it means to be awake. It is meaningless to talk about a

commitment to awakening unless we have some notion of what we are committing to. It is equally meaningless to talk about commitment if we are not capable of taking or willing to take responsibility for our own state of mind and our actions and decisions. If, in our minds, someone else is responsible for how we feel or what we do, how can we possibly say we are committed? In following a mystical calling, we voluntarily step into territory in which all our belief structures are called into question, including the restrictions and the protections of the law, of conventional morality, and our ordinary understanding of life. Because you, yourself, are questioning these conventional belief structures, you and only you are responsible for your actions and decisions.

The multifaceted jewel of Vajrayana gives us many ways to arrive at a mystical experience of life. Three such facets are the teacher-student relationship, which models our relationships with ourselves and everyone we know; the *yidam*, the meditation deity we engage in practice; and the protectors, through which we learn how to meet what happens in our lives.

As a teacher, sacred outlook means that you see the student as embodying awakening—as a potential buddha. Your commitment or samaya is to nurture that potential. Your primary gesture is compassion, but not the compassion that seeks to alleviate suffering. Rather, it is the compassion that seeks to end suffering. Your aim is to help the student become free from the burden of reactivity and know the utter groundlessness of experience.

If you are a student, you see the teacher as exemplifying what it is to be present and awake. Your primary gesture is devotion: respectful appreciation for your teacher and his or her understanding and ability. Your commitment is to make use of your teacher's instructions.

Both student and teacher are sensitive to imbalance in the relationship. If the teacher does not challenge the student, the student does not grow. If the teacher pushes the student too hard, the student shuts down. The student needs to clarify his or her experience with the teacher, and that requires honest communication. Teacher and student may not always be perfectly attuned, and that is where samaya comes in. Each person takes responsibility for whatever happens. If things aren't working, neither blames the other. Rather, each person uses the experience to identify how he or she is caught in reactivity and takes appropriate steps. It is a joint venture, and samaya is the commitment not to exit it. Through this intimate dance, teacher and student evolve a path that leads the student to awakening.

Much has been made of the teacher's command and how the student has to do whatever the teacher says. In the early Vajrayana of India, obedience was part and parcel of the small

intimate groups that formed around a teacher. Those students were fully committed to the spiritual path and simply followed their guru's instructions. In Tibet's monastic culture, however, spiritual devotion came to be conflated with feudal fealty. As far back as the 16th century, Pawo Tsulak Trengwa felt it necessary to point out that the teacher's command applies only to spiritual instruction, not to how a student conducts his or her life. In the West, the combination of idealization of the teacher and literal interpretation of poetic language has led many students to see their teacher as an absolute authority. This projection has created a lot of confusion and caused more than a little harm, particularly when students have not understood how samaya works. Ato Rinpoche, a Kagyu teacher who lives and teaches in England, once said to me that it was meaningless to talk about students violating samaya if their

teacher approached them romantically or sexually. In his opinion, the teacher had already stepped out of his or her commitment by approaching them, and the student was free of any obligation.

In my own case, there were a few occasions when I was in profound disagreement with my principal teacher, Kalu Rinpoche. On each occasion I felt I was in a double bind, as two fundamental values seemed to be in direct conflict. First, I did not want to initiate a break in my relationship with Rinpoche. Second, I could not compromise my own sense of what felt right. When you hold two seemingly contradictory principles at the same time, you are forced to look deeper. If you look deep enough, you may find that the conflict comes from holding onto something without being aware of it. In one situation, I was unaware how attached I was to my own

cultural perspective. In another, I was attached to my role as a teacher. In a third, I was attached to certain expectations about the future. In each case, when I let go of the attachment, I was able to find a way through the situation that maintained my relationship with Rinpoche and did not compromise my own integrity. In retrospect, these situations were tremendously helpful. I don't know what else would have brought me to let go of those particular patterns. For me, this is how sacred outlook and commitment work on the student's side: you use the conflict between what the teacher is requiring and what you yourself know to be true to go deep into your own patterns of reactivity until you find clarity right in the confusion of conflict.

As for yidam practice, in deity meditation you imagine that you are the yidam, the embodiment of a quality of awakened mind—awakened compassion, awakened intelligence, awakened power, or some other quality. You imagine you have a different body, a body of light, often with multiple arms, legs, and faces. You have a different voice, the voice of the deity's mantra. And you have a different mind. If you are practicing

being the embodiment of awakened compassion, for instance, you see yourself as Avalokiteshvara, or Guanyin, and you imagine feeling infinite compassion for all beings—you are willing to plunge into the depths of your own reactive patterns, like the hell realms of anger, if by doing so you can help even one person wake up. Once you have been introduced to this possibility (usually through the ritual of empowerment), your commitment is to hold that compassion in your heart until it permeates everything you experience. That is the samaya of deity practice.

Many Tibetan teachers seek to help their students come to that experience by telling them that they have to do the practice every day and recite a certain number of mantras, either every day or in total. The purpose of these perfunctory commitments is to make the students spend enough time to absorb something of the deity's spirit. However, because of the spiritual materialism rampant in both Tibetan and Western culture, students often collect large number of empowerments and then simply crank through the recitations in order to "keep their commitment." This was a problem in Tibet as much as it is in the West, and the Tibetans were well aware of it, as a Tibetan saying indicates: "In India, they practiced one deity and saw hundreds. In Tibet, we practice hundreds and see none."

Another facet of Vajrayana is dakini and protector practice. Dakinis are expressions of the activity of your own mind. Protectors are expressions of those forces within you that create conditions conducive to practice and dispel conditions not conducive to practice. Again, the usual form these commitments take is to do these practices on a daily basis, adding even more recitations to the list. As we cultivate a relationship with nonconceptual knowing, we often find that we make what we would ordinarily call intuitive leaps: we just know what to do in a given situation. Where that knowing comes from is a mystery, but it is clear, precise, and balanced, and it leads to effective action that takes into account the whole situation—in short, the five aspects of timeless awareness. Dakinis symbolize that knowing. Commitment in the context of dakini practice is to trust that knowing.

Protectors are similar, but their role is a bit different. The nightmarish forms of most protectors reflect forces stirred up in us when we encounter difficult situations—the dark primitive forces that go into operation whenever we feel threatened. From the Vajrayana perspective, there is a wakefulness even in these dark forces. Through protector practice, we familiarize ourselves with those forces and how they operate and come to recognize the wakefulness present in them. Commitment in the context of protector practice is to be awake in whatever life throws at us, using the four kinds of awakening action: calm, expansive, compelling, and forceful [See box].

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The Four Kinds of Awakening Action

It is one thing to sit peacefully in open awareness in formal practice. It is quite another to meet life's challenges and conflicts awake and aware.

Shambhala founder Chögyam Trungpa once described the four kinds of awakening action as four different ways of meeting such challenges: by being calm, expansive, compelling, or forceful. These four are often translated as pacification, enrichment, magnetization, and destruction, but those translations focus on the result rather than the method.

When you approach a challenge or a conflict calmly, you give things a chance to sort themselves out without fuss or bother. When you approach a challenge expansively, you infuse it with a positive energy that usually generates more possibilities for things to work out in a good way. When that approach does not work, you may have to compel a resolution, drawing on your personal power to change the structure of the situation. And if that fails, then you will have to use force to end the situation in which the conflict arises. For instance, when two children fight over a toy despite their mother's repeated admonishments, the mother may just take the toy away. Then the children have to find another way to play together.

What is the difference between ordinary action and awakening action? Ordinary action is based in conditioning: what you do is based on past experience that resonates with the present situation. Often, it is just a reaction, but even when your action is carefully thought out, it still comes from the conceptual mind and inevitably serves acknowledged or unacknowledged emotional agendas.

Awakening action, on the other hand, is timeless awareness taking expression in the moment. You know what to do and you do it, without relying on or resorting to the conceptual mind. It is creative, appropriate, and effective, and it serves one and only one agenda—for everyone involved to be awake in what they are doing.



THE WISDOM OF UNCERTAINTY

*The dharma's true home is
neither here nor there.*

BY KURT SPELLMEYER
ARTWORK BY BERNADETTE JIYONG FRANK

The Buddha's search for enlightenment began when he left home. Because modern people travel so easily, we may not appreciate the weight of this decision in his time, the 6th century BCE, when most people never ventured farther than a few miles from their birthplace. From almost any spot on the plains where the Buddha spent his childhood, he could see the open sky. But now, as the fields and hamlets fell away, he entered a jungle whose tangled canopy cast him in deep shadows. That jungle was unlike any place he'd seen—unlike the cities, villages, and farms, all proper venues for humankind—yet it was here the Buddha felt compelled to go in order to find what he was looking for, something called “liberation.” Psychologically as well as geographically, the Buddha had entered a liminal state. He stood on a threshold between the world he knew and another, undiscovered one.

In the early days of his wandering, the future Buddha studied meditation with two of the most respected teachers of the day. But after he'd mastered their methods thoroughly, he set out to practice on his own. Like other homeless seekers in north-eastern India, he begged for his food, sleeping on bare earth and spending many hours in charnel grounds, where bodies were laid out to decompose, so he could sit undisturbed. Finally, after six years in the wilderness, the Buddha achieved complete enlightenment, and then, for almost five decades after that, he taught the dharma everywhere he went.

None of these details were lost on Joseph Campbell, the path-breaking mythologist, who recognized in the Buddha's

narrative the outlines of a structure Campbell later refined in his many books. Drawing on traditions from around the world and reaching back to the Stone Age, he identified the stages of what he called “the hero's journey”: departure from home, then liminality, a crisis, transformation and, at last, the hero's victorious return. It's no accident that Campbell's stages match the Buddha's quest almost point for point, because the dharma played a central role in the development of his ideas.

But the two journeys diverge in one way—a detail overlooked by Campbell and, I would say, by many Buddhists throughout history: the Buddha never closed the circle. It's true that on occasion he returned to the city where he was raised, but up to his last breath he remained *anagarika*, “without home,” and he did everything he could to ensure that his followers remembered this. Liminality—in-between-ness—is the dharma's dwelling place.

To communicate that truth, monks and nuns today leave their families behind just as the Buddha did, shaving their heads and giving up their names in order to pursue awakening and to inspire others to do the same. They become living symbols of the liminal. But as the reformer Zhu Hong complained in the Ming dynasty, monastic homelessness can easily devolve into just another kind of home, and this dilemma kept him up at night worrying about complacent students. True liminality, he understood, doesn't depend on wearing robes or rising earlier than the sun: those are only skillful means

Courtesy Bernadette Jiyong Frank / Dolby Chadwick Gallery.
Spaces in Between (Orange), 2017 | Oil and acrylic on panel | 60 x 48 inches

devised to nudge the Buddha's followers toward an encounter with the real in-between—a liminality of the mind. But this in-between is hard for all of us to find, because we don't want to wander as the Buddha did, without any clear destination. We much prefer to dwell in our certainties, even though they often stand in the way of change.

Seeing this, the Buddha adopted a studied evasiveness about his own awakening. In the Pali suttas, when he describes the experience, he typically refers to what it's *not*. He calls it *amata*, "the deathless," rather than choosing an affirmative like "eternal life." He says that enlightenment is "unborn," "unproduced," and "unconditioned." The Buddha even makes this trademark move in one of his most often quoted passages, these lines from the *Dhammapada*: "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By love alone is hatred appeased" (1.5). But this translation is misleading, because the Buddha doesn't go with the standard term for love, *metta*, opting instead for "non-hatred," *averena*. "Love" sounds like something we already grasp, but "non-hatred" leaves us with empty hands.

Words such as "non-hatred" and "unborn" take us into liminality because they straddle the line between the meaningful and the meaningless. Most of us think we understand "love"

Just when we expect the Buddha to map out his path with precision and clarity, he denies that enlightenment corresponds to any known condition, even the formless *jhanas*, or states of meditative absorption he alludes to briefly: the spheres of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and so on. But if these formless states don't qualify as enlightenment, then we're left scratching our heads, unsure about what options could possibly remain.

Luckily, the Buddha offers us a hint in his praise of "unsupported discernment," awareness that accepts everything while clinging to nothing at all—not to words, ideas, or experience. The Pali term for it is *appatitthita*, "without footing or support." And in the *Ogha-tarana Sutta*, the Buddha is quite explicit about the role that unsupported discernment played in helping him reach the "other shore": "When I, friend, am supported [by anything], then I sink down; when I strive, then I am whirled about. Thus, friend, without support, unstriving, I crossed the flood" (*SN* 1.1; trans. Peter Harvey).

Common sense would lead us to assume that somebody trying to ford a rushing stream would sink without the aid of a walking stick or a guylines to clutch, but here the Buddha affirms the opposite: only by giving up and letting go did he

Liminality goes against the grain. The more uncertain our lives become in response to events beyond our control, the more we want to plant our feet solidly in one place.

and "hate," or "alive" and "dead," and these alternatives seem to foreclose any other possibilities. Yet we have more options than we might recognize and will find them if we are prepared to wander homelessly. When we do, we're likely to feel stymied, lost, maybe even enraged, but once we stay long enough with the in-between, something will shift, and we'll suddenly see a new coherence emerging from the fragments of our old thinking.

Of course, this use of words isn't just a game but a strategy the Buddha used quite consistently throughout his career to free his hearers from their assumptions. Perhaps the best example is Buddha's account of enlightenment in the canonical collection of stories known as the *Udana* (*Khuddaka Nikaya*):

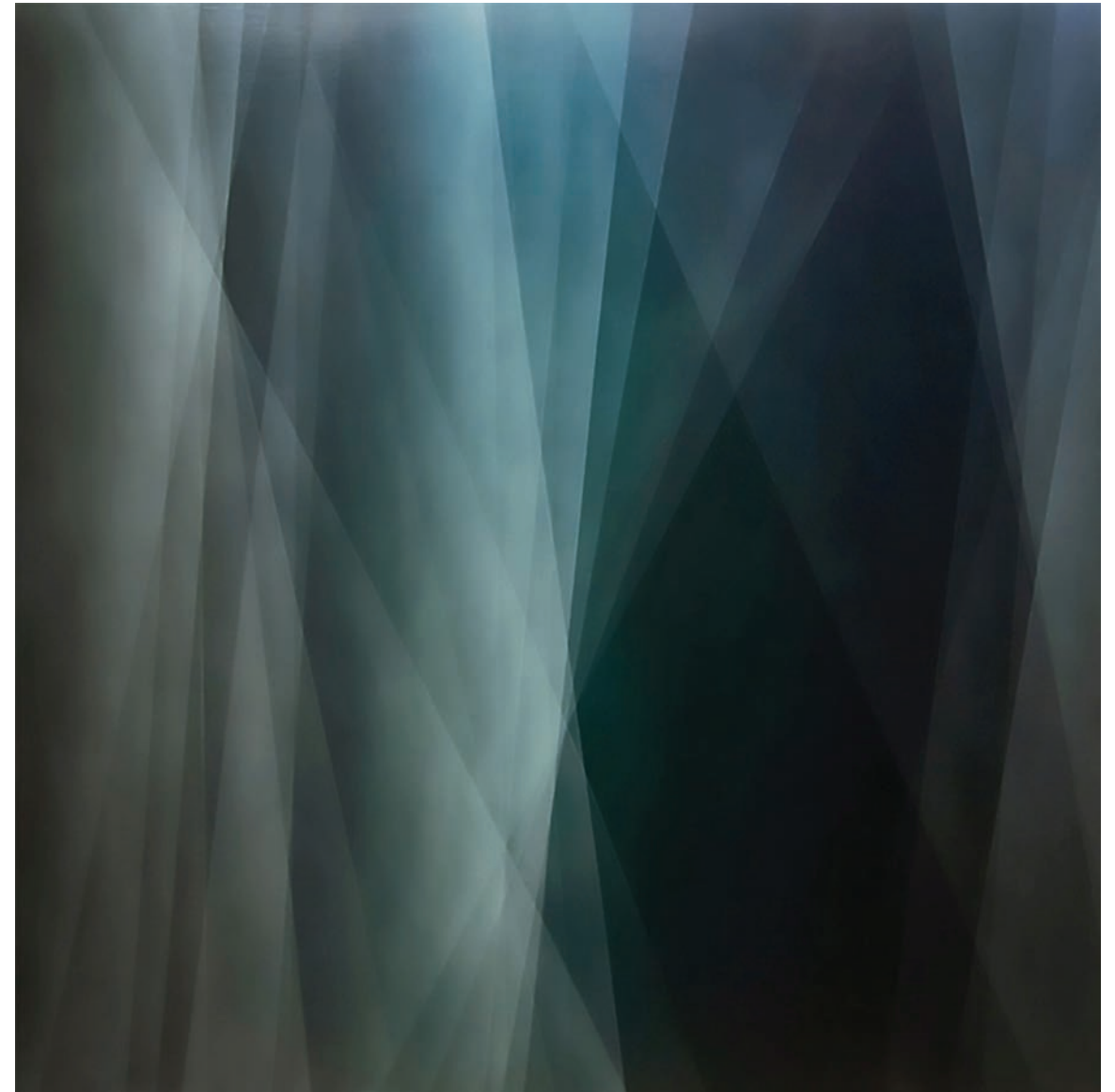
There exists, monks, that sphere where there is neither solidity, cohesion, heat, nor motion; nor the spheres of infinite space, infinite [consciousness], nothingness. . . . neither this world, nor a world beyond, nor both. . . . there, monks, I say there is no coming, nor going, nor maintenance, nor falling away, nor arising; that, surely, is without support, non-functioning, objectless.

—*Udana* 80; trans. Peter Harvey

succeed in crossing. That the Buddha's speech on this occasion has a distinctly Zen-like ring may not be an accident. In the Mahayana movement that produced Zen, "unsupported" came to mean "non-abiding," possibly the single most cherished term in Zen's lexicon.

But there's a problem with this argument. About a thousand years separate the Pali texts from Zen and its love affair with the non-abiding mind. Many thinkers in the dharma's first centuries moved as quickly as their feet could carry them in the very opposite direction—away from the liminal. They saw enlightenment as a specific state and an object of definite knowledge. Thus historians have tended to split the Buddhist world into opposing camps, with Theravadins gathered on the side of enlightenment as a knowable state and Mahayanists on the other as the defenders of the liminal. And yet the distinguished Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey says that this separation oversimplifies the dharma's real complexity in its early days. The fact that monks with a certain view were the first to lay hands on a sutta doesn't mean that they always had the best interpretation. The Pali texts, he argues, do indeed contain many passages celebrating liminality, and these later helped give birth to the

Watch Kurt Spellmeyer's September Dharma Talk series, "Waking Up by Breaking Down Barriers," online at tricycle.org/dharmataalks.



Courtesy Bernadette Jiyong Frank / Dolby Chadwick Gallery. *Spaces in Between* (Green), 2013 | Oil and acrylic on panel | 48 x 48 inches

traditions of Zen, Mahamudra, Pure Land, and others. Harvey wants us to rediscover those passages, along with other commonalities linking the Pali canon to the Mahayana and beyond. And if he's right, then, ironically, the liminal—groundless and indefinite—could turn out to be the common ground of Buddhists across the board.

It's only human nature, I suppose, to wish that firm lines could demarcate the Theravada from the Mahayana, with the *Abhidhamma*'s precision on one side and Zen's clowning around on the other. But if we stop there, everything neatly in place, we miss the bigger story about Buddhism, now in its third millennium. Regardless of the school and lineage, each generation of the Buddha's followers has needed to spell things out explicitly, because we can't function without doing so. When we were beginners on the path, we all relied on simplifications. Distinct steps and stages gave us confidence when

we started wavering. But in every generation, too, others have gone for the liminal, ignoring the divisions in order to explore new possibilities opened up by embracing the in-between.

If you're the sort of person who feels an affinity with the outcasts responsible for breakthrough art and cutting-edge ideas, then the tendency to organize and codify might look like a problem that we need to leave behind once and for all. I still recall the pained expression on the face of the Japanese monk who relayed to me this story about Soen Nakagawa (1907–1984), a Zen master widely considered to be the greatest haiku poet of the last hundred years. In his temple quarters at Ryutakuji in Mishima, Japan, Soen Roshi was old and retired but still very much the trickster. He would invite guests on a hot summer day to refresh themselves by watching goldfish swim around in a hibachi he had filled with water. He called it his "air conditioner." The monk—who spent many

years in the United States—told me that Westerners raised to enjoy Dada and the Theater of the Absurd would laugh aloud or smile broadly, whereas many Japanese guests would find the whole thing disconcerting. They would say disapprovingly, “Hibachis are for winter!”

When I first heard this story from the monk, I found myself identifying with the guests who were in on the joke, but later it occurred to me that the joke required both sides: the conventional outlook on hibachis and the one that turned this outlook on its head. Liminality needs a boundary as well as an act of boundary crossing. In the West, we call this “complementarity,” but thanks to Nagarjuna, the 2nd-century CE Indian philosopher, Buddhists will recognize it as another case of dependent origination: each thing exists only by virtue of its connectedness to everything else. This truth applies even to opposites, which are also mutually creating. For all their differences, opposites connect, and the in-between is where they meet. But because this point is so often overlooked, the need for both boundaries and crossings occupies a central place in Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) literature. And nowhere is this teaching more prominent than in the *Diamond Sutra*, revered by many as the crown of the Prajnaparamita and quite possibly the most important inspiration for the whole Mahayana.

Histories of Buddhism tend to emphasize the Mahayana’s radical break with the formalism of the earlier schools. But “break” might not be the right word for what actually happened. It would certainly be fair to say that the *Diamond Sutra* deconstructs almost every major tenet of the religion it inherited. For example, the sutra takes aim at the well-established stages on the path such as the *sotapanna*, or stream-enterer, whose dharma eye has now been opened, and the *sakadagamin*, or once-returner, whose nirvana is now certain to be only one lifetime away. The sutra seems to undercut the *paramis*, the forms of moral excellence, and it openly denies that we can identify a Buddha by his 32 distinguishing marks—which, tradition tells us, must include flat feet with wheel-like indentations on the soles, webbing between the toes, well-retracted genitals, a lion-like body, arms reaching to the knees, and a fleshy knob on the crown of the head. To the sutra’s anonymous authors, this list must have seemed as dubious as it does to many of us, and it’s not hard to feel allied with them in their skepticism. But the sutra doesn’t stop with these oddities. It also appears to jettison beliefs we may well esteem today: the poignant reality of suffering, the prospect of liberation from suffering, the attainment of awakening, and even the existence of buddhahood.



Courtesy Bernadette Jiyong Frank / Dolby Chadwick Gallery; Spaces in Between (Yellow), 2014 | Oil and acrylic on panel | 48 x 48 inches

The *Diamond Sutra* seems to dismantle the whole edifice of the dharma, but it’s important to recognize that it does so in a Mahayana spirit — “not seeking the destruction of anything,” to paraphrase the Buddha’s words in chapter 27. Yes, the sutra takes things apart, but it doesn’t leave them in utter disarray. Instead, it reassembles them for new purposes—retaining the tradition but transforming the way we inhabit it going forward. Now we can inhabit it liminally. Consider this exchange:

The Buddha said to him, “Subhuti, those who would now set forth on the bodhisattva path should thus give birth to this thought, ‘However many beings there are in whatever realms of being might exist. . . . I shall liberate them all. And [yet,] though I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated.’

“And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a being cannot be called a ‘bodhisattva.’ And why not? Subhuti, no one can be called a bodhisattva who creates the perception of a self or who creates the perception of a being, a life, or a soul.”

—Chapter 3; trans. Red Pine

A destructive attack would flat-out reject the notion of special people who vow to save all beings by leading them to their final liberation. This would be a Buddhism without beliefs, or without these beliefs, anyway. But the sutra’s Mahayana strategy first affirms a convention of the path, and then, only after making that initial move, denies that the convention points to anything ultimately real. And those two tactics—the destructive and the Mahayana one—aren’t at all the same. The first assumes that Buddhists in the past simply got things wrong, and that if we wipe their errors away, the truth will finally shine through in its pristine simplicity. But the second tactic assumes that no such truth exists because everything we might say about the world has been fabricated by our minds and conditioned by a complex web of causes. If we peer behind our image of the world, we’ll simply find another image and, beyond that, images forever. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form, as another Prajnaparamita text, the *Heart Sutra*, affirms.

In a destructive spirit, we could wipe away the dharma’s first millennium, but that wouldn’t solve the problem as defined by the authors of the *Diamond Sutra*: how do we, as symbol-making beings who depend on culture to survive, keep ourselves from getting fatally ensnared by our own mental fabrications? When early Buddhists wanted to describe the journey from delusion to truth, they often chose the Buddha’s preferred simile of his teaching as “like a raft” that the seeker can discard after reaching the other shore. But what happens when you make your way across, only to learn that both the shores have been mirages all along? Then, the *Diamond Sutra* says, the highest wisdom is to view

. . . all of the fleeting world
[As a] star at dawn, a bubble in the stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud;
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

—Section 32; trans. Mu Soeng

These verses, which appear near the sutra’s close, descend on us with such finality that we are almost reduced to silence. If we stop there, however, we haven’t fully understood. We’ve discarded form but still cling to emptiness. We need to let go of emptiness as well, and that’s why the sutra doesn’t end with those beautiful and wrenching lines. Instead it returns us to form again:

When the Buddha had finished [speaking], Venerable Subhuti, the monks and nuns, the pious lay men and women, the bodhisattvas, and the whole world with its gods, ashuras, and gandharvas were filled with joy at the teaching, and, taking it to heart, they went their separate ways.

—Section 32; trans. Mu Soeng

The whole array of beings who fill the universe go “their separate ways,” but this time one thing is different: awareness itself has become their raft. Enlightenment no longer means standing on firm ground; now the mind wanders freely “without footing or support,” just as the *Udana* recommends.

It makes perfect sense that all beings high and low—monks and nuns, laywomen and laymen, and gods of various ranks—should feel joy after they’ve received instruction from the Buddha. But the sutra leaves it for us to intimate what his teaching might mean when they return to everyday existence. And it’s here that we begin to glimpse the stakes behind a discussion that could seem purely academic: the *Diamond Sutra*’s teaching of liminality cannot be separated from its egalitarian outlook. If the sutra unmask all claims about the world as finally unreal, those claims include the hierarchy that orders the Buddhist universe as well as the Buddhist societies that took it as their model.

This hierarchy’s gradations were based on a person’s “defilements” and his or her distance from complete enlightenment. Generally, the suttas define “defilements” as destructive mental habits like greed, ill-will, anger, lust, and arrogance—qualities that all Buddhists will agree prevent us from awakening. But we should also note how quickly the language of defilements slips into a distancing of people along with mental states. Consider this passage from the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*:

And what may be said to be subject to defilement?
Wife and children are subject to defilement, men and women slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses, and mares. . . . These objects of attachment are subject to defilement; and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them and utterly committed to them, being himself subject to defilement, seeks what is also subject to defilement.

—trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi

The list of those defiled includes not only wives, children, and slaves of both genders but also all the people whose livelihoods “tie” them to animals used for tasks like plowing fields, pulling carts, and in the case of elephants, felling trees or hauling logs. And that covers pretty much everyone except for monks and nuns.

But once we’ve understood form as emptiness and emptiness as form, we can approach our so-called defilements in a radically different way, not as inherently degrading but as illusions we now need to deconstruct. These too we should regard as nothing more than “a flash of lightning in a summer cloud;/ A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.” Of course, we could always leave our husbands or wives, to say nothing of the kids; we could relinquish all our property and enter the monastic life. But if we imagine that changes of this kind would liberate us at last, the *Diamond Sutra* begs to differ. No matter who we are and what we do, the sutra tells us that we’re in the same boat: liberation comes from liminality, and liminality comes from letting everything go by perceiving its fundamental emptiness.

The language of “defilements” leads us to believe that our problem is “out there” in the world of form with its defiled cows and pigs, when the culprit is our mind’s tendency to make everything appear permanent and independent of everything else. As the *Diamond Sutra* pushes us to recognize,

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The Hidden Vegetarians of Tibet

Contrary to popular belief, meat eating has been questioned by masters both past and present.

BY GEOFFREY BARSTOW
ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL HOSTETLER

In the mid-19th century, the Tibetan Buddhist master Nyala Pema Dündul composed a poem in which he gave an account of a recent visionary experience. In this short work, he recalls waking up one morning and beginning his usual daily practice, focused on Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Suddenly his perception shifted, and instead of having to consciously visualize the deity he was able to see and speak with Avalokiteshvara directly, as if the bodhisattva were truly present. Serving as something of a tour guide, Avalokiteshvara showed Nyala Pema Dündul around various hell realms, where he observed people being tortured by demons with animal heads. These torments, Avalokiteshvara explained, were the inevitable consequence of having eaten meat in a previous life. Perhaps not surprisingly, Pema Dündul tells his

readers that he emerged from his vision shaken, lamenting the fact that he himself had eaten meat. “Let the three jewels be my witness!” he writes, “In the past, ignorance and habit have led me to eat the flesh of beings. . . . From today on, may the thought of eating meat never even enter my mind! If I do eat it, may the three jewels punish me!”

Nyala Pema Dündul was not alone in his concern about meat eating. In fact, a meatless diet in Tibet was far more common than might be expected. To date, I have identified more than 110 individual lamas—religious teachers—who made the decision to give up meat and who were active prior to the Chinese invasion of the 1950s. Given the fact that Buddhist history in Tibet has spanned 1,300 years, 110 may not seem like a large number. But it represents only those individu-

als I could identify by name—there must have been many others who are as of yet untraceable. Whether or not one should eat meat was a real, active debate in premodern Tibet, and vegetarianism was a not infrequent response.

And yet the simple fact that vegetarianism existed in Tibet is almost unknown today. Indeed, contemporary Tibetan Buddhists—both Tibetan and Western—tend to assume that vegetarianism was a non-issue. Time and again I have been told that researching the history of Tibetan vegetarianism is pointless, as the diet simply did not exist. Contained in this assumption, moreover, is an argument against adopting vegetarianism today. Like followers of other traditions, Tibetan Buddhists often look to examples set by previous masters to guide their own conduct. So it is not surprising that contem-



porary Buddhists often answer the question of why they eat meat by pointing to revered masters from the past who ate meat. Vegetarianism, following this view, is a modern innovation foreign to traditional Tibetan Buddhism and should therefore be regarded with suspicion.

But this is not true. Vegetarianism was not only present in pre-communist Tibet; it was in fact a significant aspect of Tibetan religious practice. It is not that vegetarianism ever became the norm—even among the devout, it always seems to have been a minority practice. But it was a significant and vocal minority. Furthermore, these vegetarian lamas came from all the major Buddhist lineages in Tibet, from all regions, and from all time periods. Some were relatively minor figures, but others were among the most important masters of their day and remain well known centuries later. Dolpopa, the 14th-century founder of the Jonang lineage, became a vegetarian when he took full ordination at 22. Jikten Gonpo and Taklung Tangpa, founders of the Drigung Kagyu and Taklung Kagyu in the 12th century, were both lifelong vegetarians, as was Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, 15th-century founder of the Ngor Sakya. At least seven members of the Karmapa lineage have been vegetarian. The 19th-century master Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol, his contemporary Patrul Rinpoche, the early 20th-century Bon polymath Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen, and many others were all staunch vegetarians.

Sometimes the texts not only tell us that an individual became vegetarian but also describe the circumstances surrounding their conversion, though they are not all as colorful as Nyala Pema Dündul's account. Shabkar was walking the pilgrimage circuit in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, when he came across the carcasses of many sheep and goats, slaughtered to feed the city. A wave of compassion rose up in him, and he immediately went before the Jowo, the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha that stands at the heart of the Jokhang, the holiest temple in Tibet. Looking up at the revered statue, Shabkar vowed never to eat meat again. He was so adamant in his vegetarianism, he tells us, that patrons would remove all the meat from their homes before he would visit, afraid he would be upset at the mere sight of it. The Nyingma visionary Jigme Lingpa had a similar experience, seeing a row of sheep tied up and awaiting slaughter. A powerful sense of compassion arose in him—more powerful, in fact, than in any practice he had done previously. Decades later, he described the

experience as the “most important event of my life.”

If all these masters were united in their aversion to meat, however, they were also united in the belief that a vegetarian diet was deeply unhealthy. According to Tibetan medicine, the human body has three major humors: wind, bile, and phlegm. If these are balanced, then the person is healthy. If the humors become unbalanced, then illness will arise. In this view, meat was understood to keep the wind humor in check. Even many vegetarians believed that without meat the wind humor would become too strong and the body would become weak and jittery. And yet some Tibetans

consciously rejected meat even when they anticipated that this rejection would have a direct and negative impact on their health. The biography of Jikten Gonpo relates that at the end of his life he was offered a medicinal broth made with dried and powdered yak lungs to prolong his life. A lifelong vegetarian, he refused it and died shortly thereafter. Similarly, Ngorchen Künga Zangpo's biography states repeatedly that his vegetarian diet left him weak and feeble. Both texts were written by close disciples, and it is possible to detect a hint of frustration that their masters privileged vegetarianism over their own health and time with their students. For these writers, as well as just about every other Tibetan I've read, vegetarianism was perceived as an unhealthy ascetic practice that could lead to illness and even premature death.

So why do it? Why did all these masters willingly choose a diet that they felt was bad for them? The answer is compassion; for many Tibetan religious leaders, compassion was and is the central point of all religious practice. In the words of Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen: “Compassion is the essence of all of the Buddha's teachings.”

Compassion can mean many things, even among Buddhists. But most Tibetan authors I have come across agree that practicing compassion includes trying to reduce the suffering of “others,” a category that unambiguously includes animals. There is a stream of Euro-American philosophy that regards animals as irreducibly different than us, devoid of a soul and therefore without any moral standing at all. Descartes, for instance, famously described animals as mere machines, a view that he used to justify vivisection and other violent practices. By contrast, Tibetan authors make clear that animals are sentient beings with minds and emotions.

If someone is motivated by desire to eat the flesh of beings, then butchers will seize animals such as yaks or sheep and sever their minds from their bodies. How can those who consume meat and blood as food be followers of the Buddha? Such people pridefully consider themselves to be benefiting beings and protecting the weak, but their actions contradict the precepts! Meat is nothing but the cause of amassing terrifying sins.

—Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen,
The Faults of Eating Meat

They are not necessarily as intelligent as humans, but they can experience physical and emotional pain. Furthermore, they are able, at a minimum, to anticipate the near future and so experience deep fear when they know that pain is imminent.

All these ideas are captured in a passage from Jigme Lingpa's autobiography:

Having now become animals, your fathers, mothers, siblings and friends from previous lives tremble with fear in the butcher's sinful hands, tears streaming from their eyes, and panting for breath. In that state they wonder what to do. Alas, there is no refuge! There is nowhere to go! Thinking that, right now in this place, they may be killed, their urgent suffering is great. In such a state, like one approaching a terrifying pit of hellfire, their body is turned upside down, their muzzle is tied up, and their eyes move wildly with lights shining forth.

What they see is their stomach being opened up. With their feet perpendicular to the ground, they are set on the path to the next life without even a quiver.

—trans. Geoffrey Barstow

For Jigme Lingpa, animal suffering is real. And since animal suffering is real, humans who claim to practice compassion have an obligation to reduce it—meaning that they should stop eating meat.

Beyond pointing out the causal connection between eating meat and animal suffering, Jigme Lingpa, Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen, and other vegetarian lamas also rebutted counterarguments. One of the most important objections was the question of what the Buddha himself said about eating meat. As meat apologists pointed out, the Tibetan canon includes sutras in which the Buddha explicitly allows monks to eat meat, as long as the meat in question adheres to the “rule of threefold purity.” This rule states that monks may eat meat as long as they have not *seen* that the meat was killed specifically for their own consumption, have not *heard* that it was killed specifically for them, and have not even *suspected* that it was killed specifically for them. Since meat with threefold purity had not been killed specifically for the consumer, the person eating it was insulated from the responsibility for (and therefore the karmic repercussions of) the sinful act of killing.

For the most part, lamas sympathetic to vegetarianism accepted that the rule of threefold purity was an authentic teaching of the Buddha. Rather than attacking the rule directly, therefore, they typically argued that it did not apply in a Tibetan context. Specifically, they argued that the rule of threefold purity only applies to shravakas, those who prac-

ticated certain forms of Buddhism that Tibetan lamas generally regarded as lower than their own, Mahayana path. Sakya Pandita explains this in his *Distinguishing the Three Vows*: “Shravakas may eat meat that has threefold purity. . . . In the Mahayana, meat is forbidden. Eating meat, it is taught, causes rebirth in the lower realms.” To support this argument, Sakya Pandita and others pointed to canonical Mahayana texts such as the *Lankavatara Sutra* and the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, both of which state unequivocally that the rule of threefold purity was taught only for those who practice the vehicle of the shravakas. Because the Mahayana path takes compassion as its central focus, these sutras argue, the rule of threefold purity no longer applies and monks may not eat meat.

A second argument raised by meat apologists was that their Tantric practice meant they could eat meat without worry; here they usually invoked either the idea that Tantric practitioners should actively transgress social norms or the fact that that Tantric rituals require meat offerings. In response, authors sympathetic to vegetarianism usually asked their readers to realistically assess their own level of spiritual attainment before doing anything potentially unethical. “You should think like this,” Jigme Lingpa advised his students in his teaching *Engaging the Path to Enlightenment*. “In a tantric context, it's great if someone has given rise to the power of concentration, so that he is not tainted by obscurations and is able to benefit beings through a connection with their meat and blood. But I do not have this confidence.”

Overall, Jigme Lingpa and other vegetarian lamas seem to have regarded such pro-meat arguments as mere intellectual sophistry. Instead of trying to find a way to justify eating meat on religious grounds, they wrote, practitioners should first recognize and accept that it was sinful and then do their best to give it up. This did not necessarily mean that they demanded full vegetarianism among their students. But they did want students to reflect honestly on what they were eating and then change their diet to whatever extent they felt they could. The ideal was for someone to become fully vegetarian: Shabkar recalls with some pleasure that he converted 300 of his disciples to full vegetarianism. But if an individual felt this was impossible, then they could at least try to reduce their consumption. Tibetan biographies are replete with examples of individuals who gave up meat for one day a month or one month a year. The important point was to stop kidding yourself about the consequences of your diet

When I think of the suffering that meat eating brings, I cannot bear the pain and anguish I feel within my heart.

—Nyala Pema Dündul, *Song of Advice for Giving Up Eating Meat*

Continued on page 108 →



Fudo Myoo, a wrathful subduer of evil forces in the esoteric Japanese pantheon

THE SUBJUGATION OF EVIL

In the esoteric Japanese tradition, subduing the external evils of the world as well as the inner evils of one's own mind is a central element of practice. A scholar explains why we shouldn't dismiss it so quickly.

BY ERIC SWANSON

In the Summer 2005 issue of *Tricycle*, the eminent scholar of religion Elaine Pagels spoke of how historical study can enrich spiritual life in the present: “Historical study should have the effect of making what is very familiar look different or even in some ways strange. . . . The idea of historical contingency can be very threatening. But it is important, because it fosters a broader, less sectarian view.” Since then, Professor Pagels’s observations have influenced *Tricycle*’s editorial approach in more ways and on more occasions than we could ever have imagined. They have certainly factored significantly in our series of essays on esoteric Buddhism in Japan. This essay is the third and final piece in the series, and it does not shy away from challenging some popular and familiar notions about Buddhism.

Right off the bat, the very topic of Eric Swanson’s essay—the subjugation of obstructions—may strike a jarring note to Buddhist ears. The highly aggressive language can sound just so un-Buddhist, appearing as it does to contradict commonly held attitudes associated with Buddhist practice. Furthermore, subjugation practices, which can apply to obstructions both “inner” and “outer,” are not merely incidental; rather, they lie at the core of one of East Asian Buddhism’s most influential traditions. Did our East Asian ancestors simply lose their way? Did they succumb to delusions presented under the banner of an authentic buddhadharma? Did they, in taking up subjugation practices, mark the dharma’s decline?

But as the following essay shows, there is more to it than cursory observations would tell us.

In the below article, the Buddhist scholar Eric Swanson asserts that foundational principles of Mahayana Buddhism laid the groundwork for esoteric practices, which are simply *upaya* (skillful means) for applying those principles to greatest effect. Swanson argues that, however unfamiliar subjugation practices may appear to modern Western eyes, they constitute, in their proper framework, a potent (though admittedly not unproblematic) means for realizing Mahayana values on which they are based and with which they are, in their specific way, interwoven.

It is our hope that in Swanson’s exploration of the practice and the inner logic of esoteric subjugation practices the reader will find, as Professor Pagels encourages, that some of what was familiar is made strange. And in turn, perhaps one will find that some things that at first appear strange may in the end be unexpectedly familiar.

—Andrew Cooper, Features Editor

From 2008 to 2010, I lived on Mount Koya at the temple complex founded in the 9th century by Japan’s most venerated master of esoteric Buddhism, Kukai, or as he is known honorifically, Kobo Daishi. Mount Koya is a revered pilgrimage site as well as the spiritual and administrative home of the Shingon school, which developed largely out of the tantric “secret teachings” that Kukai brought back to Japan from China. One day I had occasion to engage in a most intriguing conversation with a monk with whom I had come to

be good friends and who had impressed me with the seriousness of his practice as well as his knowledge of the esoteric tradition.

In the course of our discussion, I asked my monk friend what he considered to be the most definitive characteristics of the esoteric Buddhist teachings. I thought I knew, in a general way, what he would say. I expected that he would talk about such core principles as “attaining enlightenment in this very body” or the practice of mastering the “three mysteries” of a buddha’s body, speech, and mind or the “preaching of the *dharmakaya*,” the ultimate reality that is free of all form. To my surprise, his response did not touch on any of these or other such ideas. More surprising still was what he *did* say. My friend explained, with rather ardent enthusiasm, that what differentiated the esoteric Buddhist tradition from other Buddhist denominations in Japan was that it was the best equipped with the ritual mechanisms to “destroy evil and all enemies that obstruct the Buddhist law”—that is, the buddhadharma.

This response was disconcerting, to say the least, and it has stuck with me ever since. The monk’s words and demeanor attuned me to an apparently violent rhetoric that is found not infrequently within the esoteric Buddhist tradition, and I wanted to better understand the role and the meaning of the tradition’s notion of the *subjugation of evil*. As I pursued the

The subjugation of evil is directly connected to the goal of achieving enlightenment in this very body.

matter, in fact, it became evident that teachings on subjugation factored quite prominently within the esoteric tradition and were a driving force in its development throughout its long history in Japan.

Esoteric Buddhist subjugation rituals are best understood as *upaya*, “expedient means” that can, through the subduing of internal and external obstructions, guide the practitioner to awakening. Essential to this, however, is a clear and sustained contemplation of *bodhicitta*, the practitioner’s aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to save all sentient beings from the suffering of *samsara*. The cultivation of *bodhicitta* complements rituals of subjugation and is to be practiced simultaneously with them: the goal is realization of the Mahayana idea of the *equality of all minds*—that is, that all beings, including oneself, are fundamentally of the same nature as the Buddha. The rituals that were performed for the subjugation and forceful conversion of political enemies, criminal enterprises such as piracy, and vengeful spirits also operated under this framework, in that these rituals were not performed simply for the sake of conquest. Rather, they were seen as falling under the Buddhist ideal of actualizing peace—both internally in the mind of the practitioner and externally in the social-political realm—to support the awakening of oneself along with the awakening of all beings.

Subjugation practice is admittedly a thorny and complex matter, one that has long been a source of confusion and even

condemnation. One consequence of this is that study of the esoteric tradition’s teachings and rituals associated with subjugation is frequently neglected both by scholars and by practitioners of other Buddhist schools. I have found, however, that upon close examination the esoteric practice of subjugation is solidly grounded in the fundamental principles of Mahayana Buddhism and that it is, to its adherents, a valid and effective means of realizing Mahayana’s highest values and goals.

To adequately understand subjugation in esoteric Buddhism we need to view it not merely as a sign of a decline into superstition or an aberration of Buddhist thought, though it often is dismissed in just that way. Neither can it be reduced to a means of pandering to patrons, gaining worldly power, or gratifying harmful impulses. From the perspective of the sincere and dedicated ritual practitioner, the subjugation of evil is a central element of esoteric Buddhist practice that is directly connected to the goal of achieving enlightenment in this very body. This does not absolve subjugation practice from the potentially dangerous implications of its violent rhetoric and the risk that it could be manipulated to justify very real forms of violence. Indeed, it is worth recognizing that the esoteric Buddhist tradition conceptualized subjugation in a manner that resists any simple or unambiguous explanation. We live in a time of all sorts of ambiguity, and it can be tempting to

shrink from the discomfiting uncertainty that ambiguity often calls forth. Furthermore, it is easy to condemn or even demonize what may be nothing more than difference, and it is difficult to discern the limited understanding or self-interest one may hold that informs such judgments.

A look at the early years of Japan’s esoteric traditions shows that rituals of subjugation were employed to help appease various forms of social and political anxieties held by patrons of Buddhist institutions. It is perhaps no coincidence that we start to see the proliferation of subjugation in the 10th century, a time replete with natural disasters of drought and famine, vulnerability to piracy at the island nation’s shores, growing concern about political tensions in the neighboring Korean peninsula, and renewed historical memory of the fall of China’s Tang empire. Historical records and diaries composed around this time indicate the establishment of various ritual forms aimed at dispelling malevolent forces and retaining social order. Perhaps the best-known example of this use of ritual concerns the response to the rebellion of Taira no Masakado.

In 939, Masakado, a powerful landlord in the eastern regions of Japan, led a rebellion against the imperial family in the Heian capital (modern-day Kyoto). Tales of Masakado’s life describe him as an “evil demon” whose selfish, malicious deeds were a direct threat to the peace of the realm. According to some accounts, the Shingon monk Kancho was sent eastward

from the capital to deal with the unrest caused by Masakado. On Narita mountain, Kancho established a small *goma* (fire ritual) hall, where he performed a subjugation ritual using an auspicious statue of the wrathful protector Fudo Myoo, carved by Kukai himself. It is said that subsequently Masakado was successfully subdued and killed in battle. While the story is not reliable as accurate history, it does illustrate how subjugation rituals would have been employed to provide protection from enemies that threatened social disorder. The depiction of those who stood up against the central authority as evil beings that needed to be eliminated through the use of esoteric Buddhist rituals became a recurring theme in various forms of Japanese literature.

From more reliable historical records, we learn that another protective figure, Daigensui Myoo, was employed in response to news of the Masakado rebellion. Ritual manuals and images of Daigensui Myoo were imported from China by the Shingon monk Jogyo (d. 867), and subjugation rituals were performed multiple times until the rebellion was subdued in 940. In the *Catalogue of Imported Items* that was submitted to the court upon his return from China, Jogyo claimed that if the ruler and his ministers would revere Daigensui Myoo in particular, there would be no further threats from evil thieves; they would be victorious against enemies of the state; and the land would be at peace. In other words, the allure of subjugation effectively drew patrons to support esoteric Buddhist institutions, helping it flourish in its early years.

Scholarly skepticism of the important role of subjugation rituals is often supported with the idea that these rituals represented a decline in the progress of Japanese Buddhist thought and that they were, in the main, forms of magic designed to exploit Buddhist patrons by promising worldly benefits. Al-



Blue Fudo, an enlightened cosmic being who subdues obstacles on the path to awakening

though it is undeniable that the anticipated subjugation of perceived “external” evils often did elicit patronage, we should not readily assume that practitioners of these esoteric Buddhist rituals were involved in corrupting or devaluing what are widely accepted as the true core teachings of the buddhadharma. In fact, in most cases subjugation rituals were developed based on close study of authoritative texts within the tradition, including the *Mahavairocana Sutra*, the *Sarvatathagata-tattvasamgraha Sutra*, and the *Susiddhikara Sutra*, as well as various ritual texts that were then being imported to Japan from China.

Continued on page 110 →



COUNTRY MISSED

BY CURTIS WHITE

Wild Wild Country
Directed by Maclain Way
and Chapman Way
Duplass Brothers Production,
2018 USA, Six-part TV
documentary series

All the strangers came today
And it looks as though
they're here to stay
—David Bowie, "Oh!
You Pretty Things"

Maclain and Chapman Way's film *Wild Wild Country* (WWC hereafter) is a larger-than-life documentary series about Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his homemade paradise, Rajneeshpuram, developed by his followers in eastern Oregon in the early 1980s. I won't rehearse the scandalous history of the commune; it's enough for present purposes to say that it is full of

deceit, betrayal, sex orgies (of course), assassination plots (surprisingly), bioterrorism (really surprisingly), and something close to civil war with the nativist Christians living down the road in the town of Antelope.

I'm also not much interested in extending the moral calculus concerning heroes and villains that has enflamed magazines, newspapers, and websites since the series was released on Netflix in March. The media have been particularly fascinated by the character of Ma Anand Sheela, Bhagwan's secretary and Rajneeshpuram's primary administrator. Was she "evil," as the assistant US attorney Robert Weaver insisted, or was she just protecting her people and their right to participate in a minority religion? Such questions are part of the sensationalism that has made the series so popular, but they shouldn't be of primary interest here.

According to the Way brothers, the film began with a happy coincidence: they discovered three hundred hours of archival footage about the

Rajneesh commune at the Oregon Historical Society while doing research for their first documentary, *The Battered Bastards of Baseball*, a charming and uncontroversial film about the Portland Mavericks, the last independent professional baseball team. The Way brothers had no prior interest in New Age spiritual movements or Human Potential; they were merely looking for product, their "next film." And Netflix, for its part, was looking for "content," something to help maintain the twenty million new streaming subscribers they gained in 2017. Baseball, Buddha: it was all the same to them.

What is notable is the fact that in this archive the Way brothers stumbled upon one of the first open conflicts in what would come to be known, in the 1990s, as culture war. Seeing this distant origin of the current antagonism between "bicoastal elites" and the "Trump base" is fascinating, like learning for the first time that the light that we see from a star has been traveling toward us for thousands of years.

Disappointingly, the Way brothers don't seem especially interested in how the Rajneesh conflict comments on the recent history of the culture wars.

Unfortunately, what they *are* interested in has more to do with "true crime" than social issues. For example, in the first episode of the series we are introduced to some of the good folk of Antelope. The surviving townsfolk are interviewed in their orderly and familiar homes, talking calmly and reasonably, full of good humor if not forgiveness. And yet their sense of once having been the victims of an outlandish group of religious crazies, perhaps a sex cult, remains strong. Their resentment against the "red people" (a reference to the colors in which Rajneesh's disciples dressed) is still palpable, and their sense that they should "keep Oregon Oregon" (that is, keep it white and Christian) is still vivid for them, as is their fear of becoming a minority "in our own country." Much to the Way brothers' credit, it is captivating to watch as rural friendliness passes over to xenophobia and then back again to reasonable concern, all in the course of a sentence or two, rather like people who in principle want to be kind but often find that self-preservation makes it necessary to be cruel.

Following this introduction to local Oregonians, the Ways provide the first images of the "sannyasins," as Bhagwan called his followers. Ghostly figures dressed all in maroon wander in slow motion, aimless as zombies, down otherwise deserted streets. There is spooky, otherworldly music, perhaps meant to echo the soulless sound inside their heads. Members grin vacantly, and one plays the flute. From overhead, we see the beginnings of their massive "encampment," as the CIA might put it, as if it were a photograph of a secret Soviet missile site taken from a U2. WWC may be a Netflix Original, but this introduction feels more like the History channel's *Ancient Aliens*.

Moments later, the perception that there was something weird or demonic about the Rajneeshes is emphasized again by images of naked devotees writhing to heavy metal music, meditation as mosh pit, Black Sabbath stuff,

real "worship this at your own risk" stuff. In other words, the visual rhetoric in these first scenes strongly suggests that the filmmakers are on board with the citizens of Antelope: strange doings! As Bill Murray says in *Ghostbusters*, "Human sacrifice, dogs and cats living together—mass hysteria!"

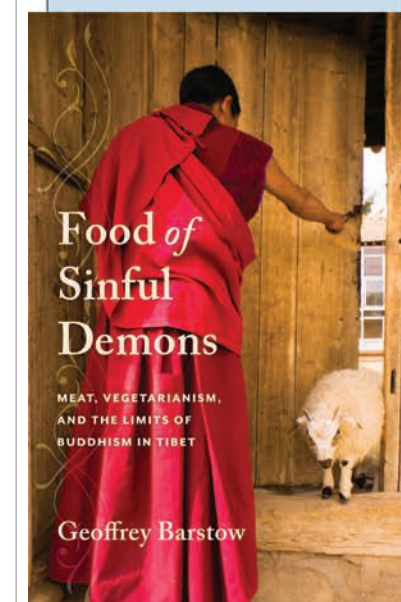
Of course, the Way brothers do not endorse bigotry, and they later allow the blunt-spoken Ma Anand Sheela to name it for what it is. But why then, if they aren't xenophobic, would the Ways introduce us to the commune from such a morally canted angle? Are they trying to show us how the townsfolk *perceived* the Rajneeshes?

The answer is simpler than that: for the Way brothers, and implicitly Netflix, the weird intro is only a carny's come on for you-the-viewer. It's *Dateline Oregon*, a crime drama. The Way brothers are setting the narrative hook. The Rajneeshes are soon enough allowed to emerge from the alien haze in order to make their case, but, importantly, that case never wanders far from the scandals, the crimes, the lawsuits, and the bitter aftermath. It is only, if you will, what "Enquiring minds want to know."

Unfortunately, this approach means that a lot of worthy questions don't get asked. First, there is the question any decent police procedural should include: what did Bhagwan know about the criminal activities of his lieutenants, and when did he know it? This one, you'd think, would be right in the Netflix wheelhouse. So in the course of the five days that the Ways spent talking with Sheela, why not ask?

There are other questions that don't get asked. Shouldn't any investigation of a religious group be curious about the group's beliefs? In other words, shouldn't the Ways have been curious about what exactly Bhagwan taught? He was obviously a very persuasive person. Thousands left their ordinary lives to follow him, and many thousands follow him still nearly 30 years after his death. It couldn't only have been that beguiling smile and those depthless brown eyes, could it? There must be something in all the books he wrote. Well, what was it?

New from
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Food of Sinful Demons

*Meat, Vegetarianism,
and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet*

GEOFFREY BARSTOW

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"A very welcome and entirely novel work on the place of vegetarianism in Tibet, *Food of Sinful Demons* will make a solid scholarly contribution to religious studies, Buddhist studies, and Tibetan studies."

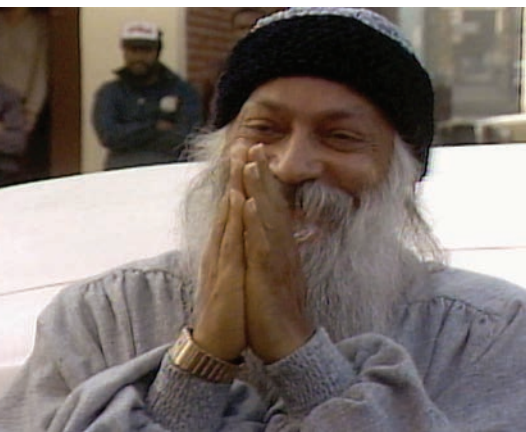
—Gray Tuttle,
Columbia University



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There is only one moment in the film when we learn something from Bhagwan, or from anyone, about his theology (if that's the right word for it): he says that humans have two ways of dealing with sex. They can either repress sex or they can transform it. He was for transformation through creativity. He says, "Hence I teach my sannyasins to be creative. Create music, create poetry, create painting. . . . Bring something new into existence and your sex will be fulfilled on a higher plane."

Obviously that is not an outrageous teaching. It is far less outrageous than the attitude of the Christians of Antelope whose anxiety about a "sex cult"



Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

made them like medieval inquisitors of Cathar heretics, who were persecuted for sexual deviance because they preached celibacy. In fact, Bhagwan's eclectic teaching is nothing like the thinking of a sex cult: it is more like Freud's theory of erotic libido transformed into creativity through sublimation. Rajneesh was a syncretist who crudely joined Nietzsche and Freud to the Buddha and the *Bhagavad Gita* and then threw in a little Dale Carnegie for the fun of it (Bhagwan was adamantly, even aggressively, pro-capitalist). It would have been useful to have someone explain that fact in the film.

The Ways have frankly acknowledged that they are not "very well versed in spirituality." Worse yet, as Maclain Way explained in an interview with the movie review forum *Movie-Boozer*, the brothers dislike documen-

taries "that have talking heads who have studied an issue for a really long time and have a PhD in something." The Way brothers prefer "storytelling" to an academic setting of context. Given their candor, it is perhaps small-minded to suggest that their lack of spiritual "verse" disqualifies them from making a film about a spiritual movement, even if it is one as convoluted as Bhagwan's. After all, in the Information Age—dominated by Wikis, blog sites, and chat rooms, all watched over by smarter-than-thou trolls—my information is as good as anyone else's, even if I don't actually know anything.

Ironically, it appears that Bhagwan felt much like the Ways. It does not appear that there was any coherent intellectual authority behind Rajneeshism beyond Rajneesh's personal charisma, nor were there any institutional traditions. The only proof for his authority was how one "felt," especially how one felt in his presence. Apparently, Bhagwan didn't need any PhDs either.

This suggests that both the filmmakers and their subject worked within what the social critic George W. S. Trow called "the context of no context." Both *WWC* and the religion it examines are ahistorical; both lack an intellectual framework. Like Bhagwan, the Ways are convinced that whatever they need can be summoned in the moment from their own idiosyncratic resources.

The downside of this approach is that the film comes almost wholly from perspectives that are self-interested. Whether listening to members of the commune, neighbors, or lawyers, one has to listen to their stories "across the grain," that is, one has to listen skeptically and bring to the film the social, religious, and intellectual contexts that the film itself refuses to provide. That's a tall order for most people, which is why the judicious use of experts, people outside the fray, is a good thing in documentary filmmaking. Deprived of that, *WWC* devolves toward mere infotainment.

Another outrageously absent question is this: what was daily life like for the typical sannyasin? To judge from the comments of the commune members at the end of the film, even

after all of the uproar and scandal, a lot of them were very sad when the commune closed and they had to move on. There are reasons for that sadness. As Milt Ritter, a cameraman for a local television station, said in an interview at the news website *Uproxx*:

Look at what the Rajneeshees did in just a few short years with this ranch that was completely depleted of everything. It was so overgrazed and in such poor, poor shape. They turned it into an oasis. They planted tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of saplings along the creeks. They replenished the riparian zones, and then they built that big dam and all those buildings. Some of them were not small buildings. It is amazing what they did. The organic farms, the meeting areas—it really is amazing what they did in such a short period of time.

The absence of any portrait of the daily experience of the commune led Sunny Massad (former sannyasin Ma Prem Sunshine) to complain to *Rolling Stone*, "I believed that he [Maclain Way] genuinely was going to do a story about the people that lived in the community—not just the few people who destroyed it."

If the leaders of Rajneeshpuram were involved in a "criminal conspiracy," as federal attorneys proved in court, it plainly was not a conspiracy for everyone involved. Some of the people who lived there were guilty only of wanting Rajneeshism to be a real response to their own longing for something other than a brutal status quo that has only gotten more brutal since then (more debt, more soulless work, less education, more inequality).

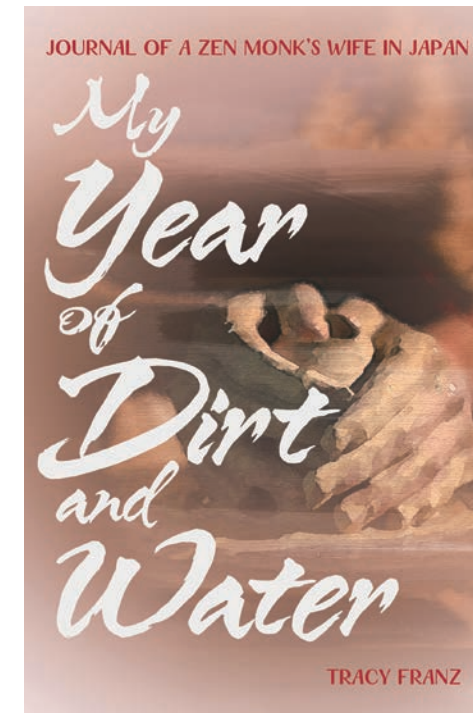
The most articulate and persuasive spokesperson for those folks is Bhagwan's attorney, Philip J. Toelkes (Swami Prem Niran). His story is compelling: before the commune he was "burnt toast," a corporate lawyer, but in the commune he was "loved and accepted . . . for the first time." Toelkes is admirable not because of his loyalty to Bhagwan and his cult, but *because of his loyalty to his own experience*. For

the film's audience, Toelkes's testimony is dissonant: we feel that his loyalty to Rajneesh's cult of personality is mistaken, but we can't dismiss his claim that the community he discovered in Rajneeshpuram changed his life for the better.

This dissonance should have led to the biggest question, the opportune question that *WWC* seems willfully to ignore: "Why do people seek out cultures that are a negation of the culture into which they were born?" And this one: "Are such cultures viable alternatives for the future?" The dominant narrative in mainstream discourse is that the '60s are dead, the counterculture failed, and communes always end in disappointment and tragedy. Because *WWC* presents Rajneeshpuram primarily as a disaster, it only contributes to the widely received idea that communes shouldn't be attempted, are doomed to failure, are cons, and so forth.

This narrative presents itself as accepted wisdom even though it flies almost entirely in the face of the fact that every major aspect of the social turn that we know as the '60s counterculture is a living part of the present: anticapitalism, feminism, gender equality, ethnic/racial equality, environmentalism, food and housing cooperatives, and—relevantly—alternative spiritual traditions, especially the ever-enlarging Western Buddhist community. San Francisco's Zen Center has had its share of scandals and challenges, but would a documentary similar to *WWC* do justice to its work and legacy? In spite of those scandals, Buddhist sanghas, meditation centers, and countercultures of whatever other stripe should continue to try to offer what Attorney Toelkes was so grateful to find at Rajneeshpuram: love, acceptance, and an alternative to the corporate sociality of money. As the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has said of the Russian Revolution, they should continue to try, and if they fail again, we can only hope that they *fail better*. ▼

Curtis White is an author and social critic. His most recent book, a novel, is *Lacking Character*.



My Year of Dirt and Water: Journal of a Zen Monk's Wife in Japan
By Tracy Franz
Stone Bridge Press
July 2018
308 pp., \$16.95, paper

One Step Removed

BY NOELLE OXENHANDLER

Tracy Franz's *My Year of Dirt and Water* is the gracefully written record of a challenging year in the life of its author. The vivid and highly distilled prose drew me in from the beginning and gave me the pleasurable sense of a journey to a world different from my own. Yet as I read, I found a kind of writer's koan emerging: how does one write about an ongoing state of loneliness and isolation in a way that creates a palpable sense of intimacy for the reader?

From the outset, the reasons for the author's sense of disconnection are clear: she is an American living in Japan while her American husband is spending the year in a Zen monastery, furthering his training as a priest. The book is written in present tense as the chronicle of a momentous year for the couple, even as they shared it primarily through absence, long stretches of time when the only contact was a postcard or a fragment of almost

inaudible phone conversation.

Franz had already been living in Japan for several years by the time her husband entered the monastery, and she was gradually growing more proficient in the language. Still, the ongoing sense of being on the outside looking in at the culture surrounding her is one of the book's central themes. It's not that she doesn't have interactions and affiliations: Franz teaches English at a university, trains in a karate studio, sits with a Zen meditation group, and devotes herself to the art of pottery, melding "dirt and water" under the gaze of a brilliantly gifted teacher. In each context she enters into a shared discipline, and her connections go well beyond the realm of superficial social chitchat. Yet she often sees herself as a fish out of water, not quite following the drift of conversation around her, feeling as if she's fumbling, dropping a stitch, or missing a step.

This recurrent sense of failure is closely intertwined with the loneliness Franz experiences. Often she seems to

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blame herself for her sense of isolation, even as she knows that there has always been something deeply self-contained at the core of Japanese culture, a pearl that foreign hands can't pry from its shell. In this context, I discovered another, related writer's koan: if one is a reserved person, living in a culture that values reserve, discretion, indirect communication, how does one break through the layers to fully engage the reader? And Franz is a very reserved writer. Early on, there are hints that her childhood in Alaska was marred by deep unhappiness. But it's not until halfway through the book that some big biographical blanks are filled in and we finally learn about not one but two troubled stepfathers who clearly impacted her life.

Similarly, it's not until deep in the book that her husband, Garrett (who now goes by his priest's name, Koun), starts to emerge as a three-dimensional character. In part this is because we, along with the author, are only catching glimpses of him during brief and highly supervised visits to the monastery. During these scenes, we see flashes of his tenderness toward his wife, but mostly what we see is his serious, highly disciplined nature. Nearly 150 pages in, I was startled to discover that he was the family "ham" as a child, and I felt somewhat cheated that I hadn't been more fully introduced to him earlier.

In some ways, you might say the book mirrors life: we become more intimate with the characters over time, as they gradually reveal more facets of themselves. From the start I felt drawn to Franz as a narrator, the way she moves through the world with open senses, a delicate irony, and a gift for detail. As I continued to read, I felt a deepening appreciation for her heart that dares to love through absence and despite a painful history of ruptured and abusive relationships. But at some point I began to feel that the book was keeping me on the outside looking in at someone who experiences *herself* as on the outside looking in, and I longed for her to dive headlong, with abandon, into the question, the

mystery, the suffering of this perspective.

This is precisely the kind of question that—in the proper context and with adequate support—one can dive into in meditation, but here too, there seemed to be a kind of shoji-screen between the author and her experience. At one point she acknowledges it: "Sometimes I think I just want to sit zazen because it is like sitting with Koun—this little thread of connection across time and space. Maybe that's all this is for me. Maybe that's it." Certainly I admired her honesty in describing this somewhat tenuous, ambivalent relationship to Zen practice, but overall I kept hoping she would discover more of the passionate intensity and exuberant playfulness that lie beneath its austere beautiful and sometimes even harshly formal surface.

Toward the end of the book, when her mother's cancer diagnosis calls her back to Alaska in the middle of winter, I felt the author becoming braver and less veiled on the page as certain extremely painful memories from the past refused to stay under wraps. At one point, contrasting the extreme cold of Alaska's winter to the low-grade chill of Japan, she writes: "Early this morning, I step outside into darkness and the singular clarity of true Alaskan cold. In Japan, I find the comparably milder winter chill annoying and ever-present, not unlike the vague discomfort that is the constant second-guessing of self and cultural habit."

That's it! I thought. Throughout the book I kept wishing that a certain gray, low-grade discomfort that kept her always "second-guessing" would fully intensify into the blackness of pure unadulterated pain—a blackness that, if we let it, can provide the most potent fuel for burning through the past and releasing us, finally, into full and intimate presence. ▼

Noelle Oxenhandler began Buddhist practice in 1970. She lives in northern California, where she teaches creative nonfiction at Sonoma State University. She is the author of three nonfiction books, and her essays have appeared in many national and literary magazines.



Where should a gift be given?
Wherever the mind feels inspired.

—*The Buddha*

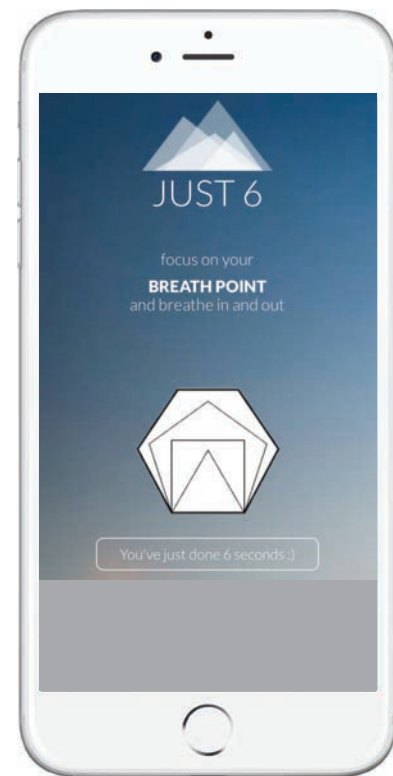
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MEDITATION APP ROUNDUP

BY CAITLIN VAN DUSEN

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JUST 6 (FREE)
Designed by Just Being, a company dedicated to developing emotional intelligence through mindfulness meditation, Just 6 is founded on the maxim “Just six seconds of mindfulness can make you more productive, focused, creative, and happy.” Though the app is web-based and there’s no mobile version, you can access it via your phone’s web browser. Its home page features an image of mountains superimposed with a “Begin” button. Click it and an instruction pops up:

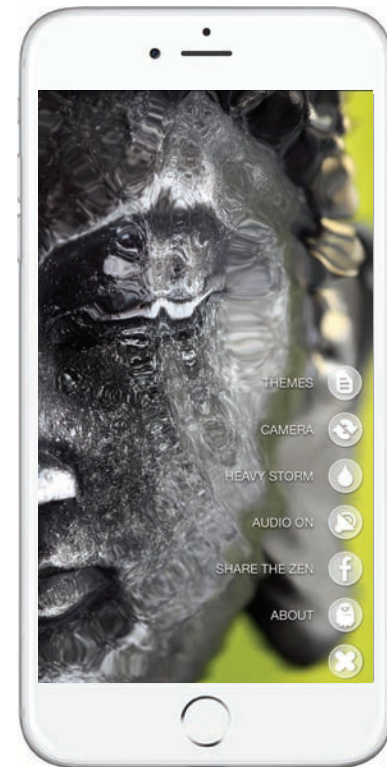
“Focus on your breath point and breathe in and out.” To help you count breaths, a triangle graphic repeatedly unfolds, origami-like, into an octagon, then refolds. After six seconds, a message appears: “You’ve just done six seconds.” If you’re not familiar with the concept of a breath point, a second button brings up a description of how to locate the spot—usually the tip of the nose—where you feel the sensation of air passing in and out of your nostrils. That’s it.

Because Just 6 is web-based, you can keep the page bookmarked—or, better yet, keep it continuously open as a tab in your browser. For some, this may make Just 6 more accessible than a mobile app—a few seconds of mindfulness are literally just a click away. Though six seconds is the shortest meditation I’ve ever seen endorsed, I found myself checking in to it whenever I was online. The tiny reset was genuinely helpful.

*Web-based
just6.life*

ZENVIEW (FREE; \$1 FOR PREMIUM SCENES)
If you’ve ever been stuck in grim surroundings and wished for a more tranquil view, look no further than ZenView, which turns your device’s screen into a virtual pool of water with a selection of scenes—including a bamboo forest, a starry night, and a sand garden—that appear as reflections. ZenView’s developers claim

that there’s “no need to practice Zen meditation for total relaxation and de-stressing” when you can “just point your camera and let ZenView do the rest.” Despite this hyperbole, playing around with the app is indeed soothing. You can experiment with leaving the reflections undisturbed, applying rain effects (from a sprinkle to a downpour), or using your finger on the touchscreen to ripple the reflection, then watch it settle satisfyingly back into stillness. Realistic watery sounds are optional, but I found that they

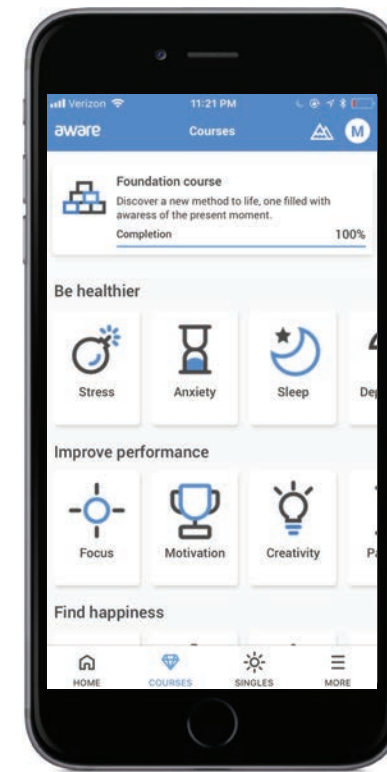


enhanced the calming effect. You can also access your device’s camera and transform, say, a dingy subway platform—or even your own face—into a reflection that you can swirl with your finger. Though the preset scenes are lovely, some verge on a screen-saver aesthetic. Playing around with your real-life view offers the most therapeutic value, as you watch the present moment melt like a Dali clock, reminding us of the Zen saying “Your mind should be like a mirror, reflecting everything but holding on to nothing.”
Available for iOS

AWARE (FREE TRIAL; \$7.99/MONTH; \$29.99/YEAR; \$74.99/LIFETIME)
Aware’s offerings begin with a 21-day foundational course called Being in Awareness. The rest of the content unlocks only after you have completed this course (or, as I did, fast-forwarded through the lessons to get there). Over the three weeks, Being in Awareness takes practitioners from the rhythm of the breath to watching streams of thought to embracing feelings with compassion. By the end, however, the content started to feel redundant.

The app’s subsequent three-week “courses” are focused on long-term goals: “Be healthier,” “Improve performance,” “Find happiness,” and, oddly, “For sportsmen” (not women?). You can skip around between them as needed, which is a relief (the app saves your progress), and the content is more targeted and much less repetitive than the foundational course.

I found the real draw of the app, though, to be its brief sessions. “Energizers” are quick awareness exercises, including a sound immersion and body scan. “Singles” are one-off meditations for common daily activities and feelings, including work breaks, quitting smoking, and anxiety; you select the length. “Travel,” for example, includes a meditation on your fellow travelers and the sensations of movement, but



“Cooking” is more focused on planning a balanced meal than on calming the mind (it even advises you to pause the meditation to jot down a shopping list!). Aware’s only unguided, silent meditation is buried in this “Singles” section.

An unusual feature is the “Breathe” tab, which offers five animated breathing exercises. The pace for each exercise is accompanied by a hornlike sound and a blue arc rising and falling on the screen. Although I found the sound distracting, the animation helped focus my breathing. Aware’s interface is spare, with a cool blue-and-white scheme and graphics for each topic. All meditations are delivered in the same soothing male voice. There is also a selection of ambient sounds (fireplace, mountain lake) that can be played inside or outside the app, and an optional “personal mindfulness buddy” who answers questions and offers advice through notifications.
*Available for iOS and Android
awaremeditationapp.com*

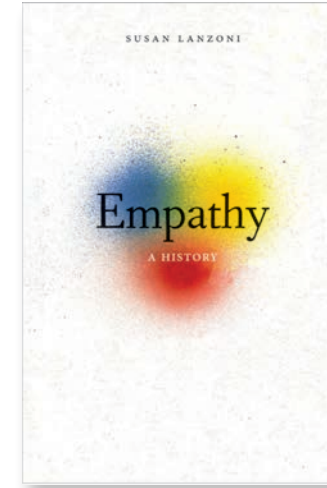
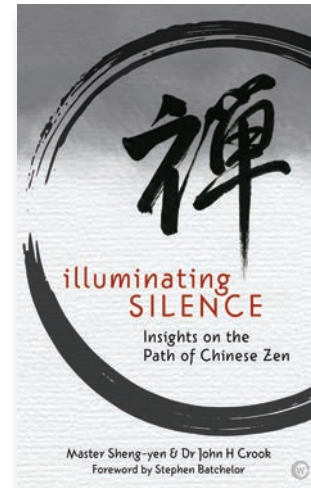
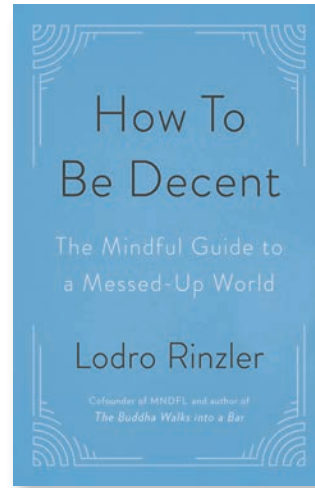
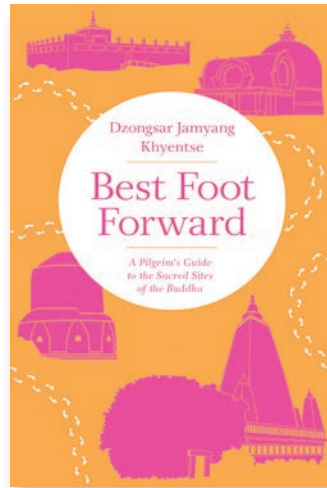
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BY GABRIEL LEFFERTS

► Pilgrimage is not an adventure to a foreign land, travel writer Pico Iyer has told us, but a “journey into reality.” In *Best Foot Forward: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Buddha* (Shambhala Publications, Aug. 2018, \$16.95, 168 pp., paper), the well-known Tibetan Buddhist lama and filmmaker Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche invokes this sentiment as he explains the whys and how-tos of pilgrimage in a short survey of the Buddhist holy places of India.

Rather than provide historical information or travel tips, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche offers dharmic reflections and practice instructions related to each site. In Kushinagar, the place of the Buddha's passing, for instance, he advises contemplating the reality of impermanence and taking advantage of the opportunity to practice before we're no longer able to. Besides Kushinagar, his list includes Lumbini, the place of the Buddha's upbringing and initial renunciation; Bodhgaya, where he achieved enlightenment; Sarnath, where he gave his first teaching; and Rajgir and Nalanda, prominent sites in the development of Mahayana Buddhism.

Best Foot Forward is useful for deepening a pilgrimage experience without having to rely on an in-person guide. Throughout, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche reminds us that by visiting the actual places touched by the historical Buddha—an ordinary

being—we realize that the goal of liberation is within reach for us too.

► Few authors can drop the line “The Buddha was a pretty cool guy” in their opening pages and follow up with a book that shows impressive depth of insight. But Lodro Rinzler can, and he has done exactly that in *How to Be Decent: The Mindful Guide to a Messed-Up World* (TarcherPerigee, October 2018, \$16, 256 pp., paper), the latest dharma guidebook for millennials from the MNDFL meditation center co-founder and Shambhala Buddhist teacher.

For Rinzler, to live a life that combines mindfulness with compassion is to live a life of *etiquette*. But that doesn't mean upholding outdated norms; it means being able to respond to other people's wants and needs with decency and dignity—and, in line with his tradition's teachings, with the recognition of one's own basic goodness. With its special emphasis on the practice of *lojong*, or “mind training,” *How to Be Decent* offers skillful ethical advice for a demographic wary of religion—or really, anyone struggling to live in our messed-up world.

► Testimony to the enduring influence of the Chan Buddhist teacher Master Sheng Yen (1930–2009) is evident in the reissuing of *Illuminating Silence*, now subtitled *Insights on the Path of Chinese Zen* (Watkins

Publishing, July 2018, \$17.95, 197 pp., paper). First published in 2002, this valuable collection of transcripts gives us a close-up view of two retreats held for Western dharma students in 1989 and 1995 at the Wales center founded by Sheng Yen's first Western dharma heir, John Crook.

Master Sheng Yen famously held dharma transmission in both the Caodong and Linji lineages of Chinese Zen, which are known to many Westerners only in their Japanese forms—Soto and Rinzai—and are often thought of as mutually exclusive styles. But these retreat accounts show how Sheng Yen expressed the expansive options traditionally known to Chinese Chan. He drew on *both* traditions to provide students with a range of relaxing and concentrating practices, from breath counting to koan-like questions (*huaou*), leading to the open, aware state of “silent illumination” that is associated with the Caodong school (and later with Dogen's *shikantaza*, “just sitting”).

The book includes Dr. Crook's commentary and personal recollections as well as an abbreviated autobiography of Master Sheng Yen, a glossary, and a foreword by Stephen Batchelor.

► Buddhists are no strangers to learning about lovingkindness and compassion. But what about their cousin, empathy? *Empathy: A History* (Yale University Press, September 2018, \$30,

408 pp., cloth), by Susan Lanzoni, a historian of the mind sciences, tracks the surprising development of the word from the early 20th century on and reflects on the role of the concept in Western society.

Empathy is now broadly understood as our capacity to grasp and share the feelings and thoughts of others. But our use of the term began, Lanzoni tells us, as a translation of the German word *Einfühlung*, literally “in-feeling,” which described the way that spectators' feelings of emotion or movement could be projected into objects of art or nature. From there, the concept of empathy transformed, eventually becoming a scientific subject to be researched, as well as a widely called upon antidote for personal, political, and cultural ills.

To study empathy is to pay attention to the ways we mark self and other, Lanzoni says, in a pursuit that will seem familiar to dharma practitioners. For while we may like to think of empathy as a means of relating to others, it's also a way of defining boundaries of *difference*. “To see another accurately,” she writes, “means to recognize that I am not you.” Ultimately, Lanzoni's goal is not to establish a universal definition for the term but to home in on its subtlety, allowing its myriad renditions to enrich our contemporary understanding of interconnection.

► Lifelong outdoorsman Christopher Ives brings walking meditation to a new level in *Zen on the Trail: Hiking as Pilgrimage* (Wisdom Publications, Sept. 2018, \$17.95, 192 pp., paper). Pulling thoughts from a variety of cultural and academic sources, Ives casts a wide net when discussing nature's transcendent qualities, allowing readers to glean their own eclectic connections to nature. But as a professor of religious studies, he also draws a parallel between trail hiking and committing oneself to the Zen Buddhist path. Loosely following the model of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, Ives tracks the spiritual progression represented by a hiker's “pilgrimage,” from stepping out the door and leaving behind social identifiers of self to returning home as a changed, more grounded individual.

Ives's thoughtful analyses of Zen meditation and the Zen view emerge seamlessly from a well of nature writing that recalls his hiking adventures around the world. Part Transcendentalist memoir, part Japanese Zen ethnography, and part dharma teaching, *Zen on the Trail* makes a bold vow: to “help us realize our embeddedness in nature and, ultimately, realize ourselves *as* nature.” ▼



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Continued from page 39: **OPENING THE INJURED HEART**

something to venerate in everyone.

Our biases can come up not only in giving tsewa, but in receiving it as well. Sometimes we only want to receive tenderness and support from special people, an exclusive group that is worthy of giving that to us. But we are not like flowers that can only blossom if they receive rays of light from the sun. That is too limited a view. We can blossom by receiving tsewa from anyone, from the highest to the lowest. If we are too picky about whom we receive warmth from, then we may even lose the affection of those we do admit to our heart. For it will become harder and harder for the latter to meet our standards and expectations.

Sometimes we turn away from others' tsewa because we are suspicious. Why is this person being so nice to me? What's behind his friendly expressions? This person doesn't even know me. What could he want? Is he planning to take advantage of me? So much paranoia can manifest when someone spontaneously and genuinely tries to be friendly with us. Of course, people can have ulterior motives, but 99 percent of the time, they are simply expressing the natural human desire to connect with one another. Why turn that into something else, something from which we need to protect ourselves?

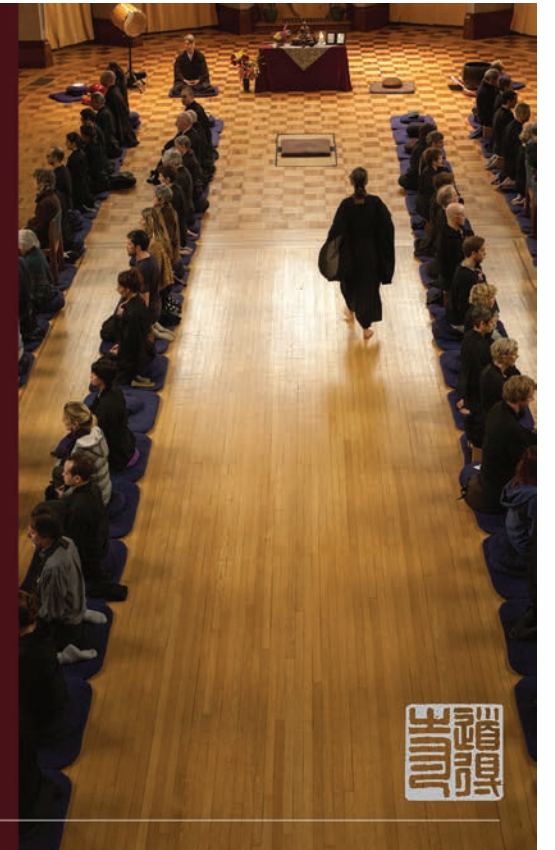
If we let the 1 percent spoil the other 99 percent, we are letting our suspiciousness color all our relations. On one hand, we always long for love in our lives. We know we can't be happy if we isolate ourselves. But on the other hand, we feel that we're taking a big risk by opening up to receive tsewa. We have to recognize that this risk—which is usually tiny—is a risk well

worth taking. What do we think we have to lose? Whatever it could be, that loss is nothing compared to the pain of keeping our heart closed in fear and paranoia.

At other times, we may feel that we just don't deserve love. Somehow we're fake, and when our true colors are exposed, we'll be rejected. Inside we may feel shaky and weak. In this state, it's very hard to open up to receiving warmth from anybody. This is when we have to remember that no one is undeserving. We are no worse than the dog that Dromtonpa circumambulated. We are also no better—everyone has the same precious tsewa. There is nothing fake about what lies at the core of all our hearts. We may have a lot of negative habits and shameful thoughts, but they are not our true colors.

As you remove impediments to giving and receiving tsewa, your mind and your life will be transformed. As you let go of small-minded stories and biases, you will be more and more amazed at how much warmth there is in this world. You will find so many beings to whom you can reach out and so many who can touch you as well. Wherever you stay or go, you will be able to make a difference in many others' lives, and many others will be able to make a difference in your life. When you orient yourself to tsewa, what you can give and receive is boundless. ▼

Adapted from *Training in Tenderness: Buddhist Teachings on Tsewa, the Radical Openness of Heart That Can Change the World*, by Dzigar Kongtrul © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Shambhala Publications (shambhala.com). **Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche** is an author and the founder of Mangala Shri Bhuti, an organization in the Longchen Nyingtik lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.



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Mahayana is some kind of later invention. But this idea wears thin when one sees the historical evidence, since we now know that many Mahayana texts appeared at the same time as many of those in the Pali tradition. Common characterizations of the Theravada tradition, such as the claim that its followers seek simply to be arhants [individually liberated beings] for themselves or that its teachings are primarily about suppressing thoughts and feelings, are also breaking down in light of newer textual and anthropological research.

As is true in any realm of knowledge, it takes considerable time and effort to engage Buddhism's long conversation in a full and rich way. Academics can do this in their way; religious professionals can do this in their way. But most contemporary practicing Buddhists—including readers of *Tricycle* or books from Shambhala or Wisdom Publications—are neither of these. How are those who are, as Shinran once said, "neither monk nor layman" to stake out a place and find a model for participating in Buddhism's vibrant intellectual tradition?

DA: I don't believe vocation is the primary barrier to a deeper participation in Buddhism's intellectual tradition. I think it is important to view vocation not as an obstacle

but as a *means* to deepen one's practice. Every situation we face in life presents an opportunity to put the principles of Buddhist thought into action in a way that benefits ourselves, our families, and our communities. Learning through the experiences of daily life is a powerful way to deepen our engagement with Buddhist thought. I have, however, observed that in many cases the ability to delve deeply into Buddhism's intellectual tradition relies upon fluency in the primary language of that tradition. Obviously not everyone has the time to learn new languages, so we need more translators, translations, and modern voices to express the Buddha's insights in a way that speaks to contemporary life.

RMH: Digging into the depth of the teachings held in the sutras is and should be a multifaceted approach. Academics can share their understanding of the text, and religious professionals and laypeople theirs. We can all mutually learn from one another.

In my study class, quite frequently a layperson will share a profound insight or understanding of a passage that neither I nor any scholar of the text has presented before. I am constantly learning from the dialogues I have in my class with those who are reading and studying the text with me. I utilize the translations of Buddhist scholars and academics in preparing for the class, but

we all study the text together. In that sense, I'd say that we are "neither monk nor layman."

Along those lines, the great D. T. Suzuki late in his life wrote about the Shin Buddhist devotees called *myokonin* [lit., "wonderful person"], who were in many cases illiterate laypeople with very little education but who had a deep spiritual understanding of the Shin Buddhist tradition. But those myokonin came to their deep understanding by listening to scholar priests who had studied the text and were sharing it in their dharma talks. They never read the texts themselves.

NO: I think there is a side of Buddhism we tend not to talk about, as Buddhism in the West is very focused on practice, such as not following thoughts in order to allow insight to develop. But for many people, practicing wholeheartedly involves a long process of learning how to think. Many teachers intentionally present the teachings to establish a clear view and understanding through which we see the lessons of the Buddha being demonstrated by each and every experience. That gives us more confidence to go deeper, and the foundational texts are there for us to support and augment this.

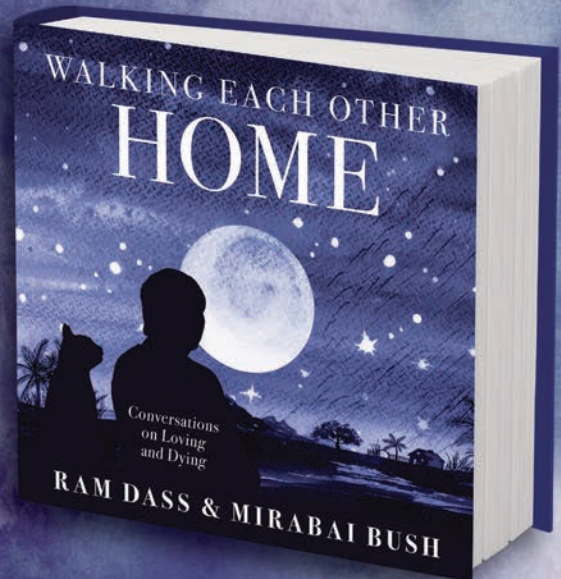
As a final thought, I would like to share something from my personal experience that may not apply to everyone, but that I suspect many will share. There is

something so enriching and joyful about slowing down and going back to some of the basics, to reading and rereading the original texts and commentaries with fresh eyes. I was reading the recent release of a 19th-century multivolume work from Tibet, *The Complete Nyingma Tradition*. This particular volume about philosophical systems included a presentation of what views are considered non-Buddhist, "mundane approaches." A few days later I was reading from the *Samannaphala Sutta* in the Pali canon, where the Buddha and King Ajatasattu are questioning each other about the fruits of the Buddhist path and the latter describes his talks with a variety of teachers who in many ways represent the same non-Buddhist views discussed in the Tibetan text.

Something about this reading—with its story setting of a still, clear moonlit night—brought the whole thing alive in an amazing way and made me further appreciate the more expository presentation I had read earlier. Both passages brought into clear focus for me many of the issues that arise in the current conversations between scientists, scholars, Buddhist traditionalists, Buddhist modernists, people of other faiths, and those just trying to get a handle on how the world works. Both sources are examples of how these foundational texts are absolutely relevant and meaningful to us here and now. Read them: you will see. ▼

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RAM DASS



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of his life and teachings remain undiminished:

Here
Radiant skies of Compassion
Shine
Without thought.

Look:
Before space opens

Hear:
Before time begins

Leap

Into the Diamond Heart
Vajrasattva
Present
Everywhere.

And hallucinations
Of the world's pain and terror,
The world's longing
Whirl, vanish slowly in the sky.

Just two weeks before Dandaron's death, the painter Zheleznov, an early student of Dandaron's and one who had been convicted in the same trial as his teacher, completed a thangka

painting of the mandala of Yamantaka, Conqueror of Death. The mandala itself is a traditional presentation. In its center, Yamantaka, wrathful and with the head of a water buffalo, stands surrounded by his retinue in the pure land of his attributes and powers. Around them are the lineage of deities and teachers who have transmitted the outer and inner meaning of this great wrathful one.

But in Zheleznov's painting, within the outer precincts of the palace are depictions of all those people most important to Dandaron: his stepfather, Dorje Badmaev; two images of his teacher, Samdan Tsydenov (one wearing humble robes, the other dressed in the ornaments of a chakravartin); and a portrait of Lama Jayagsy. Outside the mandala, among other deities and teachers, Dandaron himself is portrayed in his roles of yogi, teacher, and lineage holder. He wears prison garb, a suit, and a deity's crown and ornaments. This, then, is how Dandaron's disciples finally saw him and practiced as they followed him: moving through suffering and death, from life to life; invincible, indestructibly loving; and endlessly awakening. ▼

Poems by Douglas Penick.

This article relies particularly upon the work of Lubos Beka, Vladimir Montlevich, Alexander Piatagorsky, Nicolay Tsyrempilov, and Vello Vartanov.

Douglas Penick is a *Tricycle* contributing editor, Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, and author. His many works include *Journey of the North Star* and *Dreamers and Their Shadows* as well as three book-length episodes from the Gesar Epic.

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lineage, with lots of scaffolding built in. New students are paired with a mentor, who meets them outside the regular weekly services and meditation classes and helps them read through their first Kagyu dharma book (Weinberg is one of those mentors). “We usually start with basic shamatha [concentration practice], but we have to meet people where they are,” says Wesley. “Sometimes a person comes through the door and we’re chanting ‘Om mani padme hum,’ the mantra of universal compassion, and they’re like, ‘Wow. This is fantastic.’ It’s like a karmic peg for that person. So we let them go with that. You have to have the flexibility to help people where their interests are.” Wesley will even make house calls, to give instructions for such practices as the Medicine Buddha mantra, a healing visualization, or tonglen, a technique for spreading compassion.

Of the myriad practices in her personal repertoire, the bookend to her daily rituals is shrine practice. “That act of tending at the beginning and the end of the day is a powerful symbol of one’s commitment to oneself,” Wesley explains. “It’s a commitment to a type of spiritual self-care. That gives you confidence in your self-worth. You’re making offerings to the Buddha in front of you, but really the offerings nurture the Buddha that’s inside of you. When I took refuge, Rinpoche said that’s how you begin and end your day—with shrine tending. So I teach it to everybody who takes refuge.”

A hallmark of Tibetan Buddhist compassion practice is identification with other beings—anyone you encounter could have been your mother, your brother, your child, so whatever they’re going through is relevant to you. Wesley often quotes an aphorism from Khenpo Rinpoche: “People don’t come to the dharma because they’re having a good time. They come because they’re struggling.” To help a student “get at that struggle,” she says, “I try to find the question behind the question. Sometimes someone is asking a super-technical question about some philosophical point of dharma, but what they’re really saying is ‘I’m afraid. I’m afraid that bad things are going to happen to me or that my bad habits are going to get the better of

me.’” Once that inner question is articulated, “we work collaboratively. We’re going to go after that thing because if we don’t, it’s going to stay in your way.”

Her own struggles, the ones that brought her to dharma practice 41 years ago, are the same ones she grapples with now: “Anxiety and my emotions. I still get bowled over by my emotions. I’m quick to lose my temper.” It’s hard to picture Wesley getting snarky, but it happens, she admits, “when someone says or does something dismissive, or that suggests that I’m stupid. It brings me right back to that playground in sixth grade.” On one occasion she felt provoked and said something “too harsh” to a student, and the memory of that still torments her. “I told Khenpo Rinpoche what I’d done, and he told me, ‘Don’t ever do that again. Be patient and be a good listener.’ My role is primarily as a listener, and I was trained as a listener, but I needed to hear that.”

Still, a lot changes in four decades of practice. “What’s different now,” Wesley says, “is that I have learned that my emotions really are clouds in front of the sun, and they don’t define me. They’ve become more workable.” She credits, as much as anything, working with the *lojong* slogans, the 59 brief mind-training aphorisms that date back to 12th-century Tibet. “They taught me that I could get out of my own way and have a more constructive relationship with my emotions. I don’t have to feel terrorized and hopeless because of them. I still have my moments, but I have tools.” And they’re the same tools she shares with her students, in Columbus; at KTD, where she is a frequent guest teacher; and at the many KTC centers around the country where she is invited to teach each month.

Wesley and her husband still live in Newark, which, like Columbus, is a rustbelt town finding its way forward from deindustrialization and the Great Recession. Its greatest claim to fame—greater even than a former industrial headquarters in the shape of a giant picnic basket—is the extraordinary Newark Earthworks. These ceremonial mounds were built by the Hopewell civilization between 100 and 500 CE and are believed to have been the largest

earthen enclosures in the world, though no one knows exactly how their makers used them.

When I visit Wesley’s home in a neighborhood of modest one-story houses, she greets me with her signature humor: “Welcome to the 1950s!” The place does have a retro air, furnished as it is with abundant knickknacks, Wesley’s favorite recliner, and a multitude of taped-up notes bearing reminders she writes to herself. The only evidence that a Buddhist lama lives there, apart from tables covered in books and papers related to KTC business, is Wesley’s shrine room. The converted bedroom is a touchstone place where she practices each morning and night before a china-cupboard-turned-altar.

Reclining in her chair and swinging an orange prayer wheel on a Saturday afternoon, she recounts the details of the fire that destroyed the physical home of Columbus KTC. It was a profound teaching in impermanence and generosity. Wesley was giving a course in Mexico that week when she received an email saying there’d been a “serious fire” at the center, and by the time she reached KTC’s director, Kim Miracle, all Miracle could say was “It’s gone.” “Thangkas were vaporized, the statues scorched, and 40 years’ worth of books and recorded teachings were destroyed,” Wesley remembers. But as often seems to happen when a sacred site is destroyed, certain precious objects remained miraculously intact: the blue-and-yellow Karma Kagyu flag that flew from the church steeple was unscathed, even though the roof had erupted in flames.

“There was that pang of loss,” says Wesley, “but almost instantly all these silver linings began to appear.” Namely, an outpouring of hospitality and support. “We didn’t realize how many people were interested in what we were doing, or how many friends we had,” says Wesley. The Mayor of Columbus called the next day to offer his regrets and assistance, and within a few days, an ad hoc community of supporters organized an interfaith prayer meeting that drew 150 people in the parking lot of the burned center. “I was borne up by this outpouring of good will.”

Another silver lining was the word

from Khenpo Rinpoche that KTC should construct a new center on the site of the old one. That means a purpose-built facility, designed by a pro bono architect, that Wesley and her board hope will serve as spiritual touchstone on the city’s west side. They are dedicated to helping the historically troubled and underinvested area whose residents are now threatened by the displacement that comes with gentrification. They will continue their long tradition of offering free meditation classes and other services. But before KTC can break ground, the group needs to raise enough money to build—they are still more than \$600,000 from their goal—and for now, Wesley must function as a development director and real estate developer, in addition to teaching the dharma.

On the way out of Newark, I stop to see the Hopewell Mounds. Following Wesley’s directions, I come upon an all-but-hidden parking lot, empty, at the end of a quiet residential street, leading to a lookout platform. The icy rain is still falling, and a golf course undulates over and around the earthworks, so at first sight, the mounds don’t even register. Suddenly, though, they take shape in my field of vision, like enormous, prehistoric beasts that had been camouflaged until this moment by their own stillness. They form long ridges and a mysterious hexagon; they are immense and beautiful and alive.

Lama Kathy had urged me to see the Hopewell Mounds. Everything is impermanent—everything arises and passes away—but the mounds are still there, and they’re really cool!” she said. It dawns on me as I look out over the golf course, encrusted with frost, that there’s a fitting symmetry in the fact that Lama Kathy and Columbus KTC emerged in the same region as these structures. They each embody a syncretism: an ancient religion, layered with a new culture’s ideas and artifacts, which will someday disintegrate and pass away. And like those mounds, the Buddha’s teachings are something enduring that shapes us, if we slow down enough to take them in. We’re not a big deal, Wesley would say, but the dharma is. ▼

Mary Talbot is *Tricycle’s* editor-at-large.



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In the standardized practice methods, samaya is often presented in terms of prescribed behaviors and prescribed states of mind. The language then takes on legalistic tones — infraction, breach, violation, and complete break, for instance. In my opinion, this vocabulary masks the violence implicit in the feudal system and recasts difficulties as guilt. The American anthropologist David Graeber writes in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*: “There’s no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by re-framing them in the language of debt—above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it’s the victim who’s doing something wrong.” The word *guilt* functions in much the same way as the word *debt*. With this language, it is easy to see the student as the one at fault, even when it is the teacher who has betrayed the commitment to awakening by giving teachings or empowerments to people who are not ready for them or by using his or her position for personal benefit.

Samaya and sacred outlook are powerful tools, but powerful tools can cause serious harm when misused. These two spiritual tools were never intended to govern society or to govern the operation of political and social institutions. To use them for these purposes is, in my mind, contrary to both their spirit and intent. To invoke them for any personal gain or for any purpose other than awakening is also contrary to their spirit. They are directed to the mystic in us, for that part of us that seeks something utterly ineffable yet viscerally important—a direct knowing different from, indeed at right angles to, our conventional understanding of life. When we are ready to commit to that and are ready to go wherever our calling takes us, then these tools will serve us well, showing us how, as Suzuki Roshi says in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, we can use our very imperfections to find our firm, way-seeking mind. ▼

Ken McLeod is a writer, translator, teacher, and business consultant. His writings on Buddhist practice include *Reflections on Silver River* and *A Trackless Path*. He taught in Los Angeles for many years and in 2012 retired to focus on writing. He is currently working on a book on Vajrayana in today’s world.



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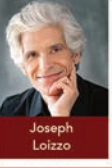
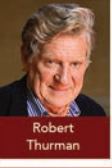
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liminality is the way things really are, and the solidity we ascribe to things is a necessary fiction that causes suffering when we mistake it for a fact. If some early Buddhists spent their lives trying to avoid stepping outside the lines, the *Diamond Sutra* calls for the opposite. We have to see and then dissolve all boundaries.

Of course, liminality goes against the grain. The more uncertain our lives become in response to events beyond our control, the more we want to plant our feet solidly in one place. A Zen story begins with a figure who tried to do just that during a terrible time. That figure, a 6th-century soldier, Xiao Yan, served under the mad emperor Xiao Baojuan. Somehow the soldier Yan managed to survive and finally overthrew Baojuan, who was assassinated by two trusted aides. Yan, now known as Emperor Wu, proved himself a ruler of great ability who created the Liang state with Buddhism as its cornerstone. He constructed temples throughout his realm, inviting from India some of the foremost Buddhist teachers of the day.

And yet an encounter with one teacher went awry—the Indian master Bodhidharma, who brought Zen to China. As the *Blue Cliff Record* relates, when the two men met, the emperor rehearsed his numerous good works—all the monasteries and nunneries he'd built, and all the libraries he'd filled with books. Then Wu asked, "How much merit have I gained to share with my family, my friends, and my subjects?"

"No merit," Bodhidharma replied.

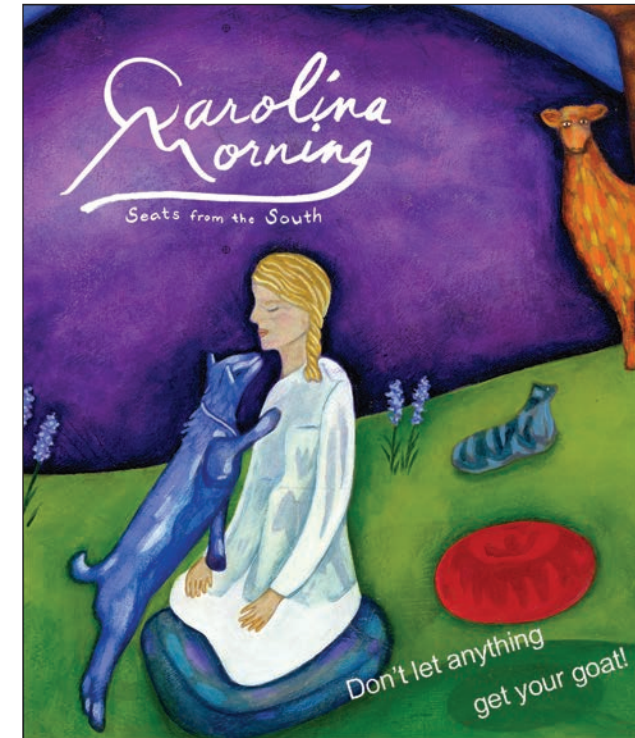
Incredulous, the emperor stared back at him. "But isn't the dharma the way of holiness?"

"Not holiness, your majesty. Great Emptiness," the old monk said. Clearly the emperor did not understand. After Bodhidharma had exited, Wu asked one of the palace monks, "Who was that strange fellow?" The monk told him, "An avatar of Avalokiteshvara" (the bodhisattva of compassion).

The most important details are contained in what happened next. Bodhidharma literally turned his back on Wu's religious paradise. But he didn't walk into the nearby town so he could live among the villagers. Rejecting both alternatives, he strode into the mountains where he would meditate for nine years in a cave until his first student arrived.

As for the kind and wise Emperor Wu, his reign ended when rebels conquered Liang. Wu's captors gradually starved him to death, and soon nothing remained of the temples he had built. But temples aren't the dharma's home, and neither are the villages. "Temple" and "village" are just ideas, too. The dharma's true home is always in between, and that's why it can set us free. ▼

Kurt Spellmeyer, a *Tricycle* contributing editor, is a Zen priest and directs the Cold Mountain Sangha in New Jersey. He teaches English at Rutgers University and is the author of *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Destruction*.



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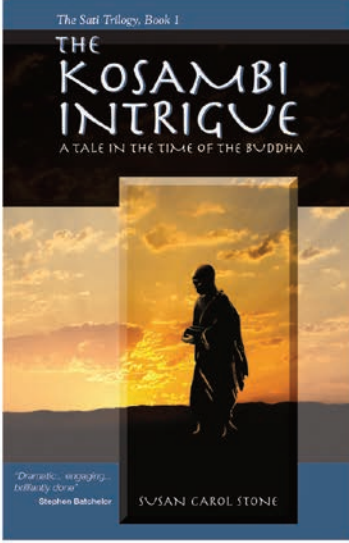


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and then do your best, even with the understanding that giving up meat was unhealthy.

Where does this leave us today? For one thing, it's surely time to put to rest the old idea that all Tibetan lamas throughout history ate meat. Rather than a settled issue, the question of meat eating was the subject of ongoing, contentious debate, for while many lamas certainly did eat meat, many others did not. It is not only inaccurate to suggest otherwise, but it denigrates the effort these masters put into practicing and promoting what was, to them, a difficult and dangerous diet.

In fact, the idea that vegetarianism was unhealthy was the only argument that could convince firmly vegetarian lamas to either eat meat themselves or to permit it among their disciples. But this argument rested on two pillars: the difficulty of finding non-meat foods, and medical assumptions about the role of meat in human health. And both of these pillars are cracking at present. Far more food options are available than was the case just a decade or two ago, even in remote nomadic pasturelands. And the incursion of Western medicine has resulted in shifting assumptions about the medical necessity of meat. Because of these changes, many Tibetans are now willing to accept that one can be perfectly healthy as a vegetarian. Some have even told me that they now think vegetarianism is healthier than eating meat!


This changing attitude has helped opened up cultural space for vegetarianism, allowing for the emergence of a powerful vegetarian movement in contemporary Tibet. Many monas-

teries that used to serve meat, for instance, are now vegetarian. In 2007 I visited Dzogchen Monastery in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham. The monks ate their meals together from three large vats of soup. One of these vats was vegetarian; the other two had meat. When I returned in 2012, the pots were still in use, but all three were now vegetarian. Similarly, it used to be difficult to find vegetarian meals in restaurants, but today restaurants commonly carry entire menus of vegetarian food, even outside of the main cities and towns. Seeing this rise in vegetarianism's popularity, Chinese companies recently began to market tofu and other "fake meat" snacks directly to Tibetans.

Some people have suggested that this movement is more connected to external influences than internal ones. For instance, a 2013 article by the French Tibetologist Katia Buffetrille quoted a comment by Jamyang Kyi, a Tibetan blogger, that contemporary vegetarianism is a "fad inspired by Chinese Buddhists and Western vegetarians." Claims like this, however, ignore the long history of vegetarianism in Tibet itself—one that honors traditional Tibetan concerns about animal suffering, now seeing fresh life in a context in which vegetarianism is considered a reasonable and healthy diet. ▼

Geoffrey Barstow is an assistant professor of religious studies at Oregon State University. He is the author of *Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet*, and he is currently editing a volume of Tibetan texts on this topic, to be published by Wisdom Publications in late 2019. Follow him on Twitter @thelostyak.


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Engaging their tradition's important treatises allowed practitioners to find ways of applying notions of subjugation as an effective response to rising social and political anxieties while simultaneously providing a doctrinal basis that helped frame these ritual forms within Buddhist notions of salvation and enlightenment.

It would, of course, be naive to suggest that subjugation rituals were immune to misuse. Placing subjugation practice in a context of Buddhist values does not free it from ethical or moral issues. Indeed, these esoteric practices were actively presented as a tool to eliminate one's enemies, and the allure of power to subdue or even destroy those who stood in opposition to one's worldly goals undoubtedly had much appeal to potential patrons and drew their support.

Subjugation has long been held as a hallmark feature of esoteric Buddhism. But it does not stand by itself. Rather, it was incumbent on practitioners of these rituals to clarify the ways in which subjugation related to the fundamental Buddhist issues of awakening and compassion. In this sense, one could say that ritual subjugation was negotiated within the esoteric tradition and continued to evolve as its teachings were put into practice, responding to the ever-changing social and political climate. The process of integrating the appeal of subjugation with foundational Buddhist values is complex and precarious, and the ways it has been worked at and articulated comprise an important aspect of Japanese religious history. The importance of the process of grounding esoteric rituals with primary Buddhist values should not be taken lightly; neither should it be dismissed as something belonging only in the past. As suggested by the words of my monk friend, the allure of subjugation remains strong in the minds of monks in the esoteric Buddhist tradition to this day.

In the esoteric Buddhist tradition, the functioning of the subjugation of evil is personified by the wrathful figures in the pantheon called *myoo*, or in Sanskrit *vidyaraja* ("wisdom king"). The *myoo* are manifestations of cosmic buddhas or bodhisattvas and are

endowed with the ability to subdue and eliminate obstructions, whether internal or external, in order to bring beings to awakening and to recover and maintain harmony in the social realm. Like mantras, subjugation rituals invoking *myoo* figures function as skillful means to dispel the darkness of ignorance.


Among the various forms of the *myoo* figure, Fudo Myoo ("immovable wisdom king") has long been of central importance. The *Commentary of the Mahavairocana Sutra*, composed by the Chinese master Yixing (683–727), is one of the most influential treatises in the development of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. The treatise gives particular emphasis to Fudo, the wrathful manifestation of the cosmic buddha Mahavairocana, the primordial buddha in the esoteric traditions of East Asia. Fudo is said to be the personification of the power of mantra to subjugate rebellious beings. Fudo Myoo is also the main figure invoked in the fire ritual, or *goma*, a core element of Shingon, which is performed to destroy negative energies and bring benefit to individuals, the realm, and all sentient beings. The *goma* is frequently practiced at Buddhist temples to this day.

In Japan, Fudo Myoo is depicted either sitting or standing on a rock base, holding a noose in his left hand and a sword in his right hand. Such iconographic elements serve to represent his function as a subjugator not only of mental obstructions but also of malicious beings who oppose the Buddhist teachings. Through Fudo's wrathful stare obstructions of the buddhadharma are subdued, tied down with the noose, and struck with the sword of wisdom, forcing the subjugated being into a state of enlightenment.

Although this use of violent force may appear to be contrary to the dharma, Yixing's *Commentary* explains that these acts of subjugation are undertaken out of compassion. Whereas buddhas and bodhisattvas are usually positioned on a lotus flower as a sign of their enlightenment, Fudo is positioned on a rock base, a visual expression of his unwavering determination to postpone his own enlightenment until after he successfully directs all other sentient beings to

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enlightenment. Fudo's use of force is justified by his vow to save even the most malicious of beings and is thus understood as the most profound expression of Buddhist compassion.

A ritual treatise attributed to the 9th-century Tendai monk Annen, the *Definitive Secret Teachings of the Holy Immovable One*, offers a sense of how the rituals associated with the Fudo Myoo were conceptualized in 10th-century Japan, the time when subjugation rituals began to proliferate. The *Definitive Secret* clearly states that the ritual practice associated with Fudo Myoo can be, or rather should be, employed both for the self-cultivation of the practitioner and to deal with various forms of "obstructions in the mundane world." Examples of the latter include a ruler's loss of rank, disloyalty on the part of ministers and officials, and the causing of social disruption—mundane obstructions that would certainly have resonated in the anxious political and social climate of the time.

While the *Definitive Secret* advocates the application of Fudo Myoo rites as a remedy for social ills, it equally stresses that the purpose of the practices associated with Fudo is to enable practitioners to protect and preserve bodhicitta by cutting away the practitioners' various "internal" vexations. The treatise claims that through the practice of the "three secret activities" of body (forming mudras, or symbolic hand gestures), speech (recitation of mantras), and mind (contemplation of Fudo Myoo) one is able to attain union with him and thus remove obstacles and achieve immediate enlightenment.

Yixing's *Commentary* further explains that a practitioner should, through the employment of mantras and mudras, contemplate oneself as none other than Fudo, enacting subjugation wrathfully by "stepping down on the head" of the source of obstruction. By embodying Fudo, one can, through affective engagement, dispel all obstructions. At the same time, however, the *Commentary* teaches that these obstacles are caused by *one's own mind*, and specifically that it is the mental afflictions of "stinginess and

greed" accumulated over infinite previous lifetimes that are the root cause of the arising of obstructions.

The *Commentary* describes the enlightenment experience as the realization that all minds—one's own mind, the mind of the Buddha, and the mind of all sentient beings—are equal. Perhaps this is why the removal of obstructions is not confined to the internal realm of one's own negative karma but also includes the negative karma shared by all sentient beings. The *Commentary* also speaks of the dynamic activity of the cosmic buddha Maha-vairocana, in which all beings are seen as none other than the extension of Mahavairocana. In a sense, these two perspectives are complementary: to understand all beings as being equal is to see all beings as part of the cosmic buddha's activity. The one who is engaged in the act of saving (the practitioner) is the same as the one who needs to be saved (another being). They are one and the same. Internally things work much the same. In the context of esoteric Buddhist ritual, there is ultimately no distinction between "self" (the practitioner who is engaged in the act of subjugation) and "other" (the obstacles that must be subjugated).

In the *Commentary*, Fudo is an expression of a view of bodhicitta that is much like the notion of the radical interconnectedness of all beings put forth in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Bodhicitta is also described as "formless" and "like space." Embodying bodhicitta in the esoteric sense allows the practitioner to realize the nondiscriminatory nature—the equality—of all beings. Without the understanding of equality, subjugation is in danger of simply being a violent act aimed at destruction of the other. Only when subjugation is predicated on understanding the equality of all beings and sustained by the aspiration to lead all beings to liberation is it authenticated as a true Mahayana Buddhist practice. ▼

Eric Swanson is a PhD candidate in Religion and Philosophy at Harvard University. His studies focus on the ritual activities of Japanese Tendai Buddhism.

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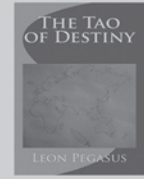
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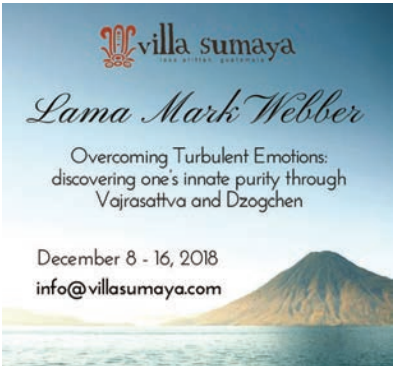
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Once the Master held up his staff and said, “The whole universe, the earth, killing and giving life: all is in [this staff] here.”
 A monk then asked, “What about killing?”
 The Master replied, “A total mess!”
 The monk went on, “And how about giving life?”
 The Master said, “[If] you want to be a rice steward . . .”
 The monk continued, “What about when one neither kills nor gives life?”
 The Master got up and exclaimed, “Oh Great Perfection of Wisdom!”

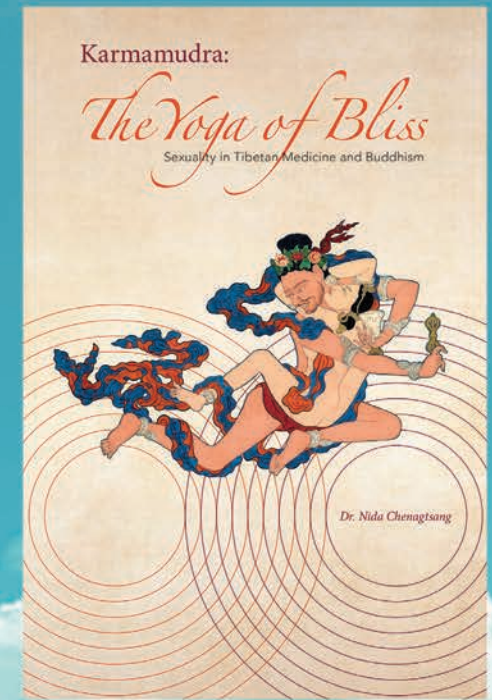
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Yunmen Wenyan (864–949) was an influential teacher of the Chinese Chan tradition.

View from Biechuan Temple, Guandong, China, 1987; photograph by Don Farber

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