THE BUDDHIST REVIEW SPRING 2019

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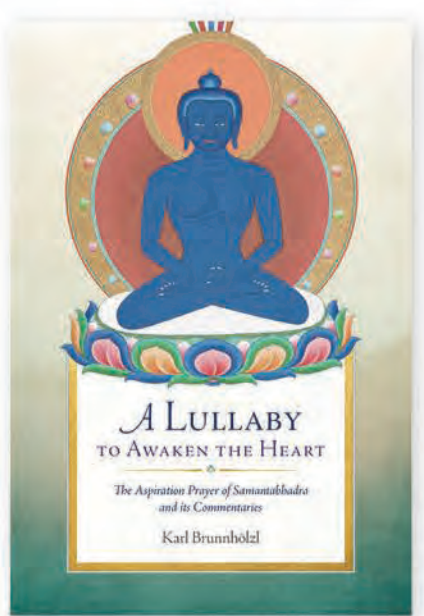
Wisdom

YOUR CONNECTION TO AUTHENTIC BUDDHISM



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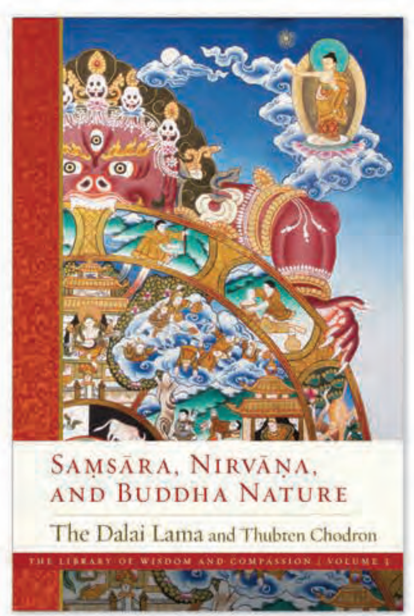

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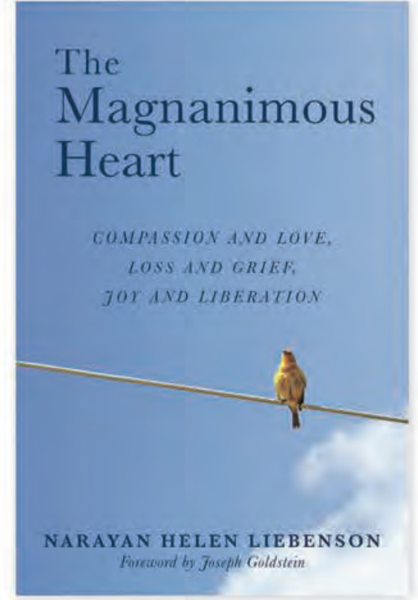

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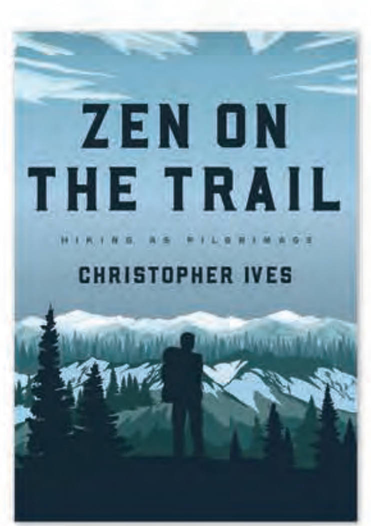

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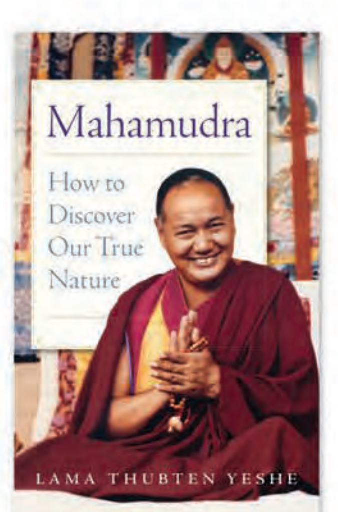

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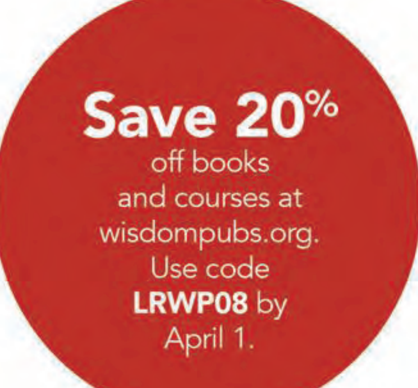

THE WISDOM PODCAST

THUPTEN JINPA
Translating for His Holiness the Dalai Lama

On this episode of the Wisdom Podcast, host Daniel Aitken travels to Montreal to speak with Thupten Jinpa, scholar and former monk in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and primary English translator to His Holiness the Dalai Lama since 1985.

CHRISTOPHER IVES
Zen, Ethics, and the Wildness of Nature

On this episode of the Wisdom Podcast, host Daniel Aitken speaks with Christopher Ives, scholar and practitioner in the Zen Buddhist tradition. Chris specializes in modern Zen ethics, as well as Buddhist approaches to nature and the environment.

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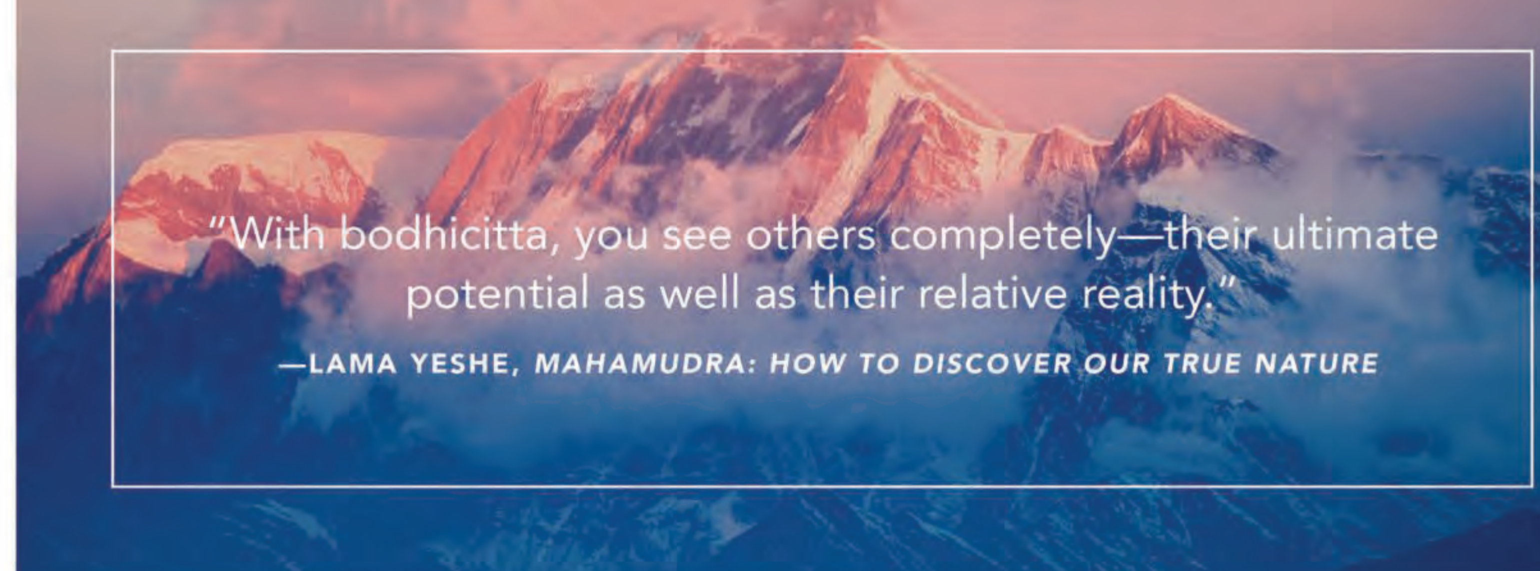

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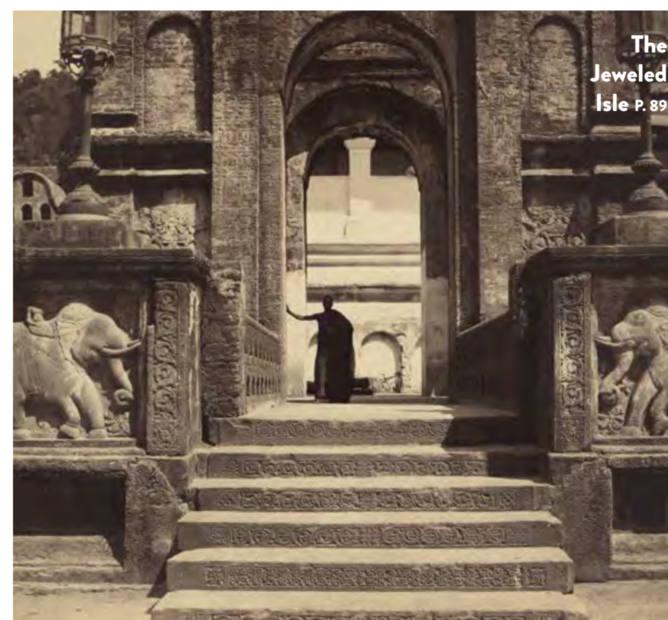

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Photograph by Céline Haeberly

BOTTOM: LACMA - THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART | TOP: ARTWORK BY FRANZISKA BARCZYK

TRICYCLE ONLINE

Each quarter, you're invited to watch select films documenting Buddhist cultures and ideas and to participate in dharma talks by contemporary teachers who are available to answer your questions on our forums. **tricycle.org/subscribe**

DHARMATALKS

How to resist the temptation of hostility

FEBRUARY

Finding Meaning in Mortality
with Rev. Marvin Harada

Accepting death is the key to a meaningful life, but doing so isn't easy. Rev. Harada shares inspiring examples from the Shin tradition of people and practices that will help us face mortality.

MARCH

Compassion in Polarizing Times
with Dungse Jampal Norbu

Today's divisive political culture can bring out our worst impulses, but with Tibetan Buddhist methods of fostering compassion, we can clear the mind of negativity and connect with our intrinsic qualities of clarity and warmth.

APRIL

The Dharmic Life
with Gesshin Greenwood

The Buddha's journey from upperclass royalty to no-class enlightenment has the twists and turns of a saga. Each stage of his life contains lessons on freeing ourselves from suffering—lessons applicable to our own lives here and now.

FILMCLUB

Mira

FEBRUARY

Mira
Directed by Lloyd Belcher / 42 min. / 2016 / Nepal

Once a Maoist child soldier, Mira Rai, a young woman from rural Nepal, overcame the challenges of an impoverished upbringing to become an internationally recognized trail runner. Today, she inspires children in her home country and abroad to pursue their dreams.

MARCH

Bhikkhuni — Buddhism, Sri Lanka, Revolution
Directed by Malgorzata Dobrowolska / 70 min. / 2018 / Sri Lanka

Three determined women take on the patriarchy by reviving an abandoned Buddhist tradition and becoming the first fully ordained Theravada Buddhist nuns in their nations' modern histories.

APRIL

Ub Lama
Directed by Egle Vertelyte / 52 min. / 2011 / Mongolia

In the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's rapidly modernizing capital city, 12-year-old Galaa must choose between monastic renunciation and illegal activity to survive in the wake of his father's passing.

PHOTOGRAPHS (L-R): COURTESY ORANGE COUNTY BUDDHIST CHURCH; BY MICHAEL VELASCO; COURTESY GESSHIN GREENWOOD

The Conversation

Letters to the Editor

Our readers respond to *Tricycle*'s print and online stories.

IN **"SKI. CLIMB. WRITE."** (Winter 2018), Emily Stifler Wolfe chronicled how the legendary climber and skier Dick Dorworth was transformed by his Zen practice. D. C. Risker considered the article part of an overplayed trend toward profiling extraordinary figures, writing, "The extreme case always seems in vogue. . . . Isn't ordinary life supposed to be the way . . . especially in Zen?" Others found the article inspiring; @foreverantrim tweeted that the article was "simply fantastic."

J. SUNARA SASSER'S REFLECTION on her experience in Soka Gakkai International as a black American, **"Why Are There So Many Black Buddhists?"** (tricycle.org, October 16, 2018), was hotly debated. Thomas Ellis was glad that there is "a sect with growing popularity that is committed to challenging racism and oppression in all its forms." Others argued that Buddhists should strive to be color-blind. Joseph Anderson wrote: "The author's attachment to race is something they will eventually have to overcome if they are to continue forward in Buddhist teachings." "Operaman" criticized any pretense at color blindness, writing that "some of the comments on this thread reflect why American sanghas can seem unwelcoming to black people," and noting he was sad to see others "judge the author … rather than showing compassion for challenges that black Americans must live with for no reason other than the color of their skin. . . . When a sangha is overwhelmingly of one race or one class in the midst of a diverse community, it is fair to wonder whether it is the sangha, and not the uncomfortable person of color, that has an attachment that might bear further reflection."

"THE ONE PURE DHARMA" (Winter 2018) by Judith Hertog took a deep dive into the controversial and rapidly expanding New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) and its leader, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. Many readers were critical of the NKT, while some NKT members criticized the article's direction: Lesly Weiner says she has been "happily practicing within the NKT for 17 years," and Joan Boccafola noted that the article lacked the voices of "those of us who are very happy being Kadampas." Reader "Giankar" saw value in the NKT's focus on purity, writing that the school "just stresses the importance of following one practice sincerely, without making a New Age salad of half-digested practices." Some former NKT members sang another tune: Pete Woods described having felt "manipulated" when attending an NKT center, and "Peace 2 all" expressed fear that "I would have lost myself to the NKT" if not for "the brave people that have spoken out about their experience."

FOLLOWING DZONGSAR Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche's Facebook letter of admiration and support for Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese Buddhist activist Maung Zarni and journalist Matthew Gindin's response, **"An Open Letter to Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche"** (tricycle.org, November 28, 2018), elicited strong reactions. A number of readers applauded the article and expressed concern over the original letter. Barbara Delaney wrote, "[His] complete disregard for the plight of the Rohingya stood out and was deeply disappointing." Academic and blogger Justin Whitaker is "very grateful" for the response to Dzongsar Khyentse, who "seems to have a profound misunderstanding of and even disdain for 'the West.'" The Tibetan Feminist Collective called the response "a must-read." Tenzin Peljor, owner of the blog *Struggling with DiffiCult Issues*, added: "Dharma realizations don't make you an expert on cross-cultural issues or geopolitics." But Sherab Jamtsho felt that Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse's letter was intended to make readers engage in critical thinking and "deserves an open-minded introspection by the West, instead of paranoia about any criticism that comes their way." "Jacaranda" questioned Aung San Suu Kyi's ability to challenge the military's treatment of the Rohingya without facing "death or persecution" and argued that her lying low "is the intelligent thing to do."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY DICK DORWORTH

THE QUESTION

How did you know you had found the right school or sangha for you?

When I read and listened to the Thai forest tradition teachings of Thanissaro Bhikkhu, they just made sense to me. I found answers to basic foundational questions that I had been wondering about all my life, and the connection grew from there.
—Mary Freeman Ericson

I haven't yet.
—Kathleen Russell

Kathleen Russell, you aren't alone, friend.
—David Hickerson

Once I met my teacher, I just knew. 🙏
—Bobby Devito

More important: how do you find a school or a sangha? I live in Alabama, and I have had a tough time finding a mentor locally.
—Karen McClure

FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:

The spiritual teacher Ram Dass (p. 76) keeps photos of both Barack Obama and Donald Trump on his altar. Do you incorporate an inspiring or challenging contemporary figure into your practice? Email editorial@tricycle.org.

"I can't seat you until you are fully present."

JOHN KLOSSNER / THE NEW YORKER COLLECTION / THECARTOON BANK

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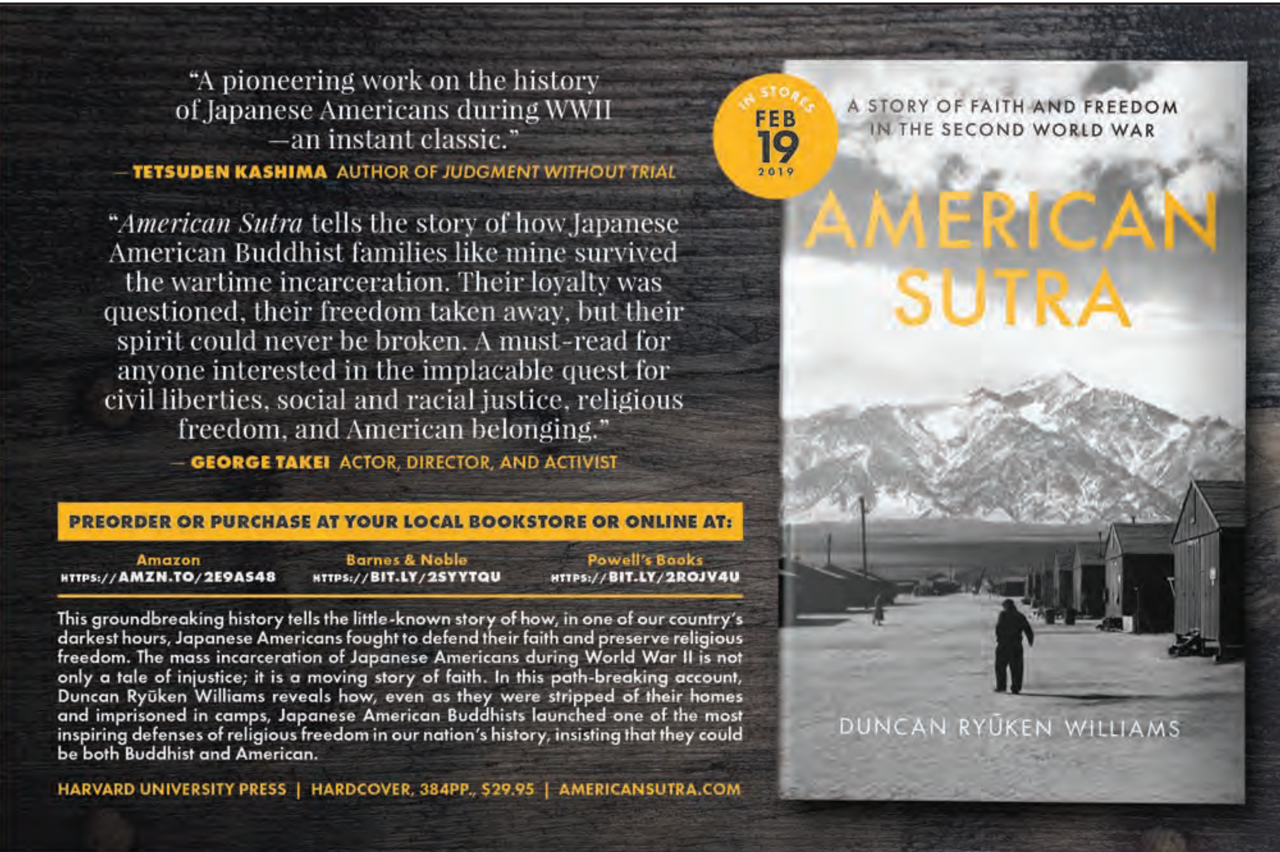

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A UNIQUELY AMERICAN BUDDHISM

"IS AMERICA BEST DEFINED AS A FUNDAMENtally white and Christian nation, or is it a land of multiple races and ethnicities and a haven for religious freedom?"

That question lies at the heart of Duncan Ryuken Williams's new book, *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War* (for an adapted excerpt, see p. 46). For decades this question has seemed all but rhetorical to most of us, yet with recent attempts to stem the flow of Muslim immigration to this country, it's a question that's assuming a new urgency.

Williams, professor of religion and East Asian languages and cultures at the University of Southern California, documents the internment of tens of thousands of Japanese Americans in the aftermath of the Imperial Army's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The action taken against Japanese Americans was swift: for years they had been under surveillance by a mistrustful US government, which had kept meticulous track of their habits, religious affiliations, and whereabouts, and plans for mass arrests were already in place. By February 1942, President Roosevelt had signed into law Executive Order 9066, allowing the military to place all persons of Japanese descent—or even partial descent—in internment camps.

In stark contrast, the loyalties of Americans of German and Italian descent remained largely unchallenged. Race, it turned out, was not the only factor at play. The American government was particularly suspicious of Buddhists, whose religion they considered alien and a threat to national security; Christians of Japanese descent were treated with more leniency, though they too were interned. But despite the government's extreme hostility toward Buddhism and the harsh conditions it inflicted on the Japanese Americans in the camps, Buddhist life flourished among the interned. Indeed, the camps served as a kind of crucible out of which a uniquely American Buddhism was born, one that not only strengthened Japanese Americans' ties to their religion but also—and poignantly—deepened their loyalty to a Constitution that afforded them the freedom to practice it. In the camps, Buddhists of diverse traditions practiced together, modeling a pluralism that has come to characterize American Buddhism.

Since World War II, Japanese Americans have often been the fiercest defenders of religious freedom, most recently in spirited protests against President Trump's Muslim travel ban. Although the US Supreme Court found that the travel ban fell within the president's authority, it overturned its 1944 decision affirming the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066. Despite this silver lining, however, the Muslim ban had already cast suspicion on yet another religious minority that Trump's predecessors had been at great pains to protect.

I spoke with Duncan Williams in our most recent episode of *Tricycle Talks* (tricycle.org/trikedaily/japanese-internment-buddhism). He told me about an elderly Japanese woman who, in the days following 9/11, had planted herself on the steps of a local mosque in Hawaii. Asked by the imam what had brought her there, she answered, "I just want to make sure nothing bad happens." Williams's narrative—a warning meticulously researched and compellingly told—invites us to join in her vigilance.

—James Shaheen
Editor and Publisher

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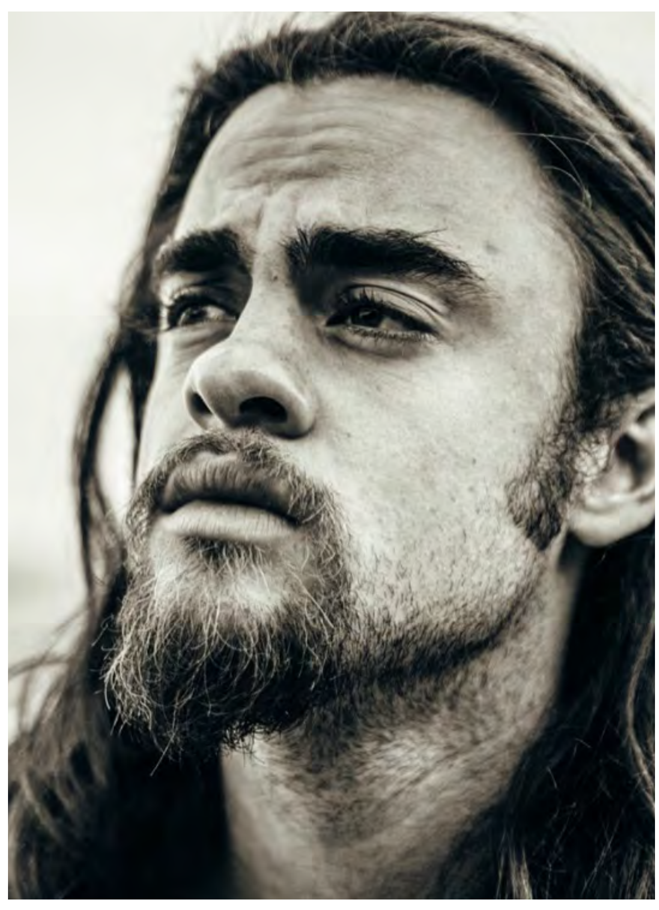

MICHAEL AVEDON

This issue, we feature the work of legendary photographer Richard Avedon in "The Coconut Monk" (p. 42) and of his grandson, Michael, whose portraiture complements our interview with Nichiren Buddhist artist Aretha Busby (p. 72). Buddhist connections run deep in the Avedon family. John Avedon, Michael's father and Richard's son, is an author of several books on Tibetan Buddhism; he's also responsible for introducing monk-photographer (and abbot) Nicholas Vreeland to the tradition. Michael's mother, Maura Moynihan, supports Tibetan refugees and is a former consultant to the Rubin Museum of Art and the International Campaign for Tibet. Michael told us, "It was a pleasure photographing Aretha, whose Buddhist practice I find particularly inspiring."

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS

"American Buddhism," Duncan Ryuken Williams told *Tricycle*, "is the lineage of extraordinary and ordinary people who maintain their Buddhist practice and faith in the midst of personal and societal karmic challenges, however difficult they may be." Williams, a Soto Zen priest and the director of the Shito Ito Center for Japanese Religions and Culture at the University of Southern California, has spent nearly two decades researching the lives of Japanese Americans during World War II. His work culminates this year in *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War* (Harvard University Press). In an excerpt (p. 46), Williams describes the experiences of those American citizens whose Buddhist faith was once deemed a threat to national security.

CAROLYN GREGOIRE

Journalist Carolyn Gregoire took a look at a unique form of generosity for this issue: she introduces us to BuddhaLand, a 200-acre plot of land in rural Kentucky purchased by a retired engineer, Nam Do, specifically for Buddhists to build upon freely (p. 17). "I left our conversation feeling so inspired to put my practice into action," Gregoire said. Gregoire, a yogini, is the coauthor of *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*, and a former senior writer at *Huffington Post*.

KENNETH TANAKA

Tanaka, a minister as well as an emeritus professor at Musashino University in Tokyo, Japan, invites us onto the Shin Buddhist path of liberation in "To The Pure Land and Back" (p. 66). "If we are truly honest with ourselves," he wrote to us, "we can't help but realize the Shin view that we are indeed foolish and imperfect, and that we can find profound solace in the teaching that we are spiritually accepted just as we are."

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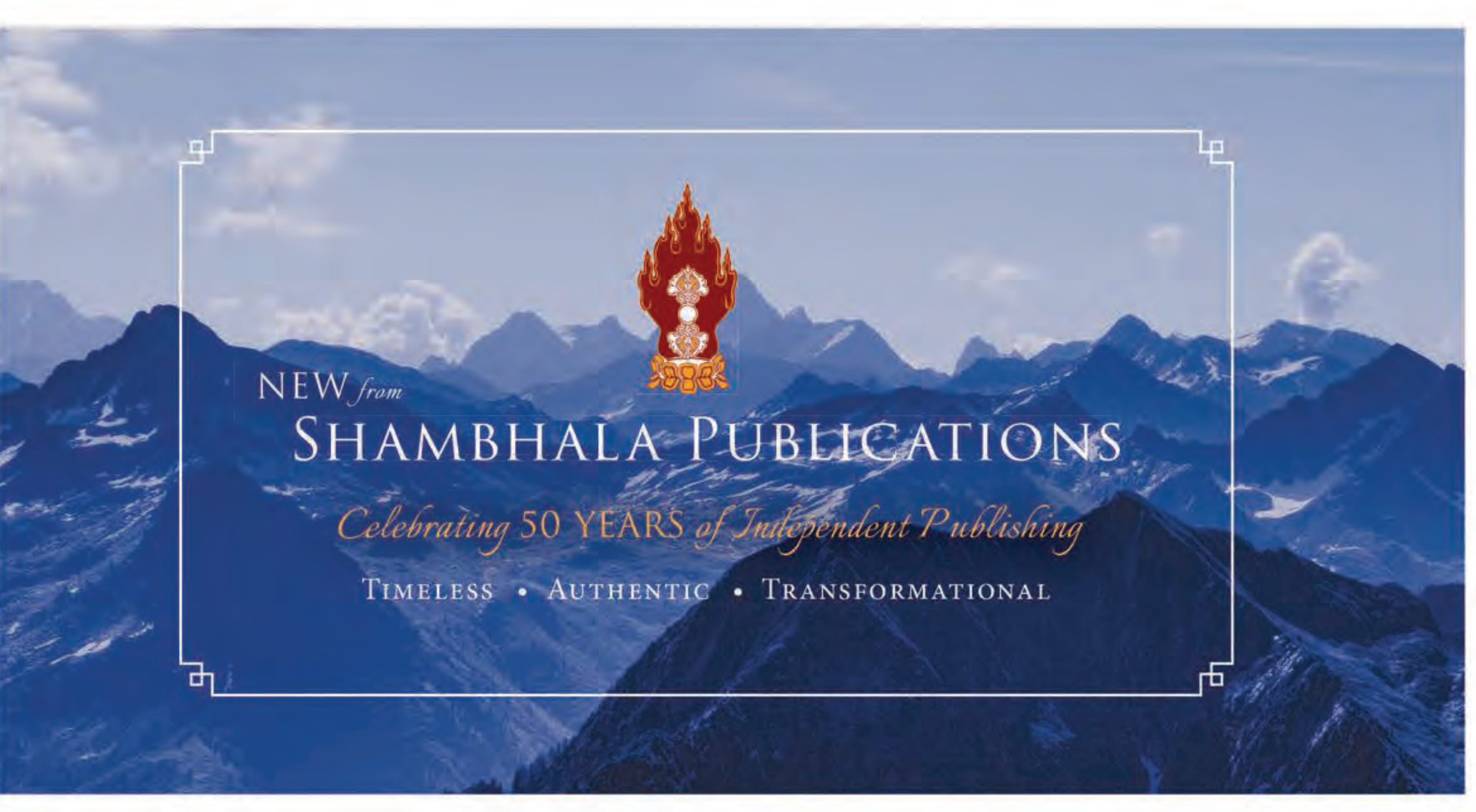

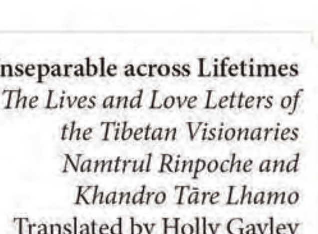

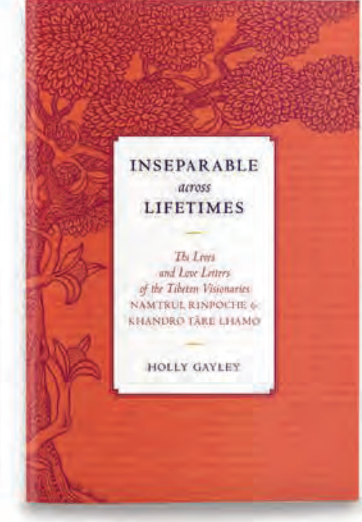

Inseparable across Lifetimes
The Lives and Love Letters of the Tibetan Visionaries Namtrul Rinpoche and Khandro Tāre Lhamo
Translated by Holly Gayley

LOVE between EQUALS
relationship as a spiritual path
POLLY YOUNG-EISENDRATH, PHD

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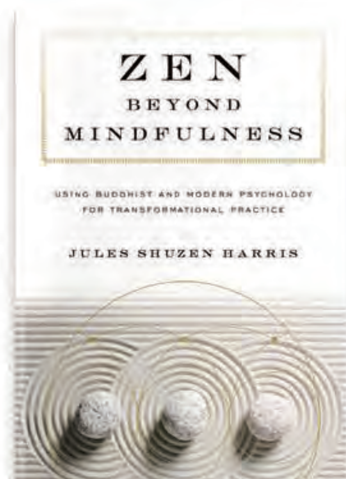
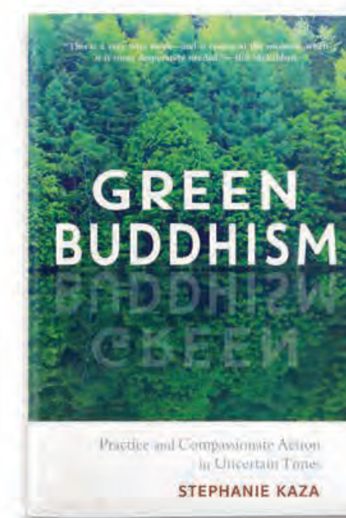
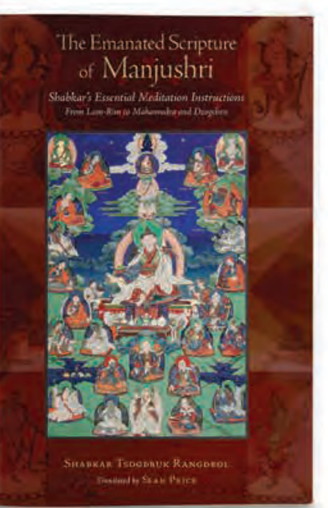


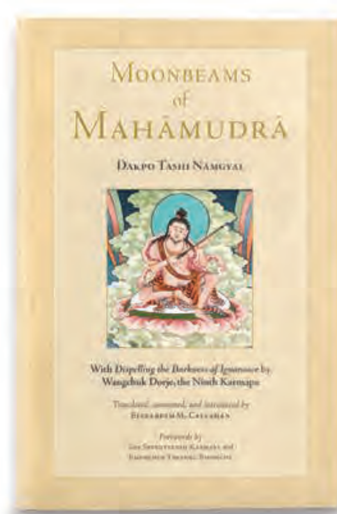
Zen beyond Mindfulness
Using Buddhist and Modern Psychology for Transformational Practice
By Jules Shuzen Harris



Green Buddhism
Practice and Compassionate Action in Uncertain Times
By Stephanie Kaza



The Emanated Scripture of Manjushri
Shabkar's Essential Meditation Instructions
By Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol
Translated by Sean Price



Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā
By Dakpo Tashi Namgyal
Translated by Elizabeth M. Callahan

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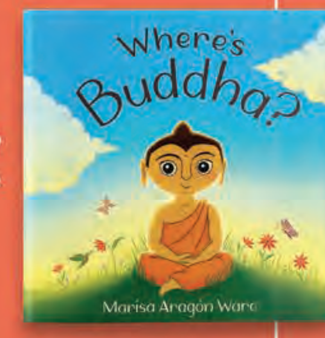

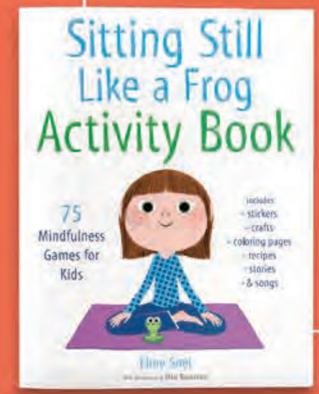

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OPENINGS

WHAT'S HAPPENING RIGHT NOW IN THE BUDDHIST WORLD

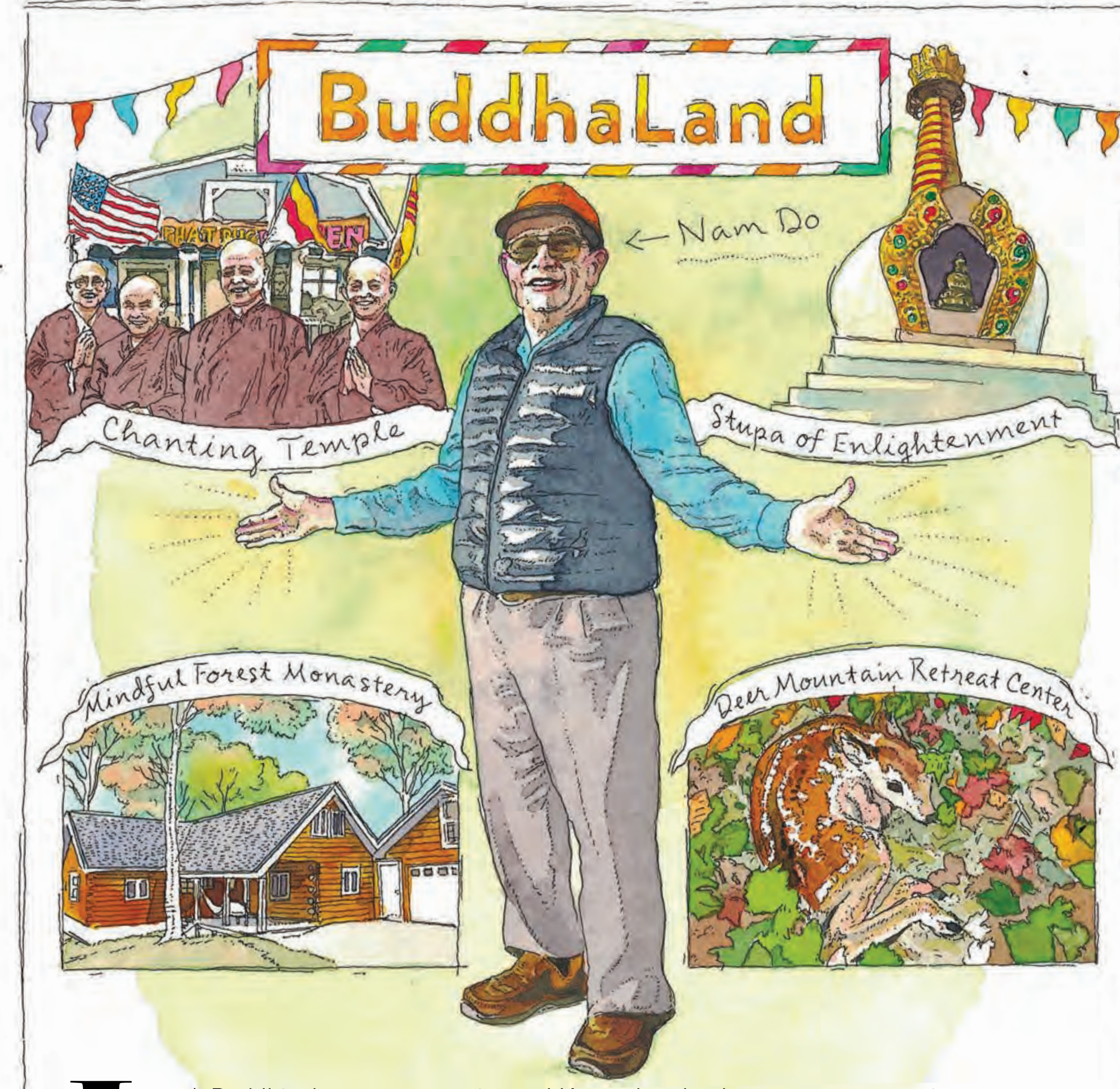


ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES NOEL SMITH

A Buddhist haven emerges in rural Kentucky, thanks to a generous retiree.

By Carolyn Gregoire

If you drive just an hour up Highway 71 from Louisville, Kentucky, toward Cincinnati, Ohio, you'll come upon 200 acres of gently rolling hills and pristine countryside—an area that's emerging as an oasis of Buddhist spiritual life.

Appropriately dubbed "The BuddhaLand," the Kentucky property has been turned into an offering to the Buddha and his teachings by its proprietor, Nam Do, a 70-year-old retired engineer and Louisville resident originally from Vietnam. Since buying the property in 2002, Do has been offering free land that Buddhist organizations and individuals can build upon with their

own funds. His mission is to nurture the American Buddhist community by providing more dedicated spaces to practice in areas where they can connect with nature.

Do arrived in Kentucky as a young man in 1975 after fleeing Vietnam on a US Navy plane, just one day before communists took over the country. His family settled in Louisville, where he went on to study engineering, then work at Ford Motor Company for 30 years. From a deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to the country that supported him and his family, Do dedicated his retirement to service, which he sees as part of his spiritual practice.

Do comes from a family of temple builders. In 1920, his grandfather built the 10,000-square-foot Buu Thanh Temple, which today continues to serve more than a thousand families in two villages in southern Vietnam. His uncle and great-uncle both constructed temples in a neighboring village, and two monks and one nun in his family serve as abbots in temples elsewhere in the country.

The BuddhaLand was created especially for groups associated with the lineage of Do's lifelong teacher, the Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh.

"Most of [their centers] in the US are in cities," he said. "For the mind, we have to seek out mountains and forests."

Six major projects are currently under way at the center, including the Deer Mountain Retreat Center, which can house up to 500 guests. (Do hopes it will become "a Plum Village for the United States.") So far, three local sanghas—as well as France's Plum Village—have pledged their support, and it is expected to be completed in three to four years.

Other projects in various stages of development include a chanting hall, scenic overlook and meditation deck, three villages (including a cave village for extended periods of solitary silent retreat), the Stupa of Enlightenment, and the Mindful Forest Monastery, all of which are associated with Thich Nhat Hanh's sangha. The first monk to join the monastery, Louisville native Michael Kavish (Thich Tinh Tri), now serves as its abbot, and four other monks are slated to take up residence there by the year's end.

The BuddhaLand is also open to other traditions, not just those that follow Thich Nhat Hanh. A small temple is being built to serve Vietnamese Buddhist families, and the monks at Mindfulness Forest Monastery host retreats and teachings for Vipassana and other local groups.

"It's a very peaceful place to practice," said Kavish. "There's a lot of good energy here." T

***Carolyn Gregoire** is a freelance journalist and the coauthor of* Wired to Create.

FOR YOUR COMMUTE

PODCAST PICKS

4 podcasts no Buddhist listener should miss

FRESH AIR

"*Why Religion?* Asks How Hearts Can Heal After Tragedy"

Religion scholar Elaine Pagels sits down with host Terry Gross. In the late 1980s, Pagels descended into debilitating grief after her 6-year-old son died from a heart condition and her husband died in a mountain climbing accident a year later. Pagels talks candidly about feeling far away from "faith" during this dark time but also tells how Christian and Hebrew texts and the meditation she learned from Trappist monks helped her to heal eventually.

npr.org

YOU MADE IT WEIRD WITH PETE HOLMES

"Sharon Salzberg"

Comedian, actor, and podcaster Pete Holmes says that Sharon Salzberg is "a delightfully down-to-earth Buddhist that anybody can enjoy." We couldn't agree more. You'll need to set aside a good chunk of time to listen (nearly three hours), but you'll be rewarded with tales of Sharon's overland trip to India from Turkey when she was 18; finding her practice in Bodhgaya (the site of the Buddha's enlightenment); and her take on why we can't really fail at meditation.

stitcher.com

FIVE THINGS

"Writer Susan Piver Is a Crime Fighter and Romantic Advice-Giver"

A podcast devoted each week to five material objects is extra interesting when a dharma teacher is in the guest's seat. In this episode, you'll learn how a T-shirt with a vigilante squad's logo, a Polaroid shot of a crushed Volkswagen beetle, a book by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a heart-shaped box, and a gold watch from the 1970s fit into the life story of Buddhist teacher and author Susan Piver.

wfpl.org

30 FOR 30

"Bikram"

The third season of this ESPN podcast takes an investigative dive into the complex world of hot yoga and its founder, Bikram Choudhury. We meet many practitioners who believe in hot yoga's transformative potential but have yet to come to terms with the founder's lies, manipulation, increasingly erratic behavior, and alleged sexual abuse. This five-part series, reported by journalist and former Bikram studio manager Julia Lowrie Henderson, is a must-listen in light of #MeToo.

30for30podcasts.com

A DAY IN THE DHARMA

with Jules Shuzen Harris, abbot of Soji Zen Center

An inside look at the daily activities of a dharma teacher in Lansdowne, PA

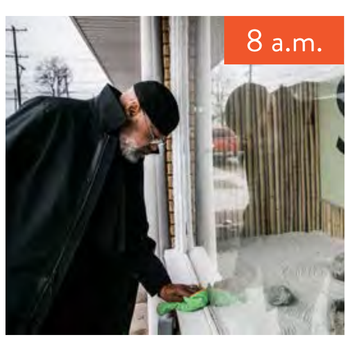
Photographs by Jeenah Moon

7:30 am

I get up and sit *shikentaza* (meditation) for half an hour. I sit again in the late afternoon.

9 a.m.

I drive to the grocery store to pick up items for dinner. Depending on what I'm making, I'll prepare and cook when I get back or later in the evening.

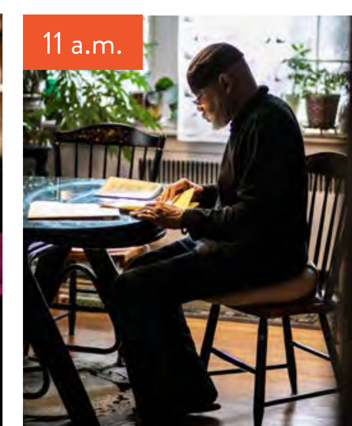


8 a.m.

On Sundays in particular, I go to the Center. First I wipe down the exterior window sills, and then we start. We have three periods of sitting meditation and two of *kinhin* (walking meditation). I offer *dokusan* (private interviews) and give a dharma talk.

10 a.m.

I practice *laido*, the art of drawing and cutting with a samurai sword, a couple of times a week at the Center.



11 a.m.

After returning home, I study until 3 or 4 p.m. Whether I'm preparing for a dharma talk or study group or reviewing koans, I like to stay at the top of my game.

5 p.m.

I prepare dinner. My specialties are salmon and pasta, although sometimes I put ingredients into my crock pot in the morning and let that cook all day.

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

RE: CORPORATE MEDITATION

Mirabai Bush was one of the first to bring meditation to the corporate sector. Two decades later, she stands by her decision.

By Wendy Joan Biddlecombe Agsar

In 2001, *Tricycle*'s founder, Helen Tworkov, spoke with the meditation teacher Mirabai Bush about teaching mindfulness to employees at Monsanto, an agriculture company making genetically modified seeds and powerful herbicides. Environmentalists and many others have been concerned with GMO "frankenfood," possible carcinogens in the ubiquitous weed-killer Roundup, and the company's aggressive lobbying against food labeling in Washington. Back then, Bush said:

> *I was persuaded to work with Monsanto because so many people work inside corporations, and because of the increasing power of corporations, not just economically but culturally, worldwide. I concluded that it could be very beneficial to change consciousness inside a corporation. Once I began to think that way, I saw my own resistances and saw the challenge of going into this situation without judgment. We certainly needed to maintain discriminating awareness about the products this company was producing, but if we could conduct a practice retreat in a space of nonjudgment and be open with each other, then we could see whether, indeed, this practice could help people open to a wider view, as it helped me.*

Bush, who cofounded the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, recently revisited the topic with *Tricycle*.

How has corporate mindfulness changed and evolved since you spoke with us nearly 20 years ago?

So much has changed, because so many corporations now have programs. I still feel that teaching these practices to human beings is a good thing. We did not go into Monsanto expecting or trying to change the corporation. Instead, we were offering mindfulness to individual people as an experiment, an exploration to see what could happen when people were learning and practicing in the workplace.

Monsanto's CEO has since retired, and the next CEO canceled everything to do with that program, as often happens. We had done so much work, established this program, and *zap*—it disappeared.

I didn't accept another invitation into corporate life until Google called me in 2007. A number of people wanted to establish the program at the grassroots level, and I thought it would influence a lot of other organizations, which it did. The training program we developed, "Search Inside Yourselves: Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence," has really helped young engineers who've been in front of their screens develop awareness. Is it true to the dharma? I think so.

What other new challenges exist today?

A lot of people are teaching mindfulness—basically sitting and watching your breath, listening to sounds, and walking meditation. But it is also important to awaken compassion and kindness in people through practices based on *tonglen* [the Tibetan practice of "sending" happiness to others and "receiving" their suffering] or lovingkindness. In this country today, we need to listen to and appreciate each other and abstain from judgment. Mindful listening practices are really helpful.

But these programs will work only if they are well developed and are led by teachers who embody the dharma. Today, many people are being trained in short courses, and some people are not even trained. And there's that old problem of people saying, "Oh, close your eyes and watch your breath—that's easy, I could teach that."

What criticisms of teaching mindfulness in corporate settings remain?

That you're allowing bad people to do bad things better. I would not enter a corporation that is doing things that are not within right livelihood, such as making weapons or mining coal. But after that, it's a difficult ethical matter. Ethics in technology is a big issue right now—everything from fake news on Facebook to whether Google is adjusting their algorithm for China. These are big questions, and these practices can only help people approach them with a clearer, calmer, and more open mind.

Can you tell me about an instance where you felt this training really paid off?

There is this unconsciousness that people bring into corporate life; they don't question. One time at Monsanto, a scientist who worked on the weed killer Roundup came to me during a silent retreat and said, "Mirabai, I was just sitting and I realized that we make products that kill life." It was this surprising moment in his meditation: that thought had never occurred to him before. Once a person is given an opportunity to explore the inner life, there is no predicting what he or she will find.

ILLUSTRATION BY WES DUVALL

BUDDHA BUZZ

A FINAL RESTING PLACE FOR BUDDHISTS IN COPENHAGEN

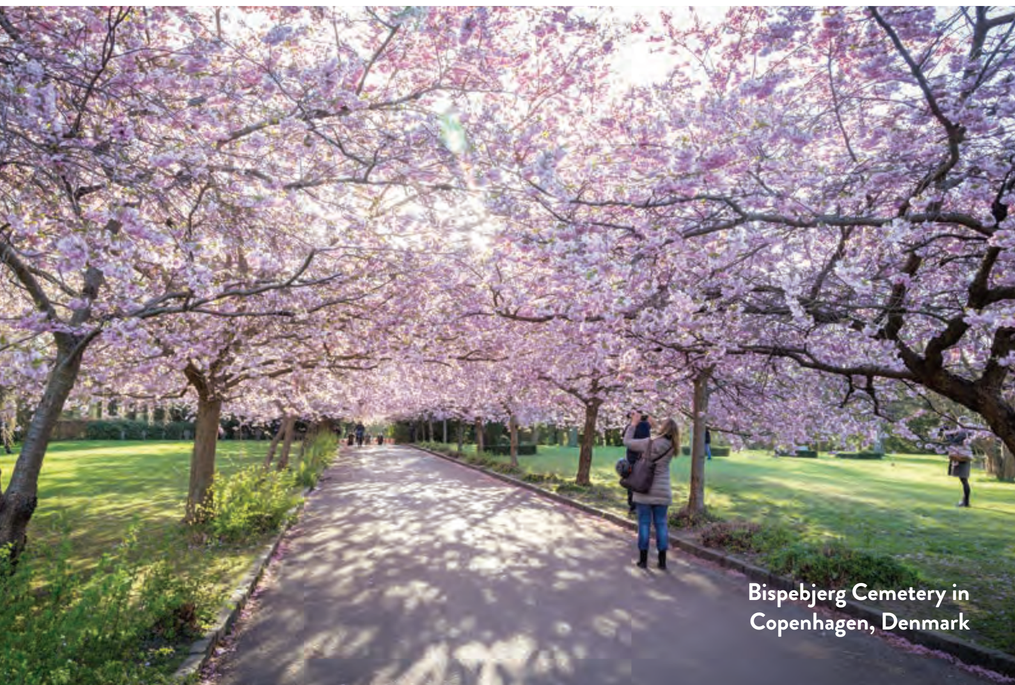
COPENHAGEN'S YOUNGEST cemetery is also the Danish capital's most progressive. Bispebjerg Cemetery, established as a Christian resting place in 1903 and known best for its blooming cherry trees in spring, has special areas for atheist, Swedish, Russian, Catholic, and Muslim graves. Buddhism is the latest tradition to get its own section in the cemetery.

Ole Nordstrom, chair of the *Buddhistisk Bisættelses Forening* (Society for Buddhist Burials), said that planning for the 108-square-meter space, which includes a columbarium and stupa, dates as far back as 1993. The first step was getting Buddhism recognized as a religion in Denmark, Nordstrom told *Tricycle*, and the initiative was inspired in part by his parents' wishes to receive a Buddhist burial. The urn repository was dedicated three years later.

Construction of the cemetery's stupa, which includes sacred objects from the 16th Karmapa, the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Rinpoche, and Tenga Rinpoche as well as stones from monasteries in Bodhgaya and Tibet, was completed in 2018. That October three monks from Benchen Monastery in Kathmandu dedicated the sacred structure for the official opening. The Tibetan Buddhist teacher Khandro Rinpoche is also planning a stop this summer to offer her blessings, Nordstrom said.

The cemetery section is open to Buddhists of all traditions for burial—even "people who feel Buddhist and wish to be buried here are welcome," Nordstrom said. Copenhagen administrators believe this is the country's first Christian cemetery to house a Tibetan Buddhist structure.

—Wendy Joan Biddlecombe Agsar



Bispebjerg Cemetery in Copenhagen, Denmark

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Bhante Buddharakkhita greets the morning light at the Uganda Buddhist Center by sitting before the brass "Mirembe Buddha" (Luganda, "Peace Buddha") statue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EUGÉNIE BACCOT

GOING GLOBAL

BUDDHISM TAKES ROOT IN AFRICA

Bhante Buddharakkhita, one of the first African Buddhist monks, is melding Buddhism with traditional African wisdom in Uganda.

By Eliza Rockefeller

WHEN VENERABLE Bhante Buddharakkhita, now 52, first became interested in Buddhism, it didn't take him long to realize that the tradition wasn't very well established in his home country of Uganda—or even his home continent. But after years spent living abroad and tireless commitment, in the course of which he survived an assassination attempt and received many strange looks at his robes, he became one of the first Africans to establish a Buddhist center on the continent.

Born Steven Kaboggoza in Kampala and raised Roman Catholic, the young man who would become Bhante Buddharakkhita didn't know there were other religions besides Christianity and Islam when he went to India in 1990 to study business at Panjab University in Chandigarh. But he was immediately drawn to two Thai monks who were his classmates.

"When I saw the monks, I felt a connection," he said. Inspired by the Buddhist teachings they shared with him and their suggestions of "practical ways to reach ultimate happiness," he spent a few years on a spiritual search, traveling to Dharamsala (home of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile), as well as Nepal, Tibet, and Thailand, where he supported himself working as a scuba instructor.

Kaboggoza realized early on that while there were religious and cultural Tibetan Buddhist organizations all around the world, there was not a single one in Africa. He decided that he would start the first, but he had a long way to go before making his dream a reality. When he asked the Dalai Lama to bless the endeavor, the Tibetan Buddhist leader scratched his head and told him he would need to find friends to help—His Holiness didn't have any contacts to offer.

After eight years abroad, Kaboggoza returned to Uganda in 1998. His relatives were expecting to welcome a prosperous businessman. What they got, Bhante Buddharakkhita later wrote in his book, *Planting Dhamma Seeds in Africa*, was a man with a shaved head carrying Buddhist books and scuba gear instead of a briefcase. But he wasn't there for long. The lack of a spiritual community led him abroad again, first to South America, then to a three-month retreat at Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, where he met his teacher, the Theravada monk Bhante Henepola Gunaratana. He decided to dedicate himself fully to spiritual life and was ordained in California in 2002 by the late Venerable U Silananda.

No matter where he was in the world, no matter what Buddhist tradition he followed, Bhante Buddharakkhita's dream of starting a center stayed with him. Returning to Uganda, he drew enough local followers and donations from supporters in Asia to purchase land in Entebbe, a town outside of Kampala, the nation's capital, and in 2005 he opened the Uganda Buddhist Center there. The early years presented many challenges: Dressed in his maroon robes and holding a begging bowl, Bhante Buddharakkhita was frequently mistaken for a member of the Maasai ethnic group, a traditional medicine man, or even a cutting-edge fashionista. When he tried to buy one parcel of land for his center, the neighbors refused to talk to him, suspecting he was a wizard. Though he shrugs off most of these cultural misunderstandings with a laugh, on one occasion he was attacked at his center and narrowly escaped a bullet at close range. He wasn't discouraged, however, and instead viewed the incident as an opportunity to "transform trauma into *dhamma*" and strengthen his resolve.

Soon after he returned to Uganda, many of Bhante Buddharakkhita's immediate family members converted to Buddhism, moved by his teachings and meditation instructions as well as the respect shown him by South Asian Buddhist immigrants in the region. Even his mother decided to ordain; now known as Venerable Dhammakami, she serves as the center's resident nun. Bhante Buddharakkhita's sister is raising her children Buddhist, and Bhante has ordained three new monks, men who found their way to the center from Uganda, Rwanda, and Egypt. In 2015 he founded the African Buddhist Union, an umbrella group aimed at uniting practitioners across the continent.

Bhante has also started a number of development projects that benefit the local community. To alleviate a shortage of clean water, the Uganda Buddhist Center drilled a new well on their grounds to share with their neighbors; they also plant trees and run a women's economic empowerment program in addition to a "Peace School," a Buddhist version of Sunday school.

Over the years Bhante Buddharakkhita has refined his teaching style, and today he highlights the similarities between African culture and Buddhism. "I use African wisdom as the foundation for my teaching," he says. He emphasizes, for instance, the similarity between the South African concept of *ubuntu* ["You are because I am, I am because you are"] and dependent origination, and he begins his talks on karma with a popular Ugandan proverb about cause and effect: "When you eat a mushroom with a maggot in it, it will eat you when you're in the grave." He sums up his work this way: "You can't bring a bucket of sand and drop it there and say, 'OK, here's Buddhism.' You cultivate the soil [with African wisdom] and make sure that it's very fertile, and then bring the dharma seed and plant it." The result, he hopes, will be a thriving and uniquely African version of Buddhism.

BUDDHISM BY THE NUMBERS

African Great Lakes Region

Number of Buddhist centers

8

- 3 Kenya
- 3 DRC*
- 1 Tanzania
- 1 Uganda

*Democratic Republic of the Congo

Number of wheelchairs the Nairobi Theravada Buddhist Center has donated across Kenya

350

OLDEST CENTER: 1915-1920
The Tanzania Buddhist Temple and Meditation Center in Dar es Salaam, founded by Sri Lankan immigrants

NEWEST CENTER: 2008
Kagyu Samye Dzong Lubumbashi, in Lubumbashi, DRC, a Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist center

Estimated number of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns

10

(9 monks, 1 nun)

Number of Tricycle subscribers (Tanzania and Kenya)

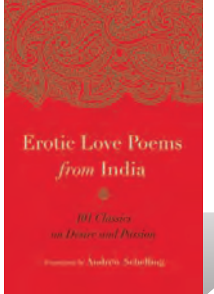
2

Data from BuddhaNet's World Buddhist Directory, The Buddhist Channel, and correspondence with centers

NEW BOOKS

WHAT WE'RE READING

By Wendy Joan Biddlecombe Agsar

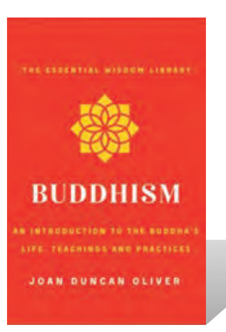


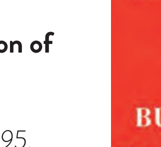
Erotic Love Poems from India
by Andrew Schelling
Shambhala Publications, January 2019, $14.95, 136 pp., paper

Sleepless nights, jealousy, deceit, a parrot who "chatters out" the passionate pillow talk overheard the night before for the whole household to hear—these 8th-century poems by an anonymous author cover the full spectrum of love and heartbreak. Although they have long been read and treasured in Southeast Asia, an English version was not available until Andrew Schelling published his translation in 2004. The book is being reissued this year to reach a new generation of readers.

Autumn Light: Season of Fire and Farewells
by Pico Iyer
Knopf, April 2019, $25.95, 256 pp., cloth

According to the well-known travel writer Pico Iyer, autumn is Japan's "secret heart." Iyer's latest book uses his adopted country's brilliant light and its radiant foliage that accompanies the short days and longer nights as a backdrop for the year that followed his father-in-law's death at the age of 91. The resulting book is a reflection on relationships, loss, and impermanence, and a portrait of a country where frequent occasions to honor the dead ensure that the departed are never forgotten.





Buddhism: An Introduction to the Buddha's Life, Teachings, and Practices
by Joan Duncan Oliver
St. Martin's Essentials, April 2019, $14.99, 128 pp., paper

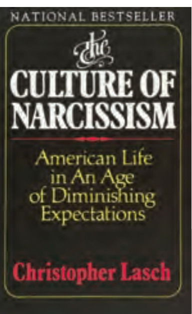
If you want to learn more about the foundations of Buddhism, let Joan Duncan Oliver be your guide. A practitioner for the last 40 years, Oliver swiftly moves through chapters on the Buddha's life, how the tradition changed in the centuries following his death, and his teachings and practices.

All readers will appreciate the handy glossary that covers highlighted terms in the book, so you can turn to the back—instead of Google—if you're unsure what *arahant*, *lama*, or *upaya* means.

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN WISEMAN

SCHOLAR'S CORNER

Ann Gleig, a professor at the University of Central Florida who specializes in contemporary Buddhism and Hinduism, leaves no stone unturned in *American Dharma*, the first scholarly work to examine recent and rapid changes among the "meditation-based convert Buddhist modern lineages in North America." *American Dharma*'s six case studies offer a comprehensive look at this new landscape, from diversity issues and the commitment to social justice to improper or abusive relationships between teachers and students to the emphasis on individual meditation that often discards the ritual and community practices of Asian Buddhists. What results is a dense but engaging read on the trends that have shaped the tradition while it takes root in the West.



BOOKS

WHAT WE'RE REREADING

The Culture of Narcissism

In his 1970s bestseller *The Culture of Narcissism*, historian and critic Christopher Lasch observed that "the left has too often served as a refuge from the terrors of the inner life." Despite his trenchant critique of the self-absorption of the "me-decade," Lasch did much to expose the "oversimplified divide between 'real' issues and personal issues," a misleading distinction that persists to this day. He likewise debunked the popular notion that the therapeutic pursuits of the era addressed psychic ills peculiar to the well-off, arguing that the desperation and alienation afflicting the urban poor had merely (and finally) caught up with the rest of society. Among other things, *The Culture of Narcissism* has a lot to say about the much misunderstood relationship between political and inner life in our own time.

—James Shaheen, Editor & Publisher

TRICYCLE.ORG VISITING TEACHER

DUNGSE JAMPAL NORBU

Dungse Jampal Norbu is a dharma teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist sangha Mangala Shri Bhuti and the son and dharma heir of Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche. His mother, Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel, is a teacher in the same lineage.

Where did you grow up? Crestone, a town in central Colorado.

When did you become a Buddhist, and why? I grew up in a Buddhist family, but I made the choice to study the dharma when I was 16. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew that working with my mind would be a great asset.

What's your favorite breakfast on retreat? I'm usually on retreat in the winter, so I enjoy stir-fried vegetables with rosemary thyme hash browns or hot miso soup with rice and pickles.

What's your daily practice? I travel a lot when I'm not in retreat, so a consistent schedule isn't always possible. I aim for 42 minutes of vipassana meditation (42 is a significant number in the Nyingma tradition).

What's the longest you've gone without meditating? Sometimes I go a couple of weeks without long meditation, but I never skip my evening prayers and daily offering, which makes it a bit easier to get back on track.

Favorite aphorism? "Don't be a loyalist to ego"—a *lojong* [mind training] slogan.

Favorite musician? Arctic Monkeys and Sarah Jarosz.

Longest retreat? 108 days.

Book on your nightstand? I'm a bibliophile, so there are a few: my *pecha* [a book of Tibetan Buddhist texts]; *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava* by Yeshe Tsogyal; *Instructions* by Neil Gaiman with illustrations by Charles Vess; and *18 Buddha Hands Qigong* by Larry Johnson.

What do you like to do in your free time? Hiking and cooking.

What non-Buddhist do you look to for guidance? Bruce Lee.

Coffee or tea? Pu'erh or chai tea.

What were you voted as in high school? My dorm had an incident the year they started the honor system, and everyone was suspended except me (I was asleep in my room). Later that month I got on honor roll. I didn't get an explanation; I suspect it was connected.

Favorite subject in school? Philosophy and Shakespearean literature.

What was your first job? Shelving books in a local bookstore.

Join Dungse Jampal Norbu in March for his online teaching series "Compassion in Polarizing Times" at tricycle.org/dharmatalks.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL VELASCO

COURTESY HEDY KLINEMAN; *LOVE*, 1996, 32 x 44 IN., ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

SEASONAL PRACTICE

INVITING IN THE WONDER OF SPRING

Seasonal change is an opportunity to be present in the world—one dandelion at a time.

Hai An (Sister Ocean)

I'm from Canada, where the winters are long. By the time spring arrives, each ray of warm sunshine feels like a little miracle. Yet even in the best of times, busyness and digital distraction make it easy to overlook these signs of renewal. For years I yearned for spring to arrive, and when it did, I missed it. It wasn't until I found the dharma that I was able to be present in the world with wonder—even the trees near my bus stop felt alive. Anyone can learn to appreciate the changing of the seasons with a few simple practices.

First, choose a spot that you'll pass on a regular basis, like a tree, park, or cracked spot in the sidewalk where dandelions tend to grow. Make a habit of pausing there regularly, even if only briefly.

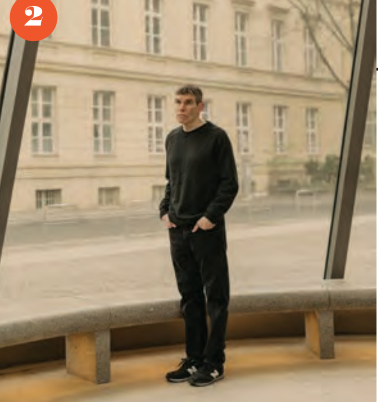
Second, bring awareness to the sensory experience of the spot. See the color and texture of the last pile of salty snow melting and the buds beginning to emerge. Listen to the breeze and the birds flying overhead. Feel the bark and leaves with your fingers, and the sensations of your feet in your shoes on the ground. Smell the air and notice when the flowers start to bloom. This can be as short as a few breaths, if you practice with full awareness.

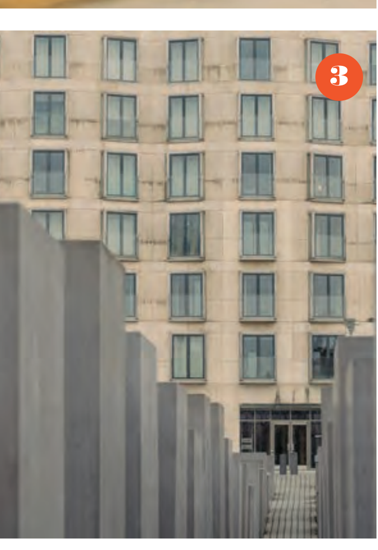
Third, invite wonder in. This cannot be forced, but can be encouraged by attitudes of curiosity and gratitude. Thinking "How amazing to get to see this leaf unfurl today" or asking "Is there room for some wonder right now?" can sometimes be enough. Even if the answer is "no," the questioning itself can bring you to the world more fully alive.

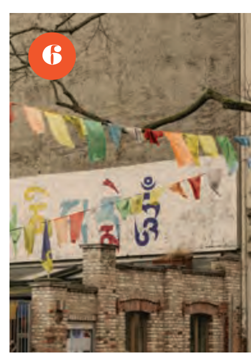
This practice is simple but also tricky, because the mind can quickly slide into what the Buddha called the three poisons, or the root of all suffering—craving, aversion, and delusion. When wonder manifests, it can switch into craving—wanting the experience to last or wanting more of *anything*. When wonder doesn't appear, aversion might be present in a judgmental, comparing mindset, or delusion may leave you distracted or confused.

The fourth step is to work with the three poisons to explore how they feel in the body. For me, craving presents as a physical sense of reaching forward, whereas aversion feels like a hardening and pushing away. Both of these can be released by relaxing the muscles of the body and taking a few deep breaths. Delusion is a dull agitation of the nervous system and pressure in my forehead that I let go of by broadening my gaze and sensing my feet on the ground. Once you know how the poisons feel, you can recognize their absence through sensations rather than thinking abstractly about whether they are there or not. From there you can find a sweet spot, free from the poisons—a moment of awakening worthy of being savored in any season.

Hai An (Sister Ocean) is a Buddhist monastic ordained in the Plum Village tradition by Thich Nhat Hanh. listenlovetrust.wordpress.com







OPENINGS

THE BUDDHIST TRAVELER IN

BERLIN

You know about Checkpoint Charlie and the Berlin Wall. But what about Europe's first Theravada Buddhist center?

By Wendy Joan Biddlecombe Agsar

FROM THE REICHSTAG TO THE BRANDENBURG GATE to the Topography of Terror, Berlin oozes with opportunities for contemplation, especially when it comes to the Second World War, which seems much less distant in Germany's capital city.

The dharma runs deep throughout the rest of Germany as well—Karl Seidenstücker, who declared Buddhism "the religion of the future," founded a convert Buddhist congregation in Leipzig way back in 1903. The first Theravada Buddhist center in Europe was founded on the outskirts of Berlin in the 1920s, and the influential Buddhist nun Ayya Khema was born in Germany's capital in 1923. She emigrated to Scotland in the late 30s, later reuniting with her Jewish family in Shanghai.

The German government doesn't keep an official tally on the number of Buddhists (though religious Christian and Jewish Germans pay an annual *Kirchensteuer*, or church tax), but the German Buddhist Union estimates that the number is around 250,000 and growing.

Here are seven suggestions for Buddhist visitors to the Gray City:

1 | Das Buddhistische Haus
Start your journey at the oldest and largest Theravada center in Europe. Founded in 1924 by Dr. Paul Dahlke, a physician and devoted practitioner, the Asian-architecture–inspired complex is built on a hill in the city's affluent Frohnau area, with 73 steps leading up to the temple (visitors should keep this climb in mind when planning their visit). Dahlke died just four years after construction began, and the buildings housed refugees during World War II. Monks started moving in during the 1950s; today, the center is open daily for lay practitioners and monastics and hosts regular lectures, courses, and retreats.
Edelhofdamm 54
das-buddhistische-haus.de

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT RIEGER FOR *TRICYCLE*

2 | Berlin Dharma
Need a dharma-talk fix while you're here? All talks at Berlin Dharma are given in English by New York expat and Insight meditation teacher Peter Doobinin. Doobinin holds weekly talks on Thursday evenings in Prenzlauer Berg, as well as multi-part courses at rented spaces throughout the city (check the website for locations).
berlindharma.org

3 | Holocaust Memorial
The memorial isn't Buddhist, but the horrors of the Holocaust are often remembered here by Jewish Buddhists and others, like the Zen Peacemakers, who have held "bearing witness" retreats at Auschwitz for more than two decades. Berlin's simple memorial, constructed from 2,711 slabs of gray concrete, provides an incredible contemplative experience, especially as one ventures farther into the memorial and becomes dwarfed and confused by its overwhelming labyrinth.
Cora-Berliner-Strasse 1
stiftung-denkmal.de

4 | Kantstrasse
Don't expect any classical Chinese architecture along Kantstrasse, a street in the western Berlin neighborhood of Charlottenburg that resembles most other streets in the city, except for Peking ducks hanging in a window. But in fact, Chinese immigrants who began settling here in the 19th century were followed by a wave of students in the early 20th century. Today, the block is home to restaurants and businesses from countries throughout Asia. You'll find all the dumplings and delicacies a tourist might want (we can vouch for Madame Ngo's *pho* and Lon Men's *gua bao*).

5 | Lotos Vihara
This Buddhist nonprofit hosts meditation classes from a variety of lineages and offers solo retreat opportunities starting at 30 euros a night plus donation. Here in the city that created (and has a museum dedicated to) currywurst, the Lotos Café provides fresh food and vegan options.
Neue Blumenstrasse 5
lotos-vihara.de

6 | Bodhicharya
This Tibetan Buddhist center in the lineage of Ogyen Trinley Dorje, one of the claimants to the 17th Karmapa title, recently completed and dedicated a stupa after years of fundraising, planning, and construction. All are welcome to experience the healing and power of this sacred structure, and the surrounding "Garden of the Senses" serves as a home to hundreds of medicinal plants and a refuge for endangered insects.
Kinzigstrasse 25
bodhicharya.de/

7 | Fo-Guang-Shan Berlin
This Chinese Buddhist temple, which is a part of Buddha's Light International Association and was established in 1993, has Sunday services, Wednesday meditation, and a number of cultural events for the sangha. The temple houses monastics, and tours of the complex, which features three buddhas in the meditation hall and a shrine to Kwan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion, are available every day but Monday.
Ackerstrasse 85-86
facebook.com/Fo-Guang-Shan-Berlin-216132905163956/

Tibetan Buddhist iconography that empowers the feminine

To read the remarkable story behind this revolutionary thangka, type into your browser https://tomkenyon.com/thankga

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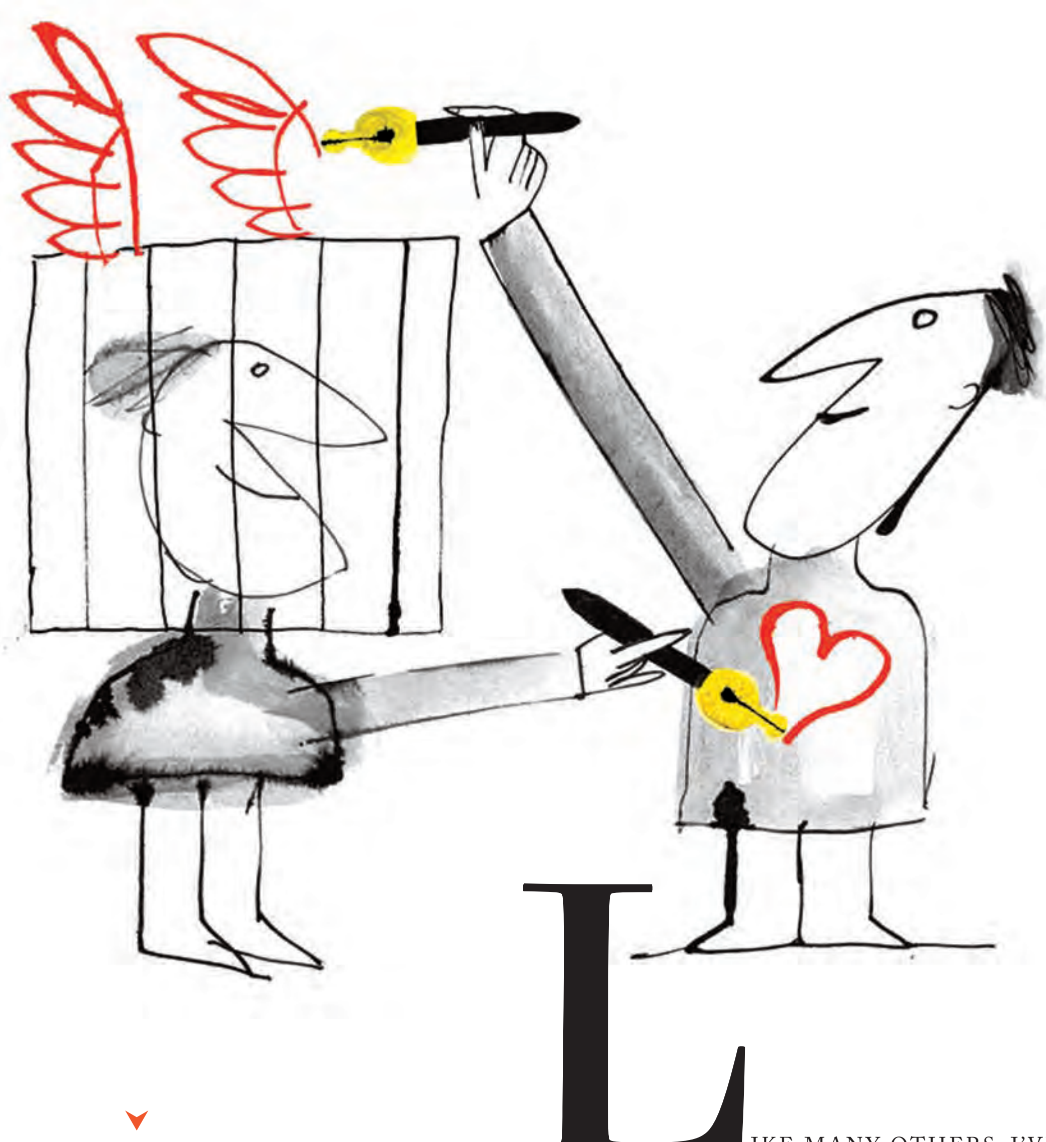

DHARMA TALK

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD

When we project conditioning from our past onto the present, we turn a benign moment into something else. Understanding the "five conditions" can help us get back to reality.

By Sean Murphy

LIKE MANY OTHERS, I'VE always found traditional Buddhist formulations of the five "aggregates" (Skt., *skandhas*) difficult to put into practice in my everyday life. For me, such teachings—which identify the five layers of existence that constitute human experience—had always landed in the zone of "interesting philosophically" but challenging to apply practically. This changed when I got to know the late American Zen teacher Bernie Glassman (1939–2018).

As a student in the early 1990s in the MFA writing program at Naropa Institute, a liberal arts college in Boulder, Colorado, founded by the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa, I often acted as chauffeur for Bernie, who was on the Naropa board and frequently flew in from New York for meetings. At this point I was still a junior Zen practitioner, and Bernie, as one of the first Americans to be officially sanctioned as a Zen teacher (having received transmission in the Zen lineage of Taizan Maezumi Roshi in 1976), seemed to me a larger-than-life, rather intimidating figure. He told me to call him Bernie, which helped put my nervousness at ease. And as I got to know him, through assisting and practicing alongside him in retreats, "Bernie" he remained.

I suspect Bernie eventually moved on from, or even forgot about, the particular presentation of the five skandhas that he made during an informal seminar with Naropa Zen practitioners. His take on the five, however, offered clarification that I found immediately useful—so much so that to this day I continue to use a version of it with students in my university meditation courses, many of whom have never before encountered Buddhist principles.

While translations and interpretations of the skandha system have differed, what they all share is a representation of five basic factors of human experience. Taken together, these factors explain the totality of what we think of as reality and, by extension, the self. A traditional presentation may look something like this:

1. Form (Pali, *rupa*)—the physical world
2. Sensation or Feeling (*vedana*)—not "sensations" or "feelings" as they're meant in ordinary English usage, but our simplest responses to experience: like, dislike, or indifference
3. Perception (*sanna*)—again, not "perception" as conveyed by ordinary English, but the recognition or interpretation of sense objects followed by mental labeling
4. Mental formations (*sankharas*)—volitional mental actions, triggered by some object, that produce karma
5. Consciousness (*vinnana*)—cognizance, including thoughts, which this system views as sense objects perceived through the "sense gate" of the mind

A central point in this system is that all the factors that make up our experience are ever-changing, subject to conditions, ungraspable, and impermanent, therefore giving rise to suffering. And a "self" cannot be found in any of them.

Overall, this presentation that I first learned in my Zen training is clear and useful enough, but start digging into the individual terms and the teaching becomes a lot fuzzier. For one thing, a number of the terms as translated differ from their common English meanings. And according to the traditional view of the fourth skandha, "mental formations," its factors can include everything from emotions like envy to intentional states of mind and action like right livelihood to seemingly involuntary ones like lethargy. Perhaps one can see why I, for one, always found the system's technicalities to be interesting food for thought but difficult to actually grasp, much less put into practice.

By saying that, however, I do not intend to find fault with the original system. Instead, we might speculate that these concerns about accessibility were what provoked Bernie to reframe the five skandhas teaching into a more usable version for Western students.

Bernie's version departed from the original in several ways, but most useful for me was the clear distinction he made between direct, moment-to-moment experiences and the mental projections we add on top of those experiences—the confusion between the two being a primary cause of suffering. Of course, what he presented was a reframing of the traditional system, but for a somewhat unusual

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IN *Brief*

Humor: The Lesser-known Buddhist Path

BY AJAHN BRAHM

TOO LONG I WAS TOLD that the spiritual path is dry and intellectual. That wisdom is cold. But I have seen with my own eyes that in the hands of great masters, wisdom is warm and full of humor. It *always* recognizes the primacy of relationships. It seeks to create relationships that are warm, uplifting, and funny! It always insists that it is not about me, not about you: it is always, always, always about *us*.

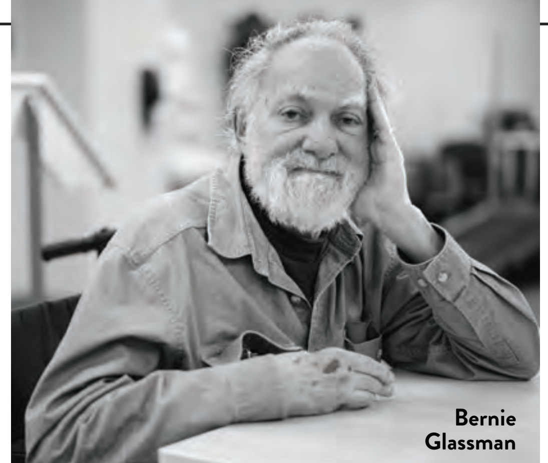
From Falling Is Flying: The Dharma of Facing Adversity, by Ajahn Brahm and Chan Master Guojun, edited by Kenneth Wapner © 2019. Reprinted with permission of Wisdom Publications (wisdompubs.org). ***Ajahn Brahm*** *is a British Theravada Buddhist monk in the Thai Forest tradition of Ajahn Chah. He is the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery, in Serpentine, Western Australia.*

reason. Beginning meditation students may not be ready for the deeper teachings of non-self that are a part of traditional presentations of the aggregates, but the distinction between moment-to-moment experience and the mental fabrications we add to it is a point that even new students can quickly grasp. Sometimes this realization in itself can be transformative.

Although I may have altered some terms slightly in the intervening years, Bernie's version of the five skandhas, presented as a chain of progression from one to the next, basically went like this:

1. Sensation—direct experience, through the senses, of the physical world. Similar to the traditional version of "form," although perhaps this version clarifies the point that even what we think of as objective physical reality is already mediated through our senses.

2. Feeling—our simplest internal response to any sensation: like, dislike, or indifference. This is the same as the traditional system.


Bernie Glassman

3. Reaction—the feeling of like, dislike, or neutrality provokes a reaction that ranges from leaping to our feet at a loud sound to subtle contraction or relaxation in the body. Such reactions may also include complex emotional responses like anger, fear, or envy—and thus include aspects of the traditional fourth skandha, mental formations.

4. Recognition/Interpretation—the mind catches up with an experience and applies a label to it. In the example above, we've heard a sound (sensation), disliked it (feeling), and leaped to our feet (reaction) before realizing it's a car backfiring. This is essentially the same as the traditional third skandha.

5. Consciousness—as Bernie explained, this is just ordinary human consciousness as average people experience it. The key aspect for our purposes is that this is where we download the storehouse of past experiences and concepts and thereby obscure the direct experience of the first skandha (sensation), often creating confusion and suffering in the process.

With beginning students, for simplicity's sake, I'll often present the fifth skandha as just "the story." In the above example, this is where our mind latches onto the loud sound and runs off thinking about our neighbor's noisy car: how he's probably disconnected the emission system and is pumping out noxious chemicals, damaging the health of the planet; how it is that we've become so dependent on fossil fuels to begin with; and how, if we don't do something to intervene, the human race is probably doomed, and so on. Our minds have turned a simple sound into the end of the world!

PRESENTING THE FIFTH aggregate as "the story" does not include everything the traditional formulation implies; nonetheless, it allows students to quickly grasp the fundamental point: that there's a big difference between what happens to us and what we bring to that experience. There lies a key to relieving suffering and creating a more satisfying life for ourselves and those around us.

For example, we may all have days in which nothing *bad* actually happens to us, but how often is there a day when we don't find some excuse to suffer? Our suffering in this case is caused by confusing reality with concepts and judgments based largely on past experience—by our conditioning, in other words—importing fear and other painful emotions into an otherwise neutral or even benign moment. For this reason, I now call the five skandhas the "five conditions," a term pulled from a common version of the *Heart Sutra*, a core text of Mahayana Buddhism.

By applying mindful attention to the unfolding of the five conditions, I tell my students, we may be able to catch ourselves reacting according to our conditioning—perhaps at first only at the level of the story—and instead realize: *I'm upsetting myself because I'm running a story; nothing has really happened to justify this level of upset.* The result? Perhaps we can let go, return to direct experience, and spare ourselves unnecessary suffering.

Stories, of course, are made up of thoughts—those mental sound bites that intrude upon direct experience, and that we let go of in meditation. The more we learn to let go of thoughts, the more we gain the ability to drop our negative stories. As we continue to practice, we may begin to catch ourselves earlier in the chain—perhaps even noticing *dislike* at the feeling level and choosing a mindful response rather than automatic reaction.

This practice may sound simple, but it has huge ramifications. How many relationships are ruined because of mental projections, fabrications, stories of past wrongs and rejections? How many wars have started over ideas that had little to do with reality?

Meditation is the tool we use to let go of unskillful thoughts, and we can put this into practice in our daily lives by being mindful of the five conditions. And so, like many of the other skillful means he invented to adapt the dharma to contemporary America, Bernie's approach to the skandhas continues to help students in ways he may never have anticipated. ⓣ

Sean Murphy is an author, a dharma holder in the White Plum Zen lineage, and the director of the Sage Institute Meditation Leader Training Program in Taos, New Mexico. murphyzen.com

PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB MILLER FOR *TRICYCLE* | ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRÉ DA

IN *Brief*

Redeeming Desire

BY JULES SHUZEN HARRIS

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON mistakes people make about Buddhism is to think that its goal is to give up all desire, to become completely detached from everything. Aside from the fact that this is impossible, it is simply not the goal of Zen. In fact, one of the three essentials for awakening in Zen (aside from great faith and great doubt) is great determination. We cannot awaken to our true nature without a great deal of determination and effort, and determination can only arise from a desire for awakening.

From Zen beyond Mindfulness: Using Buddhist and Modern Psychology for Transformational Practice, by Jules Shuzen Harris © 2019. Reprinted with permission of Shambhala Publications (shambhala.com). ***Jules Shuzen Harris****, a Zen teacher in the Soto lineage, founded the Soji Zen Center in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania (see p. 19).*

IN *Brief*

Even-keeled Idealism

BY NORMAN FISCHER

ALL IDEALS ARE IMAGINATIVE projections. Though we can conceive of them, they can't exist in this imperfect world. Yet they are valuable nevertheless. We need ideals to propel us forward into better futures, to inspire us to be better people in a better world. Religions are always idealistic, asking us to be more than we are, more than we could ever be. We cherish ideals as essential ingredients of our humanness. Without them we slowly lose energy. We become boring, small-minded, and eventually depressed, as life's natural entropy overcomes us. Ideals lift us up.

Of course, we can overdo idealism. We need to balance it with realism, honestly and humbly accepting who we are in the everyday world and grounding our idealism in that. Ideals are like the horizon, a place we can walk toward, a direction we can go in, but not a place where we arrive. In the journey toward the horizon, the only place we take steps is here, the ground on which we stand.

Ideals become problematic when we take them literally, holding ourselves to impossible standards. Ideals are ideal. They aren't real. To the extent that we expect to realize them, we become frustrated.

Ideals are even more toxic when we deceive ourselves into thinking we *have* realized them. Then we become blind to our own actual behavior and motivation, and blind to others, whom we judge as less than ourselves.

Among all pernicious forms of idealism, religious idealism may be the worst; its excesses can be literally deadly. The saving grace of the bodhisattva ideal is that it is so outrageously extravagant, so absurdly imaginative, that we are clear from the start we can never realize it. It is literally impossible! We can never get there. All we can do is keep on walking toward the bodhisattva horizon, inspired by the bright vision ahead, content to never arrive.

From The World Could Be Otherwise: Imagination and the Bodhisattva Path, by Norman Fischer © 2019. Reprinted with permission of Shambhala Publications (shambhala.com). ***Norman Fischer*** *is a Zen priest, author, poet, and translator. He is the director of the Everyday Zen Foundation.*

PRACTICE

WHEN TO SPEAK AND WHEN TO LISTEN

You have a choice—using it wisely can spell the difference between misunderstanding and meaningful dialogue.

By Oren Jay Sofer

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANZISKA BARCZYK

When it comes to conversation, the force of our habits and the pressure of social settings can make it exceedingly difficult to maintain awareness. Here, mindfulness practice serves as a basis. We can use the arena of conversation itself as a training ground for presence, using techniques to anchor awareness within the midst of exchange and developing the capacity for relational awareness.

Consciously choosing when to speak and when to listen is essential for meaningful conversation. In some respects, it's the most basic communication skill. How many times have you said something, only to wish you could take it back moments after the words left your mouth? Or hit "Send" on an email when it might have been better to let things cool off? It's equally important to have the courage to say our piece. When we don't speak up, we can feel as if we've let ourselves or our loved ones down.

Conversation is a dynamic interplay between each person's choice to speak or listen. When those choices are conscious and respectful, conversations tend to be more productive and enjoyable. If those choices are unconscious or impulsive, conversations tend to be less productive and more stressful.

I call this juncture the "choice point" between speaking and listening. With presence, every moment offers a choice. Our ability to maintain presence at the choice point takes practice. Sometimes the moment of choice races by like a road sign while we are doing 75 miles per hour on the freeway. The impulse to speak can be so strong that it impels us to verbalize simply to release the internal pressure. If we tend toward the quieter side, it can feel as if those openings in a conversation disappear before we can muster our voice.

This is where mindfulness comes in. In meditation, we learn how to observe unpleasant sensations (knee pain, a sore back) without immediately reacting. We develop the capacity to be aware of an impulse without acting on it.

The anxiety we feel in conversation is usually rooted in deeper needs to be seen or heard, needs for safety, acceptance, belonging, and so on. The less confident we feel in meeting those needs, the more pressure we will experience to speak up or remain silent. We may fear that if we don't say something *right now* we'll never be able to do so. Or that if we do say something, disaster or disconnection will surely ensue.

The more ways we find to meet those needs (and to handle them skillfully when they aren't met), the less pressure we feel to speak or remain silent; we can relax into the flow of a conversation. There's no danger in speaking our mind and no rush to say it all at once. If it's important, we'll find the right time and way to say it.

This capacity builds slowly. As we practice honoring our needs, we learn to trust ourselves. Paying attention to any small successes helps our nervous system settle and reset. With a new baseline of ease, it can stop setting off false alarms that impel us to speak or prevent us from speaking, and our ability to make more conscious choices grows. We can then discern what's going to be most helpful to move a conversation forward and how to balance all the needs on the table.

Adapted from *Say What You Mean: A Mindful Approach to Nonviolent Communication*, by Oren Jay Sofer © 2018. Reprinted with permission of Shambhala Publications (shambhala.com).

Practice: Choice Points

To practice, choose someone with whom you feel relatively comfortable. This familiarity makes it easier to learn the tool. During a conversation, notice when you choose to speak. If you find yourself talking without having consciously chosen to do so, try stopping and leaving space for the other person to continue. Notice what it's like to actively choose to say something rather than doing so automatically. Pay particular attention to any urgency or reluctance to speak or any sensations of internal pressure. Use that pressure as a signal to make a more conscious choice.

Meetings

There tends to be more freedom to remain silent in meetings than during one-to-one conversations. The next time you are in a meeting, notice how the impulse to speak can rise and fall as the conversation unfolds. If there is an important point you'd like to make, choose when to do so. You can always begin, "I'd like to go back to something we were talking about a few moments ago." Notice how it feels after you speak. Is there relief? Anxiety or self-doubt?

Written Communication

Experiment with making conscious choices about when you check your inbox or social media feeds ("listening"). When you do engage, pause before replying to consider whether or not you want to "speak." Is this the right time? Would it be useful to wait or to say nothing at all?

Part of this investigation is getting to know our own patterns. Do we tend to speak easily and freely, finding it harder to leave space for others? Is it more comfortable for us to listen, finding it challenging to come forward?

Most of us tend to be stronger in one area. Circumstances and events tied to our gender, race, class, or other aspects of our social location tend to mold how we show up relationally. We've all received messages—explicitly and implicitly, personally and through media, stories, and culture—about how we are expected to behave. Through various cues of approval or disapproval, inclusion or exclusion, we learn what's safest based on our role and the expectations of others.

Our work is to uncover these patterns and develop an authentic freedom of expression. There is no ideal way to be, no one thing to do in all circumstances. The goal is dynamic flexibility through presence, choosing to speak or listen as needed.

Oren Jay Sofer *is a teacher of insight meditation who leads retreats and workshops on mindful communication at meditation centers and educational settings around the US.*

ARTWORK BY BEN PALJOR CHATAG (BENCHATAG.COM) | *COLORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT SERIES*; EACH PIECE OIL ON CANVAS, 48 x 36 IN.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

NIRVANA

by Andrew Olendzki

THE PALI WORD *NIBBANA* (*nirvana* in Sanskrit) was first used by the Buddha to describe the highest state of profound well-being a human is capable of attaining. The mind awakens from delusion, is liberated from bondage, is cleansed of all its defilements, becomes entirely at peace, experiences the complete cessation of suffering, and is no longer reborn.

More specifically, the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion—toxic unconscious mental and emotional dispositions that cause people to harm themselves and one another and cause suffering—have been extinguished (*nibbuta*) in a person who attains nirvana. The popular account is that *nirvana* means the "blowing out" of the flames, but it is more likely that the word is based on the idea of removing fuel so that a fire goes out, or releasing the fire from clinging to its fuel.

There are two senses of the word in the early tradition: nirvana as the radical psychological transformation experienced by Siddhartha Gautama under the Bodhi tree at age 36; and parinirvana ("complete" nirvana) as the more enigmatic transformation experienced when the Buddha died between two sal trees at the age of 80. He attained nirvana when the toxic fires were quenched, lived for 45 years teaching others how to achieve the same end, and then entered parinirvana with the final passing away of his body and mental aggregates (feeling, perception, dispositions, and consciousness).

One of the great challenges of the word *nirvana* is that it is expressed in both negative and positive language. If too much emphasis is placed on the negative definition (such as absence of delusion), there is the danger of misconstruing it as nothingness, while too much on the positive side (such as the highest happiness) can lead to the tendency to think of it as an eternal reality. The Buddha discouraged both by suggesting there are no adequate conceptual means of expressing nirvana.

Each of the two major Mahayana schools took a different approach to the topic. The Madhyamaka accentuated the negative mode, reiterating the ineffability of the term and dismantling the idea of a sharp contrast between nirvana as an exalted state and samsara as a fallen world. The philosopher Nagarjuna argued that nirvana and samsara (literally the "flowing on" from one life to another) are identical—it is only one's mistaken point of view that makes the distinction.

Yogacara thinkers such as Vasubandhu tended toward the positive nature of nirvana. Building upon the idea of a transpersonal "storehouse consciousness," they developed affirmative terms such as *bodhicitta*, *dharmakaya*, *buddhanature*, and *suchness*. Tibetan forms of Buddhism tended to follow this lead, speaking for example of the "great bliss" of nirvana becoming accessible through tantric practice.

As Buddhist teachings moved into East Asia, both outward and inward orientations were further developed. The Tiantai and Hwayan schools built grand integrated cosmological systems organized around nirvana as the central principle of the cosmos, while Chan and Zen practice emphasized seeing into one's inner true nature. The experience of nirvana was embodied by a lineage of masters expressing their inexpressible realization by creative and spontaneous responses to ordinary situations.

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

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Kyaiktiyo Pagoda (known as the Golden Rock) in Mon State, Myanmar

MAIKID / GETTY IMAGES

THE COCONUT MONK

A former soldier documents wartime Vietnam on an eccentric yogi's Buddhist island.

When John Steinbeck IV, the son of the iconic American author, died suddenly in 1991, he was roughly midway through writing his autobiography. His wife, Nancy, took up the task of finishing it, though it would be more accurate to say that she both filled it out and completed it with her own singular perspective. The following article, a wonderful telling of John's encounters with the Buddhist leader of the title during his deployment as a journalist in wartime Vietnam, is an excerpt from the resulting collaborative memoir, *The Other Side of Eden: Life with John Steinbeck*. –*The Editors*

IN THE SPRING OF 1968, a few months after interviewing every Buddhist and Catholic leader in sight, a Vietnamese friend of mine told me about a large peace conference on an island in the Mekong that was hosted by a silent yogi called the Coconut Monk. I bussed the seventy kilometers south from Saigon to My Tho City with a party of novice monks. Arriving with a lot of pushing and tickling, we all climbed into sampans at the My Tho quay on the Mekong.

By **JOHN STEINBECK IV** *Portrait By* **RICHARD AVEDON**

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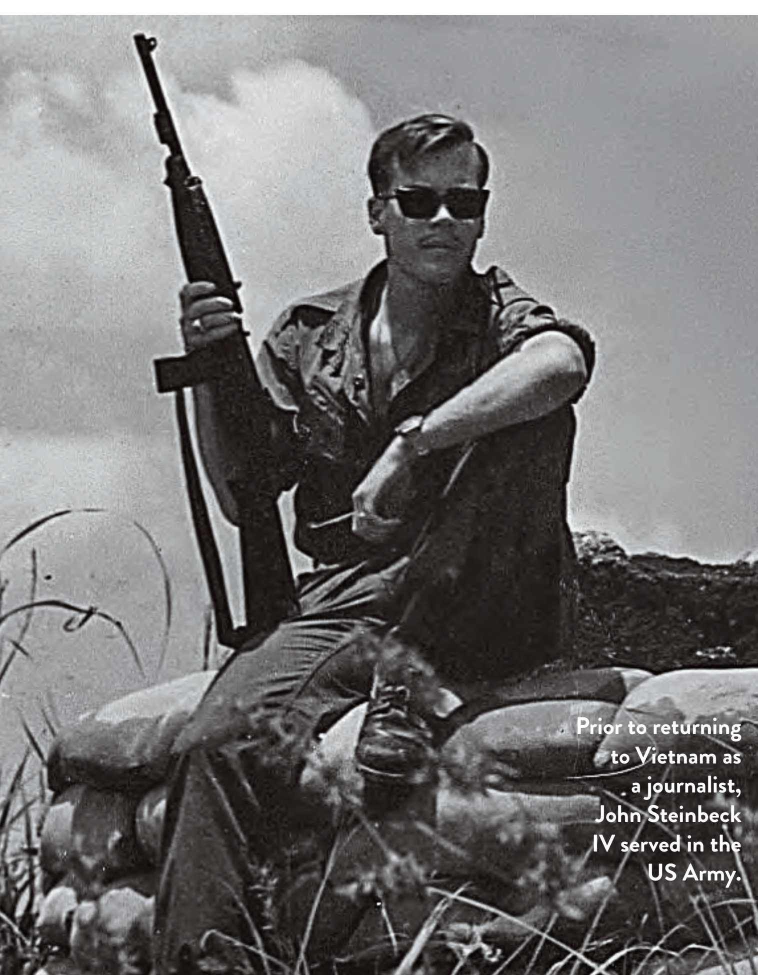
The river here is about four miles wide, segmenting the delta between little My Tho and Kien Hoa City. Phoenix Island was hidden by other small shreds of land that seemed to float like peach slices along with a salad of coconuts and mango, garnished and strewn together with palm fronds in the swift brown water. As we came around one of these spits of land, what I saw made me almost fall out of the boat. There, like a hallucination floating in the middle of the river, was what resembled a Pure Land Buddhist Amusement Park built on pilings. At the prow of the island, a towering pagoda rose from the top of a seventy-foot plaster mountain. The summit was crowned by a Buddhist swastika, a triangle, and a cross, which looked down on a huge terrazzo prayer circle, separated by color scheme and the elegant sigmoid line of yin and yang; duality in motion. Sporting neon lights on their heads, the nine dragons of the Mekong sprouted a full forty feet high from the prayer circle. The dragons were ancient and revered figures, symbolic of the nine fingers of the Mekong River's alluvial fan that had in fact created the amazingly rich delta.

While we got closer, the noise of our little outboard motor began to fade and disappeared beneath the din of large wind-bells that hung from the corners of the seven-tiered pagoda. There were hundreds of them. Their size was oddly familiar though and I later learned that they were made out of the brass casings of 175mm howitzer shells. As we came around in front of the island to a landing quay, I saw an extremely large and elaborate relief map of Vietnam, fully seventy feet from end to end, suspended horizontally above the flowing Mekong. The map was complete with little toy towns and cities, mountain ranges and jungles. Sprouting out of the North and the South were pillars that were at least five feet in diameter which rose to the sky to support two ends of a rainbow bridge more than a hundred and fifty feet above the surface, with a little hut on each end.


Prior to returning to Vietnam as a journalist, John Steinbeck IV served in the US Army.

When we finally edged up to the docking area, I saw about two hundred monks and nuns doing prostrations in the main prayer circle, bowing toward the funny plaster mountain that supported the ascending tiers of the pagoda and looked like something designed for not-so-miniature golf. In a little alcove near the top of the central plaster mountain the Coconut Monk sat grinning. Without a doubt, he was the true embodiment of the classic "Don't Worry—Be Happy" posture that is eternally endearing and mystifying in a world gone mad.

ON THIS PARTICULAR DAY, THE little community of about four hundred was choked with tourists and guests for the two-day peace festival. With others I made the pilgrimage up the micromountain to receive a blessing from the master. My friends introduced me as an American Buddhist. His eyebrows rose comically and he began clapping. For a silent man, he was a most communicative person. I somehow understood him perfectly when he questioned in a gesture whether or not I ate meat. I did, and he sort of unclapped and sent an attendant running down the mountain to the kitchen area. The attendant quickly returned with mangoes and coconuts. The master made me eat. He watched intently until I gobbled the juicy fruit down completely. My genuine enthusiasm was applauded by all as a sign of conversion, or at least sympathy.

I explained to the Coconut Monk *(Dao Dua* in Vietnamese and pronounced Dow Yua) that I was very interested in Taoism and of course Buddhism. The day before, when I had sat stoned in the Dispatch office staring at a map on the wall, I noticed that if one drew a circle around Vietnam, a simple yin-yang curve appeared. Ton Le Sap Lake (yin) in Cambodia and Hi Nam Island (yang) in the South China Sea, separated by the curved coastline of Vietnam itself, made a perfect, classic yin-yang symbol. The center of the completed visualization lay smack on the infamous DMZ.

When I told him about this discovery, the Coconut Monk's eyebrows jumped up again and he stared at me seriously. After a very long moment, he suddenly sent another monk scurrying down to a little library in the grotto/heart of the pagoda mountain. When the monk returned he had an exquisite map of Vietnam highlighted with the exact same circle around it which Dao Dua had drawn himself the day before. He was going to release this meaningful cosmo-geographical discovery to the guests later as a kind of explanation for the Vietnamese predicament; and here this round-eye had stumbled on the same thing, perhaps picking up the master's vibrations. It was a tremendously awkward moment. The surrounding monks and nuns started clucking their approval, and whispering to each other about my prophetic perceptions. Dao Dua and everyone began complimenting these friends who had invited me. No mere coincidence this, which had brought the American Buddhist to Phoenix Island. Within an hour of being there, I had become a sign, of what I'm not sure. Nonetheless, I was to pay for that little exchange of symbol-awareness with a mixture of pride and embarrassment for the rest of the years I was to be associated with Dao Dua, as the incident eventually spread on the Taoist tomtom circuit throughout the delta.

OPPOSITE PAGE: COURTESY NANCY STEINBECK | TOP RIGHT: NIK WHEELER / ALAMY

Dao Dua (top), the Coconut Monk, on Phoenix Island with American journalists, including Steinbeck (bottom), 1969

I didn't see it happening at first but an increasingly deeper understanding of the life-and-death lessons of Vietnam were to be miraculously furthered by this jungle monk, whose eccentric attitude indicated a compassion and humor that made pathos and simpleminded commiseration unworkable. For me this lesson has never become obsolete.

My year in Vietnam as a soldier had left me with the memory of being a very realistic target. I was always frustrated by my army role and the desire to be near the people without my olive-drab identity. Soon I started going down to Phoenix Island every weekend on my little motorbike. I felt happy in the countryside and that I was no longer such a juicy bull's-eye in the dress of the foreign invader. My shoulders were light as I motorcycled through the flickering sunlight on my little bike under the palms. I felt very secure with the people and as my accent got better, I began to lose the notion of what it was to be non-Vietnamese.

I was happy here. Perhaps happier than I had ever been in my life. The island became my refuge for the next five years.

On Phoenix Island, the mutual grief about the war was honest and penetrated all cultural barriers so that I felt like just one of the million carp swimming along in the silt-rich brown water of the Mekong, whose bounty travels all the way from Central Tibet to fan out here in the delta and on into the South China Sea. I was happy here. Perhaps happier than I had ever been in my life. The island became my refuge for the next five years.

Any sort of happy equipoise was Dao Dua's play. He was the father figure I'd longed for and we forged a deep affection for each other. Inversions, centering in chaos, transmutation, and a hilarious annihilation of negativity, were seemingly possible here. An incestuous exhibition of symbols swung around on a pole in the wind. A sign pivoted there, displaying Buddha with his arm around Christ; the flip side, the Holy Virgin, Mother Mary embracing the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Quan Yin. Always, bells out of bullets, inverted aggression.

In response to this extraordinary display of concrete pacifism, and to his Harpo Marx impression of a Buddha, my commitment to the Coconut Monk grew.

One day, the Coconut Monk summoned me. He asked me to stay more permanently with him on the island. He handed me his coconut begging bowl, and I accepted. That night, in the small hours I was woken up, and all the monks took me

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Thus Have I Heard: An American Sutra

With the outbreak of World War II, Japanese Americans were incarcerated by the thousands. Out of the crucible of the camps, a uniquely American Buddhism was born.

By Duncan Ryuken Williams

Thus have I heard:
The army ordered
All Japanese faces to be evacuated
From the city of Los Angeles.
This homeless monk has nothing but a Japanese face.
He stayed here thirteen springs
Meditating with all faces
From all parts of the world,
And studied the teaching of Buddha with them.
Wherever he goes, he may form other groups
Inviting friends of all faces,
Beckoning them with the empty hands of Zen.

—Nyogen Senzaki, "Parting," May 7, 1942

PHOTOGRAPH BY FOR FREEDOMS IN COLLABORATION WITH HANK WILLIS THOMAS AND EMILY SHUR

THE STORY OF AMERICA HAS long been cast as one of westward exploration and expansion, beginning with settlers from Europe who crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, and radiating out from initial outposts on the Atlantic Coast across the plains of the Midwest to the Pacific Coast and beyond. As the 19th-century doctrines of manifest destiny and American expansionism make clear, claiming territories to accommodate the ever-increasing populations of immigrants from Europe was justified in terms of both culture and religion; the United States was described as uniquely destined and divinely ordained to take on the role of a "civilizing influence" that would spread Anglo-Protestant values into lands supposedly empty of civilization. Implicit in this view of history has been the idea that America is, at its base, a Christian nation.

Does the fact of being non-white and non-Christian make one less American?

Previous page: A transformation of Norman Rockwell's *Freedom from Fear* (above) features Cindy Sangalang, a professor of social work at California State University, filmmaker Tad Nakamura, whose father was placed in an internment camp as a child, and their son.

But what happens when we flip the map? For the hundreds of thousands of Asian immigrants who crossed the Pacific to reach America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the American West was the Pacific East. Their American story has an eastward trajectory—one that begins in the mid-1800s on the sugar plantations of Hawaii and moves through California and the Pacific Northwest and eventually toward the Atlantic Coast.

American Buddhism thus begins with the migration of Asians who brought the teachings, practices, and institutions of a 2,500-year-old religion across the Pacific. These immigrants saw in America the promise of a country that could provide not only a source of livelihood but also the right to freely practice their own religious beliefs. In this, they were putting their faith in one of the central tenets of the United States Constitution: the First Amendment, which, agreed upon and ratified by the Fathers, guarantees religious freedom.

So which is it? Is America best defined as a fundamentally white and Christian nation? Or is it a land of multiple races and ethnicities and a haven for religious freedom? More pointedly—does the fact of being nonwhite and non-Christian make one less American?

Never has this question been asked with more urgency and consequence than it was in the time of the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. War, with its reflexive interrogation of who can be trusted and who cannot, who belongs and who is the enemy, often brings to the surface the deepest questioning of a nation's identity. In the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack, the question whether persons of Japanese ancestry would remain loyal to the United States became the subject of considerable debate among government and military officials, the media, and the general public. At stake were issues of both morality and law—two-thirds of the Japanese American population were American citizens and thus presumed to have constitutionally guaranteed rights of equal protection, due process, and religious freedom. But could they be trusted? Within months, debate was brought to a swift and irrevocable conclusion when, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law Executive Order 9066. This gave the military discretion to do whatever it deemed necessary to secure the safety and security of the United States. Pursuant to it, the Army removed all persons of Japanese ancestry—more than 110,000 men, women, and children—from the west coast and put them in camps surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers. Anyone with even a drop of Japanese blood was rounded up and incarcerated.

Marked as they are by ethnic, racial, and cultural differences from the majority European-origin population of the United States, Asian immigrants have long faced such nativist prejudices. Starting with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which erected a symbolic wall on the Pacific to keep out the so-called "heathen Chinee," and continuing on through various laws that banned Asian immigrants from naturalizing as citizens, owning land, or marrying white Americans, decades of legal and social structures of exclusion anticipated what happened to the Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor.

But while it has become commonplace to view their wartime incarceration through the prism of race, the role that religion played in

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Detained Japanese Americans arrive at an assembly center in Santa Anita, California.

the evaluation of whether or not they could be considered fully American—and, indeed, the rationale for the legal exclusion of Asian immigrants before that—is no less significant. Their racial designation and national origin made it impossible for Japanese Americans to elide into whiteness. But the vast majority of them were also Buddhists; in fact, Japanese Americans constituted the largest group of Buddhists in the United States at the time. The Asian origins of their religious faith meant that their place in America could not be easily captured by the notion of a Christian nation. Religious difference acted as a multiplier of suspiciousness, making it even more difficult for Japanese Americans to be perceived as anything other than perpetually foreign and potentially dangerous.

People of Japanese ancestry were thus deemed to be a threat to national security and incarcerated indiscriminately and en masse, something that did not happen to Americans of German and Italian heritage, despite the fact that the United States was also at war with Germany and Italy.

Doubly excluded from whiteness and Christendom, Japanese American Buddhists during World War II represent a particularly poignant object lesson about the perceived boundaries of who can claim the rights of being American. Their insistence on maintaining their Buddhist practices and beliefs despite imprisonment—using the searchlights from guard towers to focus their meditation practice, building Buddhist altars for their barracks rooms out of wood scavenged from the desert, or insisting that space be made available for them to congregate and worship as Buddhists—constitutes one of the most inspiring assertions of religious freedom and civil liberties in American history. Thus, this is a story about America.

But the wartime experience of Japanese American Buddhists is also a story about Buddhism in America: how the roots of what is now a popularly accepted religion were forged in the crucible of war by a community that strove to remain grounded in tradition while also adapting to the multisectarian, multigenerational, and multiethnic realities of Buddhist life in the United States.

GIVEN HOW THOROUGHLY Japanese American Buddhists have been excluded from the narrative of American belonging, it is perhaps not

surprising that their stories are not readily found in most histories of that time. In my own research, I have learned much from accounts by Japanese American Buddhists themselves, drawing from sources such as previously untranslated diaries and letters written in Japanese, dozens of new oral histories, and the ephemera of camp newsletters and religious service programs. These allow a telling of the story from the inside out, and make it possible for us to understand how the faith of these Buddhists gave them purpose and meaning at a time of loss, uncertainty, dislocation, and deep questioning of their place in the world.

To understand how something called American Buddhism came to exist, we must look to the people who embodied the teachings, even during wartime exclusion.

The insights found in Buddhist scripture cannot be transmitted without people to actualize them. To understand how something called American Buddhism came to exist and persist, we must look to the people who embodied the teachings of the Buddha even during wartime exclusion. Among those who exemplified this struggle to find a place for themselves and their religion in America was the Zen Buddhist priest Nyogen Senzaki.

Zen Buddhist priest Nyogen Senzaki at the Heart Mountain War Relocation Center in Wyoming, July 4, 1943

By the time Senzaki penned the poem "Parting," which opens this essay, in May of 1942, he had already been in the United States for close to four decades. But six months earlier, everything had changed when Japanese naval planes attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. A day later, his adopted country had declared war on his native country, and most of his fellow Buddhist priests had been rounded up and imprisoned, some of them before the smoke had cleared at Pearl Harbor.

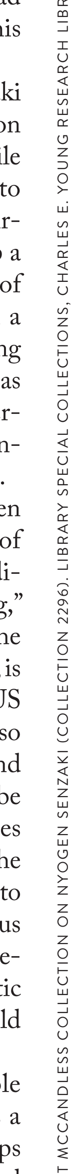
Senzaki stands out because although he had trained in the traditional Buddhist monasteries of Japan, he had made it his life's work to translate Buddhism into teachings that would be meaningful to his fellow Japanese immigrants and their English-speaking, American-born children, as well as to non-Japanese American converts.

Born in 1876, Senzaki was rescued by a Japanese Buddhist priest from the edge of a frozen riverbank where his mother had died giving birth. He was adopted into a Buddhist temple family and eventually ordained as a novice priest. His Zen teacher, Soyen Shaku, became the first Japanese Zen priest to visit the United States, invited in 1893 to represent Buddhism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. A dozen years later, with barely any English, the 29-year-old Senzaki followed his teacher's example and arrived in America. Frustrated by the rigidity of Buddhism in Japan, he had decided to cross the Pacific in the hopes of finding a new path forward for the religion in the land he had read about as a teenager in Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. "See whether it conquers you or you conquer it," his Zen master had told the young priest as he prepared for his new life in California.

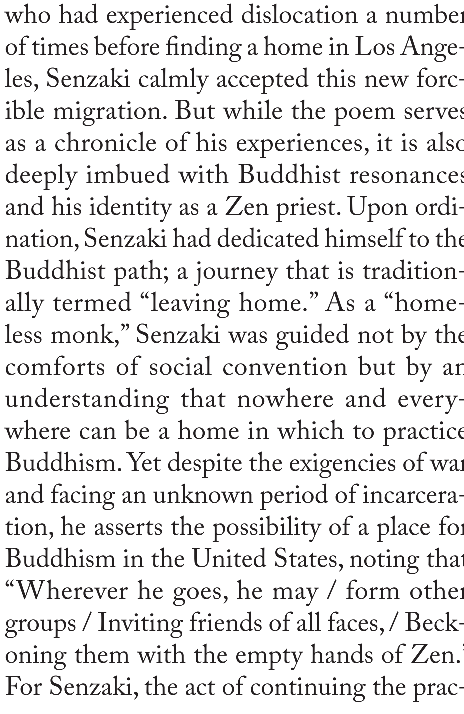
After landing in San Francisco, Senzaki studied the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James in the public library while working at menial jobs. He then moved to Los Angeles, where, over the course of "thirteen springs," he succeeded in building up a vibrant Buddhist community consisting of Japanese immigrants and converts from a variety of ethnic backgrounds—"Meditating with all faces / From all parts of the world," as he writes in the poem. He saw in the American outlook an openness that might potentially welcome the teachings of Buddhism.

This optimism was tested but not broken by the US Army's order for "all persons of Japanese ancestry" to assemble for immediate removal from the Pacific Coast. "Parting," written on the eve of his departure from the community he had worked so hard to build, is not only a Buddhist commentary upon the US government's incarceration process, it is also a Buddhist teaching he was leaving behind for those in a home to which he might not be able to return. Addressing the Los Angeles Zen community, he begins the poem with the classic opening words for a sutra, a text said to represent the Buddha's own teaching: "Thus have I heard." This phrase is a way of representing Buddhist scriptures as an authentic transmission of religious guidance that could enable the Buddha to be ever present.

"Parting" employs this classic preamble at a traumatic moment for Buddhists, as a way to give inspiration amid the hardships of the American present. "The army ordered / All Japanese faces to be evacuated," his poem recounts. "This homeless monk has nothing but a Japanese face." As someone who had experienced dislocation a number of times before finding a home in Los Angeles, Senzaki calmly accepted this new forcible migration. But while the poem serves as a chronicle of his experiences, it is also deeply imbued with Buddhist resonances and his identity as a Zen priest. Upon ordination, Senzaki had dedicated himself to the Buddhist path; a journey that is traditionally termed "leaving home." As a "homeless monk," Senzaki was guided not by the comforts of social convention but by an understanding that nowhere and everywhere can be a home in which to practice Buddhism. Yet despite the exigencies of war and facing an unknown period of incarceration, he asserts the possibility of a place for Buddhism in the United States, noting that "Wherever he goes, he may / form other groups / Inviting friends of all faces, / Beckoning them with the empty hands of Zen." For Senzaki, the act of continuing the practice of Buddhism, even under incarceration, was to serve as witness to the realities of the present moment and make the teachings of the Buddha come alive in it.



RUTH STROUT MCCANDLESS COLLECTION ON NYOGEN SENZAKI (COLLECTION 2296). LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, CHARLES E. YOUNG RESEARCH LIBRARY, UCLA



An American flag and photograph of the Buddha are prominently displayed in the barracks of the Portland Livestock Exposition Building, where Japanese Americans were interned. May 31, 1942

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY THE OREGONIAN / BARCROFT MEDIA

Senzaki believed that the powers of ultimate truths, spiritual practices, and ethical acts could be activated only when religious teachings were able to escape their hermetically sealed texts and engage with the existential struggles of life. In this view, the reinscription of scripture in a contemporary idiom is a potent act of religious imagination that gives life purpose and meaning. It is by reflecting on his forcible relocation that Senzaki is thus given the chance to write a Buddhist scripture—an American sutra—inspired by the terrible circumstances of his times.

After being deported from Los Angeles, Senzaki initially spent several months in temporary quarters just east of Los Angeles. The War Relocation Authority (WRA)

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MEET YOSHI MAEZUMI, PALEOECOLOGIST

Raised at the Zen Center of Los Angeles, the daughter of Western Zen pioneer Taizan Maezumi Roshi now makes her home in exotic field sites where she studies past ecosystems—and occasionally fishes a river piranha for dinner.

Interview by Andrew Cooper

There is obviously a lot about Facebook that merits serious criticism. And there seems to be more each day. Still, sometimes it can be pretty terrific.

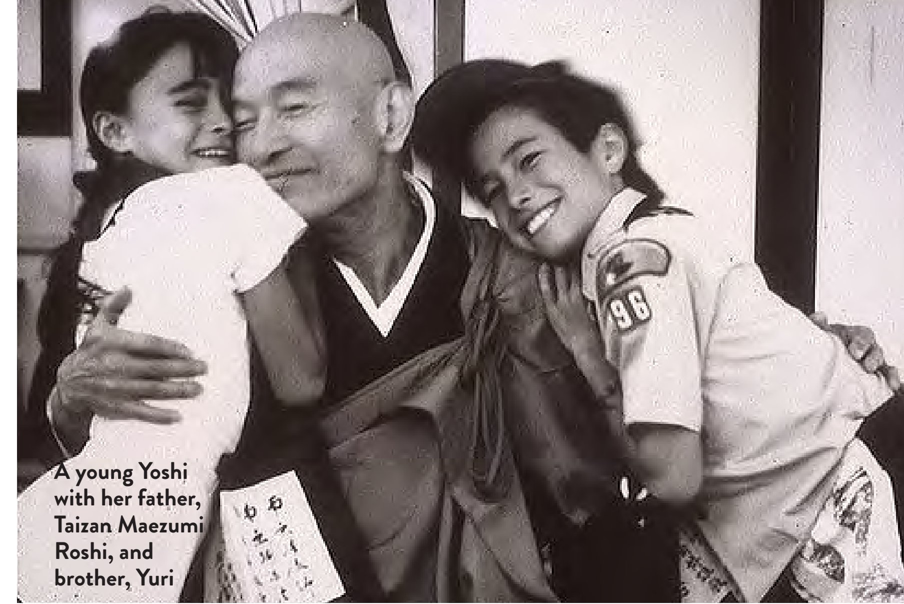
Several years ago, while I was looking through my feed of friends' postings, I came upon a comment by one Yoshi Maezumi. I was immediately struck by the commenter's personable sense of humor. But what really got my attention was her name. Although I didn't know her, I recognized her name as that of the youngest child of the founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles, my teacher Taizan Maezumi Roshi.

Curious about how this daughter of Maezumi Roshi's had grown into adulthood (she was born in 1983 and was just a toddler

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMIESON DALEY

when I moved from Los Angeles to San Francisco), I went to her Facebook page. I have an impression of one of her posts in particular, though I suspect it may have become inexact with time. In any event, there was a photo of Yoshi standing waist-deep in swampy water, surrounded by dense foliage. She wore goggles and, I believe, a hard hat, and she held before her some kind of scientific instrument, which she was examining intently. Above the photo, she had written something like this: "Doing research on pre-Columbian fire management practices in the Amazon Basin! I love being a paleoecologist!" The pure enthusiasm—those exclamation marks!—seemed to me to stand in an odd and charming contrast to the seriousness of the work she was engaged in.

And then there was this: What in the world is paleoecology?



A young Yoshi with her father, Taizan Maezumi Roshi, and brother, Yuri

I wanted to know more. Yoshi and I became Facebook friends, and periodically I would see a post describing her travels, her research, and her adventures, scientific and otherwise. It was always a kick. And I found out what paleoecology is. As the word itself indicates, paleoecology is the study of past ecosystems. When I asked what that actually entails, Yoshi wrote to me: "One of the ways we can reconstruct ancient ecosystems is from lake sediments. I look at pollen grains and charcoal particles from lakes to reconstruct changes in past fire and vegetation in the Amazon." Yoshi is particularly interested in lessons from pre-Columbian land use and fire management that may have potential management implications for more sustainable land use practices in the Amazonian forests of today.

As it happens, today, as I write this, California is in the midst of the worst wildfires in the state's history. Last year, grass fires swept through the prairies of the American Midwest. And Brazil just elected a president who believes in deregulating logging and agriculture in the Amazon Basin, the very "lungs" of our planet. Paleoecology, though it might sound recondite, may well prove to be of inestimable help to us in finding our way through the environmental perils of our times.

It is often the case that children of a parent thoroughly devoted to a life project—artistic, scientific, religious, political, or whatever kind—can have a hard time of it. And Yoshi's father had dedicated himself fully to the work of transmitting Zen Buddhism to the West. What's more, she grew up in a community built around sharing in that work. It can be hard for a child to find her way out from the shadow cast by a parent recognized for his or her dedication and accomplishment. But Yoshi Maezumi seems to have succeeded at that, and to have done so beautifully. She has found, through her own dedication and accomplishment, her own road.

Collecting lake sediment in Alter de Chão, Brazil, 2014

How does the study of paleoecology shed light on widely shared contemporary ecological concerns? The study of paleoecology provides a long-term understanding of how ecosystems respond to changes in past climate and human disturbance. We gain vital insights into how modern ecosystems may respond to modern global issues, including climate change, increased wildfire activity, and increasing anthropogenic pressures—from deforestation and industrial scale farming, for example. Our research shows that thousands of years of indigenous land and fire management have played a crucial role in shaping modern forest drought susceptibility and flammability in the Amazon. This has very important implications for modern fire management and conservation efforts that have historically neglected the role of pre-Columbians in shaping the modern landscape.

PHOTOS COURTESY YOSHI MAEZUMI

One thing that really comes across in your online postings is your love for your work. Would you tell us something about the nature and source of that love? My sister often tells a story about when I was about 5 years old and she found me outside in the garden, counting ants. Thirty years later, most days you can find me behind a microscope counting pollen grains and charcoal particles. I guess it is safe to say that my love of the natural world started at a very young age and has followed me throughout my career.

Organizing subsamples of sediment extracted from Laguna Versalles in Llanos de Moxos, Bolivia, 2016

One of my favorite quotes comes from Albert Einstein: "The important thing is not to stop questioning; curiosity has its own reason for existing." This idea has always resonated with me, despite the fact that I did not always want to be a scientist. One of my first loves as a child (and it continues today) is dance. However, after a bad car accident that ended my professional dancing aspirations, followed by a bit of persuading from my mom, I decided to go to college to be an archaeologist. After all, what's not to love about Indiana Jones and traveling to far-off exotic places to find lost civilizations and hidden treasure troves? Although I found the romanticized Hollywood version of archaeology to be far from accurate, and I have yet to find the Holy Grail, Pandora's box, or a treasure chest full of gold, this early trajectory in archaeology has sent me on a journey that has been exciting, adventurous, and immensely rewarding.

While working toward a master's degree, I had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Guatemala, where I became increasingly interested in past human impact on the environment. This led me to pursue a PhD in physical geography, in which I particularly focused on paleoecology of the Bolivian Amazon. During a three-year postdoc at the University of Exeter, I led several lake coring expeditions that sampled water and sediment in the Brazilian and Bolivian Amazon. In some of the more remote regions, getting to our field sites involved chartering small planes, riding motorcycles through the jungle, wading chest-deep through murky swamp water that was home to anacondas and crocodiles, and fishing piranha out of the river for our dinner. One moment a few years back, while we stopped on the trail to our field site, the sunlight was coming through the rainforest canopy, reflecting off the wings of blue morpho butterflies, and I thought, "It really doesn't get any cooler than this." In addition to being in the coolest field office in the world, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a brilliant and talented team of people. We have had the privilege of working with many of the local villagers, who act as guides and experts in the landscape's flora and fauna. We often have village meetings to explain our research, and we get to discuss the history through archaeological and paleoecological lenses. As I have progressed through my career, I have found that the more I learn, the more questions I have. And the questions keep getting more interesting and interconnected.

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A Martial Arts Ballet

Shaolin monks kick, flip, and dance in a performance both timeless and contemporary.

CHOREOGRAPHED BY **SIDI LARBI CHERKAOUI**

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IF THE NEW YORK CITY BALLET'S corps of ballerinas were replaced by 20 kung fu Buddhist monks? *Sutra*, choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and with music by Szymon Brzóska, is as close an answer as you're likely to get. The hourlong performance melds contemporary dance with the fighting techniques of China's famous Shaolin martial arts.

Onstage, Cherkaoui, 42, joins the Chan Buddhist monks as well as 21 human-size boxes. These boxes, conceptualized by the British sculptor Antony Gormley, are as much a part of the choreography as the dancers themselves. Dragged around, stacked, put together like a puzzle and broken apart again—these simple props create complex worlds. Frequently the performers hide within them before flying out with flips, kicks, and spins.

Sutra premiered a decade ago but remains fresh. In 2007, Cherkaoui began the process of working with the monks, who hail from the original Shaolin Monastery in eastern China. Developed during the Sui and Tang dynasties (581–618 CE and 618–907 CE) to protect the monastery from attack, the unique style of martial arts is now considered a tool for physical and mental cultivation.

At the time of their first meeting with Cherkaoui, the temple's leaders had been looking for a way to modernize the tradition while still honoring its spiritual roots. *Sutra* was their answer.

–Emma Varvaloucas, Executive Editor

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREE LANTHIER. LEFT AND RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRÉE LANTHIER. BELOW: LEO MASON SPORTS PHOTOS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Previous spread: Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and the Shaolin monks onstage at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. Left and above: Three monks in *Sutra* show off their acrobatic skills.

The temple leaders had been looking for a way to modernize the Shaolin kung fu tradition while still honoring its roots. *Sutra* was the answer.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉE LANTHIER

A still from *Sutra* performed at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. The show premiered in 2008 and recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

A GOOD ENOUGH DEATH

What does it look like to die well?

By **Katy Butler**

If someone you love has died in a hospital, you may have seen modern death at its worst: overly medicalized, impersonal, and filled with unnecessary suffering. The experience can be a bitter lesson in Buddha's most basic teaching: the more we try to avoid suffering (including death), the worse we often make it.

Even though roughly half of Americans die in hospitals and other institutions, most of us yearn to die at home, and perhaps to experience our leavetaking as a sacred rite of passage rather than a technological flail. You don't have to be a saint, or be wealthy, or have a Rolodex of influential names to die well. But you do need to prepare. It helps to be a member of at least one "tribe," to have someone who cares deeply about you, and to have doctors who tell you necessary truths so that you can decide when to stop aggressive treatment and opt for hospice care. Then those who care for you can arrange the basics: privacy, cleanliness, and quiet, the removal of beeping technologies, and adequate pain control. They can listen and express their love, and provide the hands-on bedside care hospice doesn't cover.

From then on, a more realistic hope for our caregivers, and for ourselves when we are dying, may not be an idealized "good death" by a well-behaved patient, but a "good enough death," where we keep the dying as comfortable and pain-free as possible, and leave room for the beautiful and the transcendent—which may or may not occur.

Hospice professionals often warn against high expectations. Things will probably not go as planned, and there comes a point when radical acceptance is far more important than goal-oriented activity. They don't like the idea, inherent in some notions of the "good death," of expecting the dying to put on a final ritual performance for the living, one marked by beautiful last words, final reconciliations, philosophical acceptance of the coming of death, lack of fear, and a peaceful letting go.

"I don't tell families at the outset that their

Photographic Series by Nancy Borowick

Top: "In It Together" Left: "The Calm before the Storm" Right: "His and Hers"

Nancy Borowick's photo series (January 2013 through December 2014) depicts the experiences of Howie and Laurel Borowick, partners for over 30 years, who found their lives consumed by doctor appointments and the shared challenges of chemotherapy.

experience can be life-affirming, and leave them with positive feelings and memories," said hospice nurse Jerry Soucy. "I say instead that we're going to do all we can to make the best of a difficult situation, because that's what we confront. The positive feelings sometimes happen in the moment, but are more likely to be of comfort in the days and months after a death." This is what it took, and how it looked, for the family of John Masterson.

JOHN WAS AN ARTIST and sign painter, the ninth of ten children born to a devout Catholic couple in Davenport, Iowa. His mother died when he was 8, and he and two of his sisters spent nearly a year in an orphanage. He moved to Seattle in his twenties, earned a black belt in karate, started a sign-painting business, and converted to Nichiren Shoshu, the branch of Buddhism whose primary practice is chanting. He never left his house without intoning three times in Japanese *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* ("I Honor the Impeccable Teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*").

He was 57 and living alone, without health insurance, when he developed multiple myeloma, an incurable blood cancer. He didn't have much money: he was the kind of person who would spend hours teaching a fellow artist how to apply gold leaf, while falling behind on his paid work. But thanks to his large extended family, his karate practice, and his fierce dedication to his religion, he was part of several tribes. He was devoted to his three children—each the result of a serious relationship with a different woman—and they loved him equally fiercely. His youngest sister, Anne, a nurse who had followed him to Seattle, said he had "an uncanny ability to piss people off but make them love him loyally forever."

When he first started feeling exhausted and looking gaunt, John tried to cure himself with herbs and chanting. By the time Anne got him to a doctor, he had a tumor the size of a half grapefruit protruding from his breastbone. Myeloma is sometimes called a "smoldering" cancer, because it can lie dormant for years. By the time John's was diagnosed, his was in flames.

Huge plasma cells were piling up in his bone marrow, while other rogue blood cells dissolved bone and dumped calcium into his bloodstream, damaging his kidneys and brain function. He grew too weak and confused to work or drive. Bills piled up and his house fell into foreclosure. Anne, who worked the evening shift at a local hospital, moved him into her house and drove him to various government offices to apply for food stamps, Social Security Disability, and Medicaid. She would frequently get up early to stand in line outside social services offices with his paperwork in a portable plastic file box.

Medicaid paid for the drug thalidomide, which cleared the calcium from John's bloodstream and helped his brain and kidneys recover. A blood cancer specialist at the University of Washington Medical Center told him that a bone marrow transplant might buy him time, perhaps even years. But myeloma eventually returns; the transplant doesn't cure it. The treatment would temporarily destroy his immune system, could kill him, and would require weeks of recovery in sterile isolation. John decided against it, and was equally adamant that he'd never go on dialysis.

After six months on thalidomide, John recovered enough to move into a government-subsidized studio apartment near Pike Place Market. He loved being on his own again and wandered the market making videos of street musicians, which he'd post on Facebook. But Anne now had to drive across town to shop, cook, and clean for him.

The health plateau lasted more than a year. But by the fall of 2010, John could no longer bear one of thalidomide's most difficult side effects, agonizing neuropathic foot pain. When he stopped taking the drug, he knew that calcium would once again build up in his bloodstream, and that he was turning toward his death.

An older sister and brother flew out from Iowa to help Anne care for him. One sibling would spend the night, and another, or John's oldest daughter, Keely, a law student, would spend the day.

Christmas came and went. His sister Irene returned to Iowa and was replaced by another Iowa sister, Dottie, a devout Catholic. In early January, John developed a urinary tract infection and became severely constipated and unable to pee. Anne took him to the University of Washington Medical Center for what turned out to be the last time. His kidneys were failing and his bones so eaten away by disease that when he sneezed, he broke several ribs. Before he left the hospital, John met with a hematologist, a blood specialist, who asked Anne to step briefly out of the room.

Anne does not know exactly what was said. But most UW doctors are well trained in difficult conversations, thanks to a morally

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THE FIVE REMEMBRANCES PRESCRIBED BY THE BUDDHA

I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way I can escape growing old.
I am of the nature to get sick. There is no way I can escape getting sick.
I am of the nature to die. There is no way I can escape death.
Everything and everyone I love will change. There is no way I can escape being separated from them.
My deeds are my only companions. They are the ground on which I stand.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NANCY BOROWICK

Top: "The Drive to Chemo" Bottom: "Last Touch"

The drive to treatment takes half an hour, and Howie and Laurel Borowick take turns, resting and driving, depending on who's getting treatment that day. In Laurel's final moments, her family assured her that all would be OK.

To the Pure Land and Back

Like the oxherding pictures used in Zen, Shin Buddhism's seven phases of the drowning sailor illustrate the path to enlightenment.

By Kenneth Tanaka
Illustrations by Andrew Archer

Several years ago, at a gathering of American Buddhists of various schools, I introduced myself as a Shin Buddhist to a Zen Buddhist sitting next to me. Smiling, she responded, "So you're the *Christian* Buddhist!" I was quite taken aback, but perhaps I shouldn't have been. It is a view not uncommon among convert Buddhists in the United States, in particular those drawn to meditation traditions such as Vajrayana, vipassana, and of course Zen.

I was about to address my Zen Buddhist neighbor's misperception, but the program started and I lost my chance. Had I been able, I might have mentioned that, like Zen, Shin Buddhism is rooted in Mahayana scrip-

tures and commentaries, some in Sanskrit dating back to India in the first century of the common era. I might have pointed out that Shin, like other traditions, gives particular emphasis to certain scriptural sources—in this case, those known as the three Pure Land sutras, namely, the *Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, the *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, and the *Amitabha Sutra*. And I might have said that Shin—again like Zen and other schools—developed from its scriptural roots a distinct character. Shin Buddhism's distinctiveness centers on the teaching from its founder, Shinran (1173–1263), of a path of naturalness, or *jinen*, for nonmonastic seekers.

As a child, I heard at my temple in California the Shin way described through a parable of a drowning sailor. Over the years, I have developed this parable into what I call the Seven Phases of a Drowning Sailor. In a manner akin to the oxherding pictures used in Zen, these seven phases can help students understand the course of the Shin Buddhist path from beginning to fruition.

PHASE 1

Boarding the Ship

A sailor boards a ship, which departs from the port of a tropical island. After several hours on the high seas, the sailor is on the deck with two of his sailor buddies enjoying the magnificent sunset.

Boarding the ship symbolizes being born as a human being. According to Buddhist tradition, a human birth entails being subject to the suffering, or *dukkha*, of the cycle of samsaric birth and death. On the occasion of his ordination as a monk, Shinran, who had lost both parents at a young age, captured his acute awareness of the evanescent and unpredictable nature of life and the suffering that comes with it:

> *If you assume there will be tomorrow*
> *The cherry blossoms may have scattered*
> *In a tempest during the night.*

On the other hand, human birth is considered extremely rare and fortunate. It is fortunate because humans, of all those in the realms of the six destinies (heavenly beings, humans, titans, beasts, hungry ghosts, and hellish beings), have the best chance of awakening. The rarity of human birth is likened to the chance that a sea turtle that surfaces only once every hundred years would poke its head exactly through a hole in a piece of wood that happens to be floating in the vast ocean. This outlook today serves to inspire Shin Buddhists, who, prior to taking refuge in the Three Treasures, recite:

> *Hard is it to be born into human life, but now we are living it. . . . If we do not awaken in this life, in which life will we ever be awakened?*

PHASE 2

Falling Off the Ship

Without warning, the ship tilts violently, and the sailor and his two friends are thrown overboard. No one on the ship has noticed, so the ship continues on its course. The sailor finds himself trying frantically to stay afloat in the extremely choppy and chilly water. He looks around, but his buddies are nowhere to be seen.

Falling off the ship is analogous to our personal encounter with dukkha. Prior to awakening, Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha-to-be, is said to have encountered suffering on his sojourn from his sheltered life within the royal castle, when he saw a decrepit elderly person, a sick person, and a deceased person. Shinran, too, had his life changed by an awareness of suffering, when, in his twenties, he was beset by a gnawing sense of the unsatisfactoriness of life and fear of his own death.

Our human life, of course, presents its shares of joy and fulfilment, symbolized in this story by the sailors marveling at the magnificent sunset. But unexpected upsets and difficulties can appear at any time. The Buddha outlined eight kinds of suffering; in the case of our sailor, suffering takes the form of "encountering a situation that one hates."

For me personally, my eyes were first opened to life's suffering as a result of the decision by my American-born parents to leave a comfortable life in Japan to return to America. For a 10-year-old who could not speak any English and was unfamiliar with American culture and custom, the sudden change and the challenges of making a new life in a strange country came as a psychological shock. This was compounded by my parents' inability to get along. Like the sailor, I felt as though I had been "thrown overboard."

PHASE 3

Swimming by Striving

The sailor realizes he cannot stay in the cold and choppy waters. He then starts to swim toward an island he saw before he fell overboard, but—having lost his sense of direction—he is not completely sure if he is on the right course. He is an able swimmer and manages to swim for about an hour in the hope that he will reach the island. However, as the fading sunlight gives way to darkness and the water begins to feel even icier and more turbulent, the island is still nowhere in sight.

Soon, with his strength exhausted and his lungs gasping for air, the sailor senses that this could be the end. As despair overcomes him, his energy drains from him like sand in an hourglass. He begins to choke on the water slapping his face and can feel his body being dragged under.

Like the sailor beginning to swim with all his might to reach the island, Shinran embarked on the Buddhist path to find a resolution to his suffering. He was ordained a monk in the Tendai school, and he dedicated himself to rigorous practice. An example of one such practice was *jogyo zammai* ("constantly-walking samadhi"), which required up to 90 days of continuous circumambulation of a statue of Amida Buddha. (Amida is the Japanese, and thus the Shin Buddhist, way of saying Amitabha, the buddha of the Pure Land.) During the circumambulation the practitioners, continually contemplating Amida while reciting his name, barely slept, and when they did they did so standing up, hanging onto a rope suspended from the ceiling of the hall built specifically for this practice. Contrary to a common misperception, monks engaged in Pure Land practices in China and Japan prior to, and often during, Shinran's time were no less rigorous in their training than, say, Zen practitioners.

Despite his enormous efforts, Shinran, realizing that he was not making any significant progress toward the goal of awakening, began to despair. The more he strove, the more he saw the enormity of his afflictions, or "blind passions."

In his seminal work, *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, he wrote:

> *Oh, how grievous it is that I, ignorant stubble-haired Shinran, am wallowing in the immense ocean of desire and attachments and lost in the vast mountains of fame and advantage.*

It was not that Shinran had more afflictions than other monks. Rather, because he was intensely introspective and brutally honest with himself, he *acknowledged* his shortcomings fully. His honesty was fueled by his great determination to realize awakening in this life.

As one can see from the above confession, Shinran realized that he was woefully steeped in the three poisons of greed, aversion, and ignorance. He came to see that all his efforts were ultimately ego-centered and that they consisted in the belief in what he called "self-power." Efforts based on ideas of doing good or being good were bound to engender pride and even a sense of superiority. A spiritual practitioner *filled* with the three poisons while trying to *neutralize* those very same poisons is, paradoxically, caught up in his or her own effort.

As a result of his inability to overcome his afflictions fully despite making enormous effort to do so, Shinran came to refer to himself as "ordinary and foolish," a *bombu*. Shinran's recognition of his bombu nature emerged from the failure of practice based on self-power. In the parable, the sailor, after swimming with all his might to reach shore, represents the way spiritual practice based on the self's efforts to overcome the self leads to failure.

PHASE 4

Letting Go and Floating

The sailor hears a call from the depths of the ocean: "Let go. Let go of your striving! You're fine just as you are!" Hearing the call, the sailor ceases his striving, relaxes, and turns over on his back with limbs outstretched as if lying in a backyard hammock on a lazy summer afternoon. Then, to his great surprise, the ocean holds him up and he finds himself floating!

This phase symbolizes the Shin transformative experience called *shinjin*. Shinjin is at the heart of Shin Buddhist soteriology; it takes place in this life and guarantees Buddhahood upon death. *Shinjin* is a multivalent term that can mean "realization," "entrusting," "faith," "joy," and "confidence." Most Shin writers render it "entrusting heart," but I prefer "awakening." Shinran speaks of the "wisdom of shinjin" and tells us that "Great shinjin is none other than buddhanature." Both wisdom and buddhanature are revealed through the personal experience of awakening.

The content of shinjin involves awakening to two Buddhist principles, namely, emptiness and interconnectedness. Shinran, however, expressed them in distinctively Pure Land terms: emptiness as "the depth of his *bombu* nature" and interconnectedness as "being embraced in Amida's compassion." He expresses in deeply personal and mythic language these two foundational teachings of Mahayana Buddhism.

For Shinran, shinjin was not a simple belief in Amida as a divine being. It entailed wisdom and insight. It is, therefore, not surprising that Shinran equated shinjin with the first stage of liberation, stream-enterer, found in early Buddhist texts and with the first of Mahayana Buddhism's ten stages, or *bhumis*, on the bodhisattva's path, the stage of joy. Although those who reach these stages have yet to overcome the deeper layers of mental afflictions, they have achieved an essential initial level of awakening.

Going back to our parable, in Shin Buddhism the ocean is none other than Amida Buddha. Amida is often thought of as the foundation that supports us from *underneath*, *the sides* and *behind*. Shinran, for example, speaks of Amida as "the immense ocean into which all the rivers of sentient beings flow." Amida constitutes the foundational reality that has been there all along, underneath and around us. We simply fail to notice it because of how we strive. We get too caught up in our effort to reach the island solely on our own power.

Amida is *ultimately* not a divine being dwelling in an unfathomably distant paradise. Amida's essence is ineffable and beyond form. Amida is, therefore, the provisional manifestation of ultimate reality, which is expressed in such mainstream Mahayana Buddhist terms as "suchness" (*tathata*) and "dharma-body" (*dharmakaya*). Shinran also used a term considered unique to him, *jinen honi*, which I render "suchness of naturalness." It was this suchness of naturalness that Shinran had awakened to. Just as the sailor let go of striving and realized that the ocean embraced and uplifted him, with shinjin, one lets go of egoic self-power and awakens to Amida's workings, or other-power.

PHASE 5

Joy

The ocean holds him up without any effort on his part, and the sailor is thus overjoyed. Now the water feels warm and the waves have stilled. The ocean that was about to drag him under and drown him now caresses him. Knowing that he is all right, the sailor is filled with gratitude and happiness.

The sailor was about to drown. When he began to go under, he was struck with a sense of utter terror. Then, when he relaxed and let go, he found himself floating. How could he not be overjoyed?

Further, his sense of joy is accompanied by the realization that he was fine all along. He just didn't know it. The ocean has not changed at all. But because he stopped striving so hard, the sailor's relationship with the ocean was transformed. The sea changed from being a dangerous and frightening enemy to being a friend who embraced and supported him.

Shinran's encounter with the teachings of Honen (1133–1212) revealed a path of naturalness wherein all beings are embraced, even with their blind passions intact. Shinran expressed the profound joy that came upon him with this awakening:

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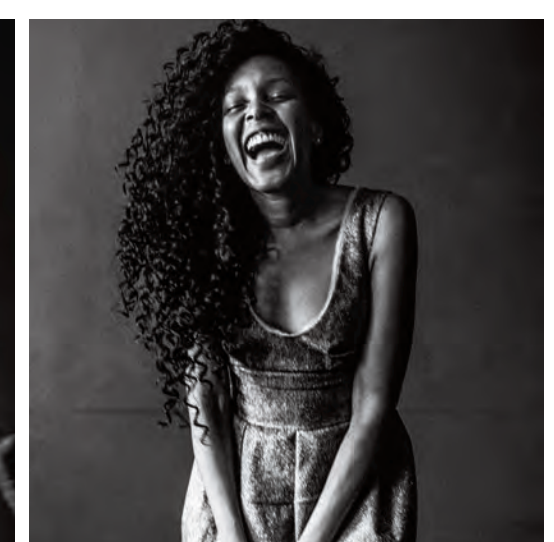
TOLERABLY BLACK



PHOTOGRAPHS BY **MICHAEL AVEDON**

A Nichiren Buddhist artist invites us to reckon with the painful legacy of American slavery with openness and compassion.

"$100.00 REWARD. RANAWAY from the subscriber's farm, near Washington, on the 11th of October, negro woman Sophia Gordon. . . . I will give the above reward, no matter where taken and secured in jail so that I get her again."

So reads a typical ad for a runaway slave, featured in artist Aretha Busby's installation *Tolerably Black*. She screenprints the ads by hand onto cotton muslin and frames them in black shadow boxes or attaches them to hanging nooses, also handmade. The cotton is a reference to the industry for which many slaves labored. "They were giving their lives to the fabric," Busby said, "and I wanted the fabric to give back to their memory." The nooses are a reminder of what often became of those who ran away repeatedly.

With the project, Busby hopes to give meaning to the lives of the runaway slaves whom history has forgotten. Busby is herself a descendant of a runaway slave who made it to freedom in Canada. "These people were the foundation of my existence here," she said.

It's a history that not everyone is comfortable dealing with. As part of the installation, Busby dresses in period costume to interact with visitors, creating a space for open conversation that sometimes leads to pushback. Born into a family that practices in the Nichiren Buddhist organization Sokka Gakkai International, she sees the dialogue, approached with a compassionate heart, as part of her Buddhist practice.

Tolerably Black was most recently shown at Brown University in November 2018. Busby has also presented it to elementary schools in New York and New Jersey, and at press time was planning presentations to coincide with Black History Month in February.

—Emma Varvaloucas, Executive Editor

How did *Tolerably Black* begin? I was trying to learn banjo. There was a Southern band I was interested in called the Carolina Chocolate Drops, and on their website they had a runaway slave ad that said "Looking for my wench." We've all seen runaway slave ads before—I'd like to think so, anyway—but for some reason I had never read one with the same heart. Perhaps it was because I was trying to connect to this music at the time. I looked at it and thought about my great-great-great-great-grandmother, who was a runaway slave. What would her ad have looked like? It started me on a journey.

I started researching the ads and collecting them, and as I was doing that I began thinking that something needed to be done for the people in them. There's no ending to any of their stories—were they caught? Were they hanged? Did they succeed at running away and live a happy, fulfilling life somewhere else? I wondered what the best way was to dignify their lives and their suffering.

Why is the project called *Tolerably Black*? There was an ad for someone named Alfred that struck me for a couple of reasons. One was that it only offers five dollars for him, ten dollars if he's found further away. Then it gets into his physical description: "…about 5 feet high, tolerably black." "Tolerably black" stopped me in my tracks. What the hell does that mean?

We know that this is a physical description—maybe this is just the best way a Caucasian person in 1844 can convey before photography what Alfred looked like. We might never know what "tolerably black" meant in 1844. But I know what "tolerably black" might mean today, in 2019. So I named the whole show that because of the questioning of our identities as people of color in the United States. What are the boundaries? At what point have we crossed over into where we aren't "tolerably" black anymore—when we're uncomfortably black? Do you know what I mean?

I think so, but can you explain? I believe what they're implying here is that the darker your skin, the more offensive you were. That thinking has driven how we as people of color view ourselves, how people who are not of color view us, and from there, which opportunities have been afforded to us and which have been denied.

Those two words—*tolerably black*—seemed like the most important thing. When a black person reads the term they might have a certain thought; people who are not black will have a different one. Those thoughts are the things that we have to talk about, because this "tolerably blackness" is why we often are on different sides of an issue.

My Buddhist practice is about unity; it's about coming together and not differentiating ourselves, about really understanding that we are all human beings, pursuing happiness. So in my view, the more we can share and talk about our feelings about why we believe we're different, the better for everyone.

FILM PHOTOGRAPHED BY JONATHAN SIEKKINEN

COURTESY ARETHA BUSBY

Left: A still image from the *Tolerably Black* film

Above: Busby preparing artwork

What kind of reactions have you been getting from the people who participate in the installation? Pretty much every reaction that you can imagine. A lot of the time people are afraid, and that manifests itself as fear but also as anger. And if you're carrying around something shameful and something about my work ignites that, then you're not going to receive it positively. That's my understanding, and it occurs on both sides. For example, there were two women of color who came to an event at Brown University. They had a really big problem with the nooses. One shared that two of her ancestors were lynched, and she said to this day her family still won't talk about it. And the other woman's family had become sharecroppers after slavery; they still live on that same land. She thought the work was traumatizing. As much as she was uncomfortable, I was like, "Right on." I want people to feel uncomfortable. Otherwise I'd be painting tulips, you know?

It's an uncomfortable conversation for a lot of people, I'm sure. How do you navigate such fraught dialogue? The two women I mentioned who were so resistant—I felt for them. I could see they were trembling while they were talking to me. And I said, "That's why we're doing this." Because if your family can't talk about these things, you can bring it here; this is a safe space for it. By the end, those same two women didn't want the event to end! The catering people came and cleaned up, and we were still there talking.

There's a shame attached to all these stories that hinders people from sharing them. I want to do away with all the shame. I want everyone to feel proud. I want people of color to feel like we can wear our history like a badge of honor. I'm the descendant of slaves, which means that there were some resilient people in my lineage that made some very difficult choices so that I could be here today.

You also actively participate in the installation by dressing up. Does it affect you? There's definitely an emotional toll to it. There's a video we play in the installation that shows me and a friend running away. That day in the park, it took us five hours to shoot what was reduced to ten minutes of usable footage. It's hot and buggy. I'm sweaty. The shoes and the hoop skirt are uncomfortable. And I'm thinking, what was it like for my great-great-great-great-grandmother when she left? You hear rustling in the grass, and you start to think about how everyone these slaves encountered could have been the person who resulted in your demise. And not only that, but they were running into the unknown. It's not like there was Google Maps. You were just relying on the kindness of strangers and I don't know what else.

It sounds like it really connects you with your fourth great-grandmother. I grew up with a girl whose dad had passed away when she was young. She shared with me that when he would take her to the park, there was one intersection where they would stop and wait to cross the street. When he passed away, going to the park together was one of the things that she missed the most. She said she would go, even until she was a teenager, to that intersection, and stand in the place where he stood, because it made her feel really close to him.

I feel like that's the only analogy I have. I mean, clearly, I did not have a physical connection with my ancestors as she did with her dad. But there is this *becoming* them that happens when I dress up.

What is your perspective on freedom for people of color in the United States today? Has it been found? I think it can change from minute to minute. I would like to believe that life is a million times better. I mean, I can make my own choices now, right? But I do also feel that when you make choices that aren't successful, as a person of color you're judged more harshly. And it can also be more difficult for you to get yourself back on track. There's the Christian expression "There but for the grace of God go I." It's not to say that it's hopeless. I believe in hope and I believe that you can turn any situation around. But society isn't super forgiving if you are a person of color.

You mentioned that your whole family converted to Buddhism at once. Of course, I have to ask about how that happened. Yes, when I was 8 or 9. It started with my uncle on my mom's

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PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN PERUGIA / GAIA VISUAL

ALREADY FREE

A swim with Ram Dass is a dip into egolessness.

BY MARK EPSTEIN

"YOU'RE NOT WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE."

The first time I heard Ram Dass say this, I felt something stir in me. It was the summer of 1974 and I was 20 years old. He was 43. It had never occurred to me that I was not my ego, but it seemed obvious once he said it. My obsessive thinking, according to his way of understanding things, was obscuring my soul. He had more to say on the subject, but the more theoretical he became the more my attention wandered. Nothing compared to the raw impact of that first proclamation: I was not who I thought I was. This seemed very true. Then who was I?

I am now 65 years old, and Ram Dass is almost 88. The comment he made, and the questions it provoked, have stayed with me over the past forty-odd years and guided me in my work with my patients. The ego takes refuge in the intellect, but as a famous psychoanalyst once said, "We are poor indeed if we are only sane." Not knowing is better than pretending. As the ancient Buddhist text *Dhammapada* declared:

> The fool who knows he is foolish is, let us say, wise.
> The fool who thinks he is wise is hugely foolish.

In 1997, Ram Dass suffered a crippling stroke that left him paralyzed on his right side and challenged to find the words he needed to express himself. He was no longer who he had thought he was either. I visited him a year later, when I was well into my career. He greeted me with a chuckle.

"So are you a Buddhist psychiatrist now?" he teased me.

It took a long time to enunciate the entire sentence, but he did so with a twinkle in his eye. When I answered positively, he asked me another provocative question. He had trouble getting the words out, but I eventually understood what he was saying.

"Do you see them as already free?" he queried.

His question went right to the heart of what he had taught me all those years before. I did indeed try to see my patients as already free. My job was to help clear away the ego's debris so that they could see it too.

In April 2017, twenty years after our last encounter, I visited Ram Dass for several days at his home on the grounds of an old horse farm on the north shore of the island of Maui. On this occasion, Ram Dass did not question me about anything. I was waiting for

Left: Ram Dass, 87, sits before an altar at his home in Hawaii.

him on the patio out behind his house at sunset, having just arrived from my New York flight. He came gliding down on a little elevator from his bedroom, the back door of the house flying open as he descended, and rolled out in his wheelchair onto the terrace in time for dinner. There was a smile on his face as he registered my surprise at his unanticipated entrance. Three white cranes had just swooped into the yard. His speech was much improved from the last time I had seen him, and he greeted me warmly.

"I'm spending much more time in here now," he told me, pointing to his chest.

He was uncomplaining. He needed help from various attendants to move from his wheelchair to a garden chair, but his mood was chipper and he was clearly an inspiration to the people who were helping him. We had some good conversations about death over the next few days.

"Death is like taking off a tight shoe," a spiritual friend had once told him.

"Soon I will be released from Central Jail!" his own guru had exclaimed after having a heart attack shortly before he died.

I told him how I had spoken to my father about the Buddhist view of death when he was 84 years old and newly diagnosed with a silent but malignant brain tumor. My father, a physician and professor of medicine with no interest in any of my spiritual pursuits, was a scientist who did not believe in an afterlife. I had always avoided talking to him about Buddhism, but I suddenly realized I had advice I had never given. He was surprisingly receptive.

"You know the feeling of yourself deep inside that hasn't really changed since you were a boy?" I said. "The way you have felt the same to yourself as a young man, in middle age, and even now? It's kind of transparent: you know what it is, but it's hard to put your finger on it. You can just relax your mind into that feeling and ride out through it. The body comes apart, but you can rest in who you have always been."

As we were sitting at the dinner table with the members of his household after this exchange, Ram Dass pointed at me and said to the others, "He's . . . he's . . . the real thing." I had been somewhat nervous about visiting for such an extended time (I was there for three days in all), not wanting to impose on him, but his comment made me relax. I was very glad to feel his approval.

Ram Dass during an outing to the beach on a sunny December day in Hawaii

PHOTOGRAPH BY BENEDICTE LECHRIST FOR TRICYCLE

We were indeed a pod of souls, liberated, for an interlude, from the confines of our egos.

THE NEXT MORNING WE TOOK an expedition to the ocean for a swim. It was raining, but Mondays were beach days and the weather app promised that it would be sunny on the other side of the island. The weekly swim was a tradition I had heard about before I arrived, but I could not really envision how it was going to happen. Still, things unfolded smoothly. Six of us piled into two cars, Ram Dass sitting in the front of an SUV with his friend driving him. I sat in the back and listened as the driver played a recording of Ram Dass giving a lecture sometime in the 1970s when he still had his golden tongue. I remembered how enthralled I had been by his storytelling.

"Did you write that stuff out beforehand or just improvise?" I asked him. "The narrative is so well-constructed."

"Improvised," he responded with a hint of pride.

"How did you learn to do that?" I asked.

"I used to listen to my father giving speeches for Jewish charities," he answered, and we laughed and laughed.

When we got to the beach, things moved quickly. The sun was shining and the ocean beckoned. Ram Dass was transferred from the SUV to a makeshift wooden wheelbarrow, a wet suit was maneuvered onto him, and he was wrapped in a life vest. He lay in the wheelbarrow grinning as he was wheeled into the ocean. I was already there, swimming into the oncoming waves, my first taste of the warm Hawaiian waters. I turned just in time to see him being dumped out of the wheelbarrow. I had assumed he would just rest in the wagon and let the sea wash over him, but I was in for a surprise. Floating in the water, supported by his life vest, Ram Dass was able to use his good arm and leg to paddle at will. Lying on his back, he propelled himself around, bobbing and weaving like a jovial old prizefighter. Without my being aware of it, 15 people or so had joined him in the water. I swam toward them. They were an assortment of aging Maui folks, mostly ex-hippies from the mainland by the look and sound of them, familiar types to me but no one I had ever met before. It became clear very quickly that this was a regular thing for them: they came each week around this time to join Ram Dass in the water.

I was struck by their shining countenances. When I had spoken earlier with Ram Dass about death, he had used the phrase "a pod of souls" to talk about the way friendship and love bound people together life after life. The phrase came back to me in the ocean as I looked from one person to the next. We were like a pod of souls in that sea, jostling about as the waves lapped around us. Ram Dass was very happy to be freed from the encasement of his beleaguered body. The other people were glowing too, and I was caught up in the shared enthusiasm. One man ("He's a retired dentist," Ram Dass whispered to me as I swam alongside him) began to call out a Hawaiian chant. I had no idea what he was saying, but the sound rang true and everyone sang a gusty response. The beauty of each of the swimmers hit me deeply. I don't really mean they were physically beautiful—they were not especially handsome—but each one of them was stunningly lovely. I suppose it was the communal happiness that gave me that impression. I was caught up in it: the buoyancy of the sea, the lightness of our bodies, the sun's warmth, and Ram Dass's evident pleasure.

The next thing I knew, everyone was singing:

> Row, row, row your boat
> Gently down the stream.
> Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily . . .

COURTESY RAM DASS

The simplicity of the song made me happy. It was perfect. Soft waves were ushering us toward shore. The group was singing the verses in a round. Ram Dass was paddling himself; the rest of us were rowing alongside him. The waves were gentle as a stream. And the phrase "Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily" came spinning off everyone's tongues like one of those hoop-rolling games European children played after the war. We were indeed a pod of souls, liberated, for an interlude, from the confines of our egos.

Back on shore, Ram Dass was quickly whisked out of his wet suit. He made it clear that he was taking everyone to lunch. An empty Thai restaurant in a nearby strip mall awaited us. The proprietors had clearly seen this group—or one like it—before. They were overjoyed and set a long table for 20. I sat across from Ram Dass, and the gathering stretched out on either side. Everyone was back in his or her personality, and I began to question my earlier impressions of their beauty. There was much commotion as a waitress began taking orders for Thai iced tea. A few people did not want ice; others could not drink condensed milk; many preferred theirs without sugar, and a few asked for Splenda instead. Some people wanted hot tea while others wanted decaf. One woman asked the group to turn off their cell phones since their electromagnetic radiation worsened her arthritis. My judgmental thoughts, refreshingly absent during my watery sojourn, began to flow freely, and I was once again back to who I thought I was. I shook my head wondering how long this was going to last. With the possible exception of Ram Dass, who was more interested in his lunch than in the kvetching around him, we were all swimming in our egos now, myself included.

In the back of my mind the nursery rhyme was running on. I had been so swept up in the rowing and the stream and the delightful sound of the word "merrily" (from the Old English *myriglice*, meaning "pleasantly," "melodiously") that I don't think I had bothered to finish the song in my head. But now I did.

"Life is but a dream."

Ordering the iced tea had been difficult enough for the group: imagine what happened when it came to the soup. Ram Dass ate heartily, though. I was full of disapproving thoughts, but he didn't seem perturbed by any of what was flourishing around him. Later that evening, as we were watching a repeat of *Saturday Night Live*, he remarked on how happy he had been in the ocean. "Yep," he repeated several times. "Yep . . . yep, that was great!" And he nodded his head in the affirmative. Throughout my entire visit he was consistently upbeat. Despite the constraint and discomfort of his long-suffering body, I had the distinct impression that he was already free.

Mark Epstein *is a psychiatrist, Buddhist practitioner, and a bestselling author. His newest book is* Advice Not Given: A Guide to Getting Over Yourself.

Where should a gift be given?
Wherever the mind feels inspired.
—*The Buddha*

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BOOKS

AWAKENING FROM CLIMATE SLUMBER

Can Buddhist theology help save us from climate disaster? The Dalai Lama thinks so.

By Linda Heuman

DALAI LAMA
His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the most prominent spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhist community. In 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advocating for peace in the midst of the Chinese government's oppression of Tibet. In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled his homeland and sought refuge in Dharamsala, India, where he lives today.

Humanity faces an environmental crisis so critical that our survival on earth is in peril. Yet we have another even more urgent problem: most of us go on living as though nothing out of the ordinary is happening. What is wrong with us? Is there something religions could do to spur us to action? If so, what? Is there a role Buddhists could play? To address these questions, in 2011, at the request of the His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mind & Life Institute convened a think tank of more than a dozen leading scientists, interdisciplinary scholars, and theologians at his private residence in Dharamsala, India. Other Buddhist luminaries joined in, including Roshi Joan Halifax, Thupten Jinpa, Matthieu Ricard, and His Holiness the 17th Karmapa. This meeting was the twenty-third Mind & Life dialogue with the Dalai Lama. As is typical of these dialogues, it provided a forum both to educate the Dalai Lama and to solicit his input; it also provided a rare venue to introduce Buddhist perspectives to cutting-edge interdisciplinary scholarship, interfaith dialogue, and public discourse. (Atypically, it focused on a topic unrelated to cognitive science.) *Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence: the Dalai Lama in Conversation with Leading Thinkers on Climate Change*—a skillfully edited and easily readable transcript of the dialogue—shares that important conversation with a wider audience. (Interested readers can also watch videos of the meeting on YouTube.)

"We're all in a kind of trance," says meeting moderator and book co-editor Daniel Goleman in the opening chapter. "Today, we're facing a real paradox: even though we love our children as much as anybody in human history has, every day, each of us unwittingly acts in ways that create a future for this planet and for our own children, and their children, that will be much worse." The struggle to understand, articulate, and address this paradox is a central theme of the book. "I feel that Buddhism and Christian theology, as well as philosophy and psychology, have very important perspectives to offer science," Goleman continues. "Science documents what's happening, but it doesn't necessarily have within it the mechanisms to mobilize people to act in a skillful way."

The book comprises ten lectures and the ensuing discussions. It is divided into three parts: the first part lays out the scientific evidence showing the consequences of human activity on the planet; the second weighs the ethical implications of environmental change; and the third explores effective action. This weeklong conversation traverses a wide range of questions from the factual (What is happening, to whom, and how fast?) to the philosophical (Do future humans have rights?) to the practical (Should we be vegetarians?). It introduces creative metaphors to facilitate action—such as "handprint," a counterbalance to environmental "footprint," which offers a way to quantify the positive impact of our actions. Or "mindprint," which adds intention to the calculation. And it strikes a hopeful tone, not only focusing on what humans are doing wrong but also providing examples of where we are doing it right—such as in Bhutan, where 50 percent of the country is national park, farming is headed toward all-organic, and carbon emissions are on decline.

Environmental scientist Diana Liverman starts off the presentations, summarizing the latest scientific findings on the state of the environment. By means of a series of charts, she demonstrates the growth in human activity and resource use since 1950 and the corresponding increase in environmental degradation—a phenomenon known as *the Great Acceleration*. The acceleration results from two factors: the number of people on the planet (good news: expected to level off at nine billion by 2050) and how much each person consumes (well, that's bad news). Scientists are concerned about multiple environmental tipping points, she explains; if we cross these thresholds, change will be rapid and irreversible. In this context, climate change is merely one of nine looming catastrophes including chemical pollution, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss.

PORTRAIT ILLUSTRATION BY YANN LEGENDRE

We have moved from the Holocene into the *Anthropocene*, Liverman explains, a new geological epoch in which the primary shaping force of the planet is human activity. The emerging understanding of the earth is that all its multiple systems—land, oceans, atmosphere, and living things—and all its multiple processes—physical, chemical, and biological—are entangled in complex ways with each other and with human life and activity. "It is very important to remember that the earth's system is not separate from us, but rather that we are part of it," she emphasizes, introducing a second central theme of the book: interdependence.

Climate science evolves quickly. Between the occurrence of the meeting and the publishing of the book seven years have elapsed, so potential readers might fear the content is dated. Alas, recent facts are no less concerning, so the fundamental issues addressed by the book are still relevant. More complicating for the reader is that the political backdrop of the climate conversation has inverted in the United States since the meeting occurred; now climate-change-deniers govern one of the world's leading polluters. In this sense, the book sometimes reads as a relic of a qualitatively different and more hopeful age. For example, after Liverman finishes her talk, the Dalai Lama offers advice that seems naive in the face of today's political reality. "Global leaders should be exposed to this kind of data so that people who are responsible for countries will become fully convinced of the seriousness of the situation. More awareness needs to be created, particularly awareness in free countries where leaders are chosen through election."

In his repeated insistence that education is the solution to public inaction, the Dalai Lama acts as a foil. His is the voice of common sense. Get people the information about what is happening; explain that changing their way of life is in their own best interest; and of course they will comply. Except that isn't what happens, the Dalai Lama's interlocutors are quick to inform him, explaining that the findings have become politicized, forces of active *dis*information are at work, and even when receptive people get the memo, often they don't respond. (The fact that the commonsense approach fails is an important indication that something is wrong with contemporary common sense, an insight that emerges chapters later.)

If peoples' failure to respond is not caused by a lack of data, then what *is* its cause? We have a design flaw in our brains, Goleman suggests, offering a perspective from evolutionary psychology. After all, we have brains "designed for detecting snarling tigers, not the very subtle causes of planetary degradation," he said, so the danger simply doesn't trip the neurological alarm system. The panelists consider many other possibilities as the dialogue advances. Science is telling people things they don't want to hear; the implications are too severe. Or: the future is too far away; we aren't emotionally moved by it. Or: people aren't convinced by data; statistics just aren't the sort of thing that convinces.

Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence: The Dalai Lama in Conversation with Leading Thinkers on Climate Change
Edited by John D. Dunne and Daniel Goleman.
October 2018.
344 pp., $18.95, paper

Throughout these exchanges, the Dalai Lama demonstrates a faith in science education laudable for a religious leader but misguided in its scientism. "In these modern times, the scientist can sometimes be considered a guru, a person of authority on these issues," the Dalai Lama insisted. "The gurus need to come out and speak." Or later: "I think the best people to stimulate awareness about what's happening and what needs to be done are not the politicians or leaders but the scientists. They are the real gurus in these matters."

When the issue at hand is environmental change, certainly natural scientists *are* the best authorities. But when the matter concerns motivating public response, they are not. The Dalai Lama here is making three common—but telling—category mistakes. First, he conflates all knowledge with knowledge of natural science. Motivation is not a matter of natural fact; it is a matter of human meaning and values, which is the forte of experts like theologians, qualitative scientists, and humanists. Second and third, he misappraises the *kind* of awareness at stake and the corresponding *kind* of response needed—thus missing game-changing distinctions that enter the conversation only when Christian theologian Sallie McFague presents.

To introduce these distinctions, McFague asks her audience to imagine giving up driving or flying. "The shock that we feel when we imagine this causes us to realize how far we have to go in our attitudes and our practices. We human beings are so embedded in the culture of consumerism that being asked to consume less makes us almost gasp. And we do; we stop for a moment, and then we have to inhale and take another breath, and get back in our cars and our airplanes, and continue on."

That feeling of mind-stopping shock is an important indication that peoples' lack of response is not operating at the level of explicit *knowledge* (which thereafter is referred to as "awareness"); it is operating at the level of implicit *assumptions* (thereafter "deep awareness"). McFague puts it like this: "The culture of consumerism is not just a form of life that we can accept or reject. It has now become like the air we breathe, and this is the nature of culture. Culture becomes nature; it becomes natural. It

becomes the way things are; it becomes the world in which we live."

Anthropocene is ostensibly a scientific term referring to an epoch in *natural* history, but it has another important meaning in the context of the humanities, which went unmentioned in Dharamsala. It refers to the corresponding era in *human* history. This meaning of "Anthropocene" is harder to get your head around: it is the era during which nature has been, all along, something humans were assuming it was not. The notion captures an uncanniness and shock, suggests essayist Amitav Ghosh, similar to the moment "when a harmlessly drifting log turns out to be a crocodile." (See Ghosh's book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, which is an excellent companion read.)

Buddhism contains parallels. For example, when we learn the truth of suffering, we might imagine we have acquired knowledge about the world "out there"—that it is in the nature of suffering—but what really matters is what we learn about *ourselves*: we had imagined otherwise; we had it wrong. And gaining that insight is not a matter of acquiring a new fact. Rather, it is relinquishing an illusion.

THROUGHOUT THE INDUStrial revolution and beyond, modern people assumed that nature was separate from humans, inert, predictable, without agency, under our control, and there for our exploitation. That's how we ended up in this mess. But the escalating environmental crisis acts as incontrovertible counterevidence to these assumptions. We now know that nature has never been like that. We had it wrong.

Understanding that there is a connection between nature and humans reveals a further surprise. We had it wrong on not just one but two counts; that is, about both nature and humans. In light of science's new conception of nature, continuing our out-of-control use of resources is illuminated as logically incoherent, morally wrong, and existentially absurd. But questioning consumer ideology—"the culture of insatiable greed"—in turn undermines our very identity. We no longer know who we are in the most fundamental scheme of things, where we fit into the big picture as human beings, or what we should be doing, McFague observed. "Change at this level is very, very difficult, and in fact, most people find it impossible."

We cannot solve the crisis with the paradigm that created it. And this is why education is necessary but not sufficient to awaken public response. Succeeding at that lies not in playing this game better, as it were, but in playing an entirely different game. We need a paradigm shift.

TO IDENTIFY THE KIND OF shift needed, we have to examine the nature of consumer culture. In what manner are we entrenched? What kind of change would abandoning it entail? McFague says, "Consumerism is a cultural pattern that leads people to find meaning and fulfillment through the consumption of goods and services. Given this," she posits, "consumerism is the newest, the latest, and the most successful *religion* [italics mine]."

To adequately address the planetary crisis then, it would seem we need a culture-wide transformation akin to a *spiritual awakening*. Indeed, McFague uses such language when she says, "We need to wake up to the lie held in the current worldview of individualist, selfish fulfillment… We need to wake up to a different worldview, one that shares all our resources with our fellow creatures." Such an "awakening" sounds comparable in scope to a *religious conversion*. "The change has to happen at all levels of our life," she confirms, "personal, what we eat, how we get to work, taxes, car emissions, everything."

In responding to McFague, the Dalai Lama pinpoints what is at stake. There are theistic and nontheistic religions, he observes, "but we need a third religion." As the chapters progress, conference participants sketch an outline of what that "religion" might look like. (Dalai Lama: "One without scriptures, that is based simply on common sense, our common experience, our inner experience, warmheartedness, a sense of concern for others' well-being, and respect for the rights of others.") Thupten Jinpa, the Dalai Lama's primary interpreter, contributes a Buddhist mechanism for facilitating a value-system shift. And the Karmapa adds his personal environmental conversion story, conveying what environmental awakening might look like from a first-person perspective. Creating a new social consciousness to bring about an alternative future might seem like a brazen undertaking, but cutting-edge theorizing of this very sort is already well underway in academic fields like science studies and the environmental humanities. Moving forward, it could be fruitful to connect the dialogue that emerged from Dharamsala more explicitly with that broader conversation.

A reader might begin *Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence* imagining that the role for religions in motivating public response is a peripheral one—on the order of planting trees in monasteries, finding sutras that support environmental ethics, or preaching conservation from the pulpit. But by the end of the book, it is clear that is not the case. In the vision that comes forth from the conference, religion occupies center stage

And in this project, Buddhism could play a leading part. After all, don't Buddhists have experience developing a culture based on a kind of waking up? And how did the Buddha do it? He articulated the problem; identified its causes; established that the problem could be fixed by abandoning its causes; and taught a step-by-step path for doing that. Then he created a community and evolved institutions to support people undergoing that transformation. Might this example not serve as a parallel for how to awaken humanity from climate slumber? The Buddha provided a strategy to recognize and escape from a predicament so existentially dire that we are encouraged to respond as though our hair is on fire. Today, as the Dalai Lama says, in the sentence that closes the book, "The earth is our home, and our home is on fire."

Linda Heuman is a Tricycle *contributing editor and freelance journalist based in Providence, Rhode Island.*

JEFFERY KENT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

BOOKS

Love Passing Beneath Shadows

A playwright and a poet create beauty in the face of death in *Letters from Max*.

By Douglas Penick

BODY, SPEECH, AND MIND, IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION, are often considered as three of our fundamental fields of experience and cultivation. They are aspects of awakening and so are also called the three bodies of Buddha; but, we can equally consider them as aspects of continuity. So there is our continuity as body: things taking physical form in incalculable proliferations of worlds and universes. There is continuity as mind, which is luminous, empty awareness, awareness beyond the limits of form, time, conceptualization. And then, in between, as it were, we have continuity as speech. This is language in the broadest and deepest sense: communicating and the desire to communicate, and our joy in doing so.

Letters from Max: A Book of Friendship is an account of the author Sarah Ruhl's deep, poignant, and sustaining friendship with the young poet Max Ritvo. Max did not live long, but in that time he and Sarah developed an extraordinary bond. This book consists of their correspondence and Ruhl's commentary, and it is an offering of love, commitment, and inspiration. It is also the story of two people whose lives are focused within the domain of speech and a passion for communication. They meet in the world of words, and the deep connection that evolves is inseparable from the ways in which they articulate, explore, and communicate their outer and inner lives.

Sarah Ruhl is a well-known and widely admired playwright. Her plays, including *Eurydice*, *The Clean House*, and *In the Next Room*, have been performed throughout the US and Europe. John Lahr observed in *The New Yorker*, "her plays are bold," and he wrote of "her nonlinear form of realism—full of astonishments, surprises, and mysteries." She has been nominated twice for the Pulitzer Prize, and has been the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, the Laura Pels International Foundation Theater Award, and the Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award. She has written essays on a wide range of topics and teaches at Yale School of Drama. Max Ritvo was a young poet who would, before his short life ended, write extraordinary poems and have a considerable impact on the poetry world.

SARAH MET MAX IN THE FALL of his senior year at Yale, after he had applied for a place in her playwriting class. At the conclusion of the application in which he described his involvement with poetry, he said: "All I want to do is write." His lack of any playwriting experience almost led Sarah not to accept him. She later wondered what "strange parallel universe" she would have inhabited if she had not changed her mind.

Soon after her first meeting with Max, his schedule of medical treatments obliged him to explain that he had had cancer since he was 16, and although he had been in remission, that might no longer be the case. He would occasionally have to miss certain classes. Soon began the decorous and deep unfolding intimacy of mind and heart that is the subject of this book. Max was assiduous in attending class, participating, working to write a play. But when cancer laid hands on him, this was not possible. When Sarah's schedule and family life permitted, she would visit him in the clinics and hospitals during his treatments.

In the contemporary American landscape, cancer is a vast, half-hidden

SARAH RUHL

A playwright, essayist, and professor at the Yale School of Drama, Sarah Ruhl has received multiple awards for her work, including two nominations for the Pulitzer Prize.

MAX RITVO

Writing by Max Ritvo (1990–2016) was published posthumously by Milkweed Editions in *Four Reincarnations*, *Letters to Max*, and *The Final Voicemails*. Ritvo earned his MFA in Poetry at Columbia University's School of the Arts.

domain. (According to a 2018 report for the President's Cancer Panel, approximately 41 percent of Americans will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime and about 21 percent will die from cancer.) Whether this realm of illness, with its poison cures, radiation beams, and radical surgeries, has been triggered by the array of chemicals in our polluted environment, none can or will say. (The same report states that this question has been given a low priority for investigation and funding.) It is a world where aberrant internal biological forms invade the body and proliferate, but they also find a place in their own specially designated buildings, meet their own specialist doctors, nurses, technicians, researchers, are spoken of in their own language. Here is a special delineation of the body's geography, a unique pictorial language of scans, a calculated placement in high-risk protocols, the statistical arcana of fatal prognostication.

The nonnegotiable brutality of cancer and its logic did not allow Max to take for granted the safe regularity of academia or to languish in the short-breathed excitement of the literary world. Instead, he was impelled to throw himself into life with outlandish glee, determination, and astonishing generosity.

Max and Sarah's friendship evolved in visits and correspondence: in their first two letters, they had found an informality and ease. He dreamed of becoming a poet. As his cancer returned and he moved toward surgery, their conversations "about art and life," as she wrote, "took on a new urgency, and our correspondence began in earnest."

From Max, in the hospital: "I'm clinging more and more to my writing as my panic is increasing."

Sarah: "I want you to write in any way that makes sense to you."

Max: "Everything in my life, the fabric of my life itself, is dissolving. You are not. Maybe I am not?"

Sarah to Max (a poem):

Health does not belong to literature.
I wish it did.

Max is a poet.
Max is a poem.
We all become poems
in the end.

MAX GRADUATED, GOT into the writing program at Columbia, and became a rising star in the New York poetry world. Even with the demands of their separate careers, the two grew closer. Sarah commented on a reading he gave at the 13th Street Repertory Theatre in New York, alongside "luminaries like Jean Valentine. At this time Max was full of brio, and hope. The tumors appeared to be stable. He had a book coming out and a wedding to plan. Max's readings were extraordinary. . . . he would rotate, wearing his pink kimono while declaiming poetry, arms outstretched, including everyone in his luminous pink gaze."

Within a few years, Max's cancer returned in force, and he was subjected to new rounds of experimental chemotherapy. Nonetheless, he pressed on, graduating from Columbia and working to complete another book of poetry. He and Sarah discussed writing their letters in a way that might be suitable for a book.

Letters from Max: A Book of Friendship
By Sarah Ruhl and Max Ritvo. Milkweed Editions, September 2018. 336 pp., $26, cloth

Sarah to Max on his poetry: "I think you are bringing us along where poetry needs to go, away from the small and confessional into a big world, the world of death, love, and metaphysics. . . . How lucky I am that I met you and you made me love poetry again."

Max: "Humans are expensive to nature, I'm realizing. Wherever we go we replace nature with art."

Sarah: "Beauty always giving rise to the desire to replicate."

Max (as his condition deteriorated): "My equanimity just has to be forbearance and forgiveness every two or three seconds for the condition I find myself in."

PORTRAIT ILLUSTRATIONS BY YANN LEGENDRE

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Sarah: "I have an aspiration to be one person in your life whom you do not have to comfort through your illness. So don't worry if I cry in a dream or otherwise. The main thing is you."

In 2016, Max weakened as new cancers and new treatments sapped his strength. He wrote Sarah of his fear. She replied: "I do not believe you are only carrying a torch of fear into the night with you. You might think you are carrying a torch of fear, Max, but what I see you holding is a torch of incredible luminosity, bravery, generosity to all those around you, and metaphysical HEART. Big, big, big! Good, good, good! Bright, bright, bright! Illuminating the way in front of you and imparting light to the people you love."

Max: "What if the soul is no more than the success with which we envision one another? What if you make me and I make you, and we need each other to make each other? …We'll know one another forever, however long ever is. And that's all I want—is to know you forever." Around that time, he began writing at an ever greater pace:

. . . and my chest slit with gills
for the new thing
taking over.

I abandoned my mind's garden . . .

It stirs, I bleed. A lesson:
Pain is just panic sitting still a moment.

As my blood pours
it moves the air.
–*"Self Portrait as Jesus"*

Sarah wanted to assemble as many of their letters as possible. Max wanted a short volume organized by topic. He had a horror of a "poor cancer boy and his wise, loving mentor" book. He wrote and apologized for imposing his earlier poems on her; he called them "Barf." And she replied: "I would not have judged your writing in that way, Max. It was *you!* Not words. I saw YOU, Max!"

"I can't believe my luck to be part of something as beautiful as life."

Their letters became much longer and involved with speculation about life, death, meaning, writing, reincarnation, soul, Buddhism, belief, doctrines. Max concluded this interchange: "All spirituality asks is that we put ourselves in situations that feel holy. That take our breath away and make us go: I can't believe my luck to be part of something as beautiful as life."

Max from "The Final Voicemails":

I know you've been waiting for disintegration,
but it just doesn't seem to be coming
. . .
but these mild passions, all surface,
keep erupting now
like acne—or like those berries on a bush.

Don't ask me to name them—
I've never been that kind of guy.
Red berries—sour, sticky.
If you really want to know,
come here, just try them.

Red as earth,
red as a dying berry
red as your lips,
red as the last thing I saw
and whatever next thing I will see.

Max wrote an introduction to their book (what became this book, actually, where Sarah placed it near the end). It is a paean to Sarah and to their friendship. It concludes: "we talked in person, on the phone, and through our letters, and became friends in the deep sense of You Are Not Alone. And we discussed True Love and The Afterlife. And we never figured anything out. And that was what there was to figure out, And now, if I ever hug you, it is Sarah hugging you."

In his last email to her, Max wrote:

Death doesn't seem soon
It seems now
. . .
the book is written
that's the part that actually means life happened.

He died soon after. The day before, he had asked his mother: "Do you think I've fought hard enough?"

IN THEIR CORRESPONDENCE, Max and Sarah often looked at a Buddhist context for life and art. They reached no conclusions about how this might work. Of course, how enlightenment is alive within our ordinary life is an enduring question. Sarah had taken refuge with a nun in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Max was very taken with Zen and wrote a lovely and intriguing essay on the poet and Zen priest Philip Whalen. Whalen's teacher, Suzuki Roshi, once remarked: "I don't know so much if there are enlightened beings, but I know there are enlightened moments."

Here, also from a renowned Zen master, Joshu Sasaki Roshi, is another glimpse of how the awakened state may be present in ways not clearly delineated in doctrine.

A longtime student of Sasaki Roshi's suddenly left for an Indian teacher far less well-known. "What will happen to him?" asked a fellow student.

"Oh," Roshi replied, "I don't think he'll find true love."

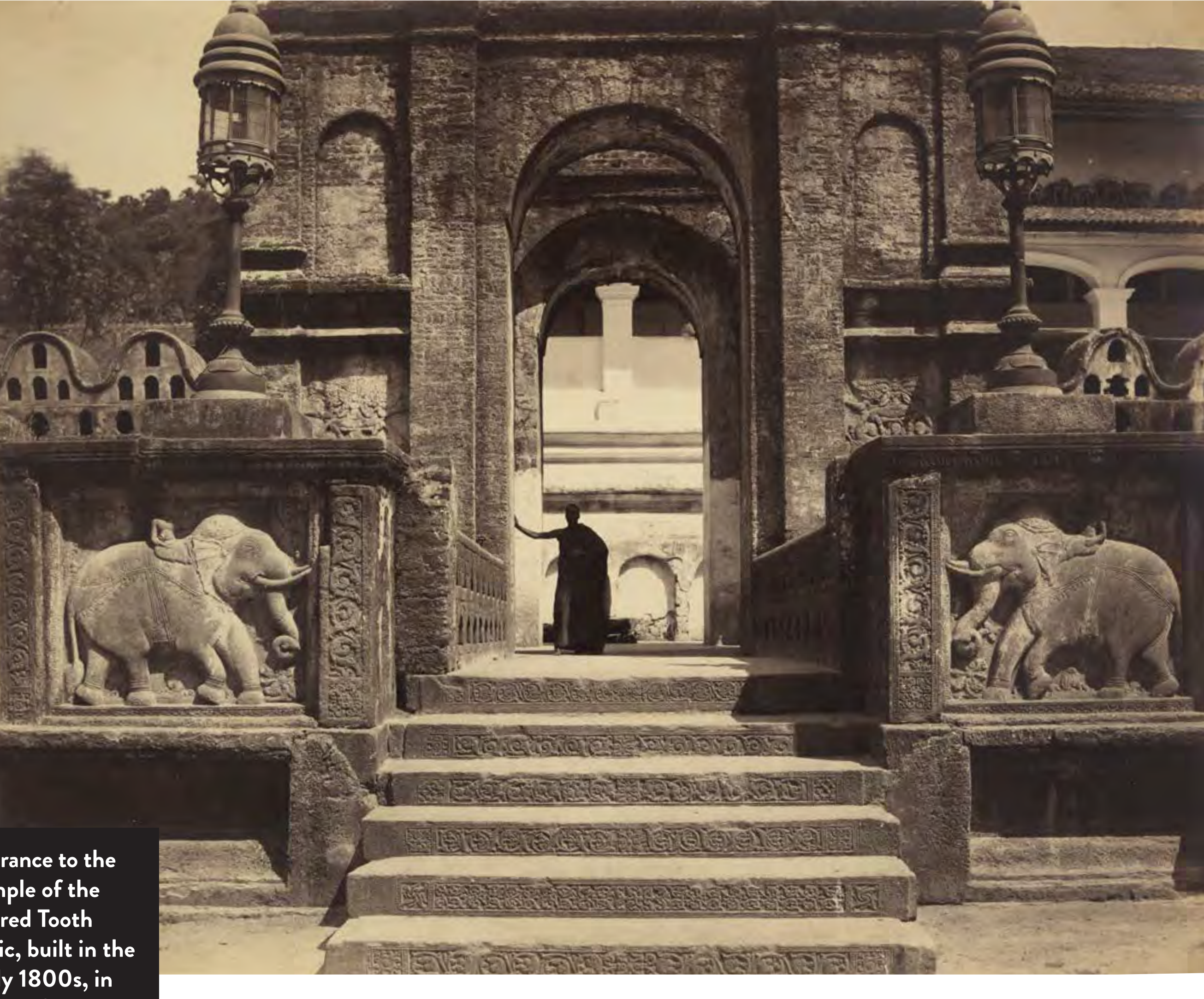
I thought this was a remarkable formulation, but the person who told me the story said:

"Oh, he says that sometimes when he means enlightenment."

"True love?"

"Yes."

***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.*



Entrance to the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, built in the early 1800s, in Kandy, Sri Lanka

LACMA - THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

ART

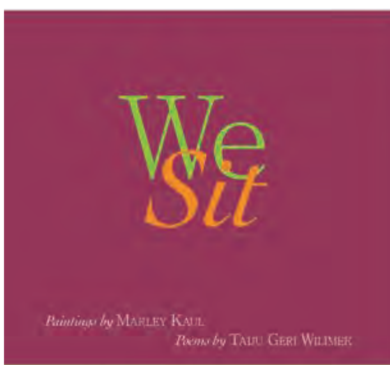
The Jeweled Isle

Long overdue, a new exhibition spanning centuries showcases the richness and diversity of Sri Lankan art and chronicles Buddhism's introduction to the country.

By Albert Johns

THE RAREST AND MOST VALUABLE SRI Lankan jewel of all is not on display at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's current exhibition *The Jeweled Isle: Art from Sri Lanka*. It isn't the 407-carat topaz, or even the 3,339-carat lemon quartz seen shining in the first gallery, along with 19 other exquisite gems mined on the island. Rather, it is the tooth relic of the Buddha, sent from India in the 4th century, whose history was closely interwoven with the royal families of Sri Lanka and their ruling capitals.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) exhibition is organized chronologically into three sections, based on three successive capital cities, each of which once housed the sacred tooth relic. More than 240 objects on



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Day wanes
while
the full moon
brings me
close to bursting.
—Taiju Geri Wilimek

display tell the story of Buddhism's introduction to Sri Lanka, including its accommodation of indigenous deities and beliefs, its interaction with Hinduism, and its ties to Indian culture and visual forms. The objects also show the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial influences on Sri Lankan culture, the development of Sri Lankan decorative traditions, the richness of its courtly arts, and, last but not least, the legacy of these influences in modern-day Sri Lanka.

Buddha Shakyamuni and Attendants, 18th century, ivory with paint, ebony frame

LACMA - THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART

It was a surprise for this museumgoer to learn that the exhibition is the first comprehensive survey of Sri Lankan art organized by any museum in the United States. Many of the objects on display are from LACMA's own collections—the most expansive and diverse holdings in the US—and the University of California, Los Angeles, the home institution of Robert L. Brown, co-curator with The LACMA's Tushara Bindu Gude, is the only university in the country to teach Sri Lankan art.

A longtime ban on removing art from the island and a 25-year civil war that ended only in 2009 created a gap in Sri Lankan scholarship. A survey of the country's art was long overdue. The result is an ornate, colorful, and diverse panorama of objects and images.

The exhibition's images of the Buddha are perhaps the most intriguing of all. These have a genuine, deep-rooted quality relatively lacking in the colonial pieces. Elegant in repose, seated in meditation, or standing in assurance, these figures emanate reverence and devotion in a way that seems to have been lost once European influences arrived. There is one example, however, of the melding of native and European styles that succeeds in capturing the best of both worlds: a dense, lushly carved 18th-century ivory scene in an ebony frame, *Buddha Shakyamuni and Attendants*. Here the native carver has married a European-style format, a rectangular frame bordering a frontal relief, with pure Sri Lankan imagery: an elegant Buddha figure under an intricately decorated arch, flanked by ornately dressed figures, while two others float above on clouds.

Bright polychromatic figures abound in later and modern artworks as they do in the famous annual tooth relic procession in Kandy, replete with decorated elephants, masses of richly costumed performers, lights, and flowers. Also on display at LACMA are a number of wooden shrine panels from the 17th and 18th centuries whose paintings depict the incorporation of Indian gods, some clearly Hindu, into a protective pantheon of Sri Lankan Buddhist figures.

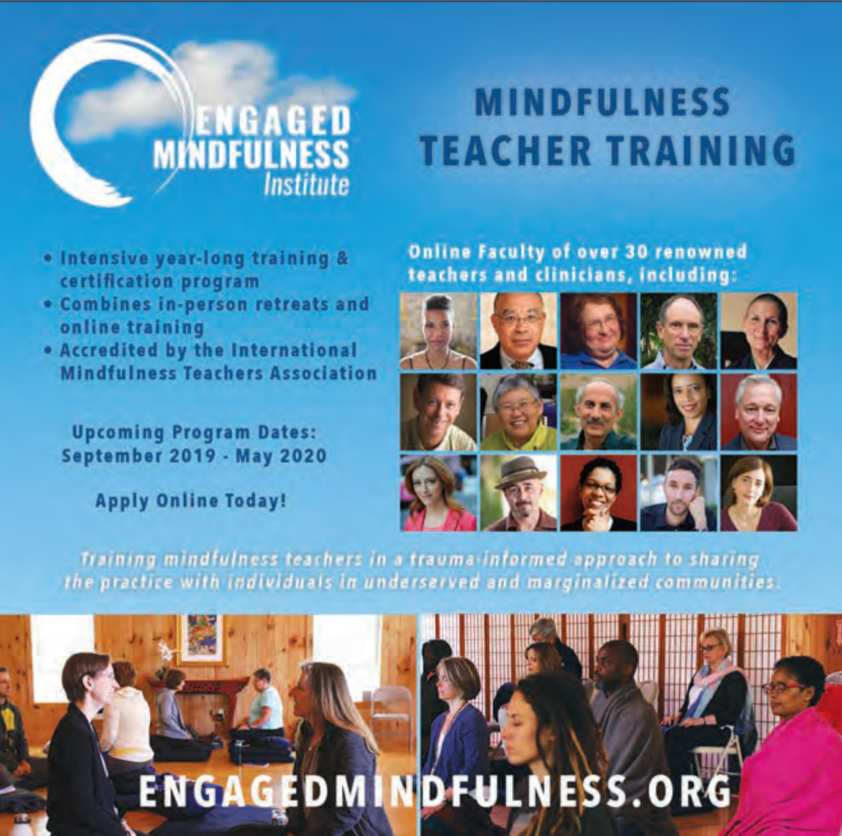
Escher GuneWardena Architecture, the exhibition's designer, came up with the show's layout after examining the objects' historical settings and elements of ancient Sri Lankan architecture. According to their statement, the placement of monochromatic, monolithic forms are meant to suggest ruins extruding from the ground plane. While some of these effects work quietly and effectively on the viewer, I found the resulting dark charcoal-gray rooms rather cave-like and too distant from the verdant, light-filled, and spectacularly beautiful environment that is home to all the objects on display. Where the designers do back certain objects with panels colored in pigments that are evocative of Sri Lankan culture, the effect is lovely, and the pieces come alive.

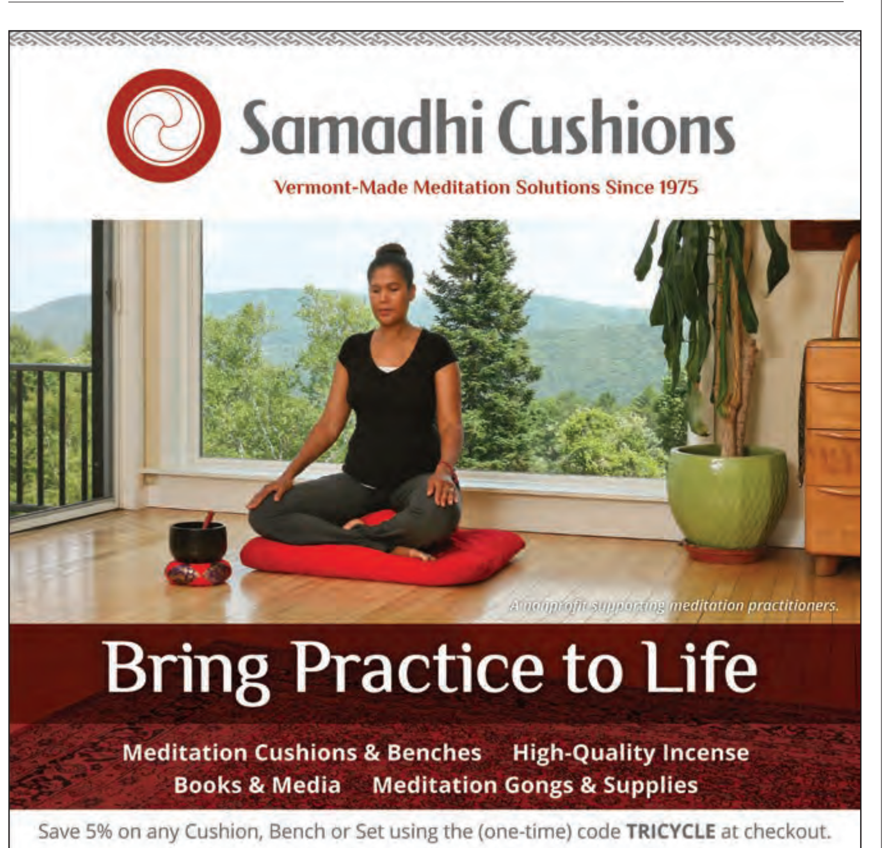
Sri Lanka gained independence from the British in 1948 after more than four hundred years of European colonial rule. The country took its present name in 1972, doing away with "Ceylon," the anglicized form of the Portugese *Ceilao* (based on a native term, *Sinhala*). Offering viewers a broad historical and visual context, the LACMA exhibition is interspersed with late 19th-century British colonial photographs that depict landscapes, sacred sites, monuments, botanical studies, and portraits of Kandyan elites from its modern history.

As a counterpoint to the colonial images, a wall at the end of the exhibition displays 20th-century photos by Reg van Cuylenburg (1926–1988), a Sri Lankan native of Kandyan, Sinhalese, English, and Dutch descent. Taken primarily in the 1950s, these photos present dignified images of fellow countrymen in a beloved homeland. Such is the jeweled isle celebrated in this exhibition—a place whose vibrant artistic culture spans more than two millennia.

The Jeweled Isle: Art from Sri Lanka runs through June 23, 2019, at The Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

***Albert Johns** is a painter and scholar based in Los Angeles. His work involves translation and illustration of premodern Arabic literature.*





THE COCONUT MONK
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

into the large cave in the plaster mountain and handed me the maroon robes (pajamas really) of the community. Having accepted the robes and the rules of the community such as they were, I moved into a tiny hut which we built on top of an old wooden river barge.

No war and a dragon's roar of nonaggression were the most tangible, and often mysterious part of Dao Dua's influence. It seemed to rule the environment, and I mean this quite literally. It is one thing to emanate kindness or manage to deflate a kitchen quarrel, but there was something deeper going on here. There actually was *no war*, or the jagged vibrations of war on this island. Above and around it, yes. Many evenings I used to sit eating pineapple under my thatched hut in the moonlight, watching both banks of the river rage at each other with howitzer shells and tracer bullets whistling back and forth over my head, while the colored lights of Dao Dua's prayer circle embraced the sadness and the huge bells of Phoenix Island slammed, exchanging and diffusing the suffering.

From a logical or pedestrian point of view Dao Dua was quite mad. His presentation was beyond ridiculous, though in fact he danced in a desperate political world surrounded by an electronic battlefield. He made one's mind spin, but his style penetrated the heart. A purely analytical mind could never get purchase on his vision.

WHETHER OR NOT THE PERSON you take teaching from is completely out of hand or represents the truth is often an unavoidable problem. This is more and more the case as we have to spiritually grow up and have to take responsibility for our own truth, rather than hide behind a dead doctrine or any old emperor's new clothes. But in Vietnam, with everyone else in sight trying to slaughter each other, I found it easy to be relaxed about Dao Dua's debatable relevance.

Dao Dua was the epitome of his creation. When I met him he was well under five feet tall. He used to be taller, but he had fallen out of a tree that he was meditating in and broken his back. He asked his disciples not to worry, and get him back up in his tree. His lower back became fused in a sitting posture. His arms seemed to sprout out of his chest instead of his shoulders. His expression mixed a mock-seriousness with a huge approval of everything, except the demonstration of war. The fact of it, however, didn't faze him.

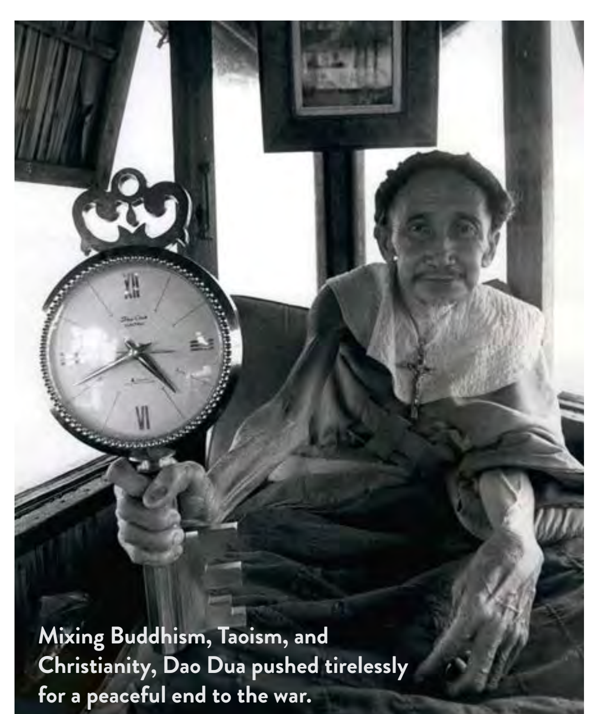
Dao Dua was special. He normally wore his ponytail wound around the top of his head with the tip tucked in at the back. He thought this could symbolize Christ's crown of thorns. Sometimes he let the ponytail hang down in back, which he said represented Maitreya, the coming Buddha.

Dao Dua's expression mixed a mock-seriousness with a huge approval of everything, except the war.

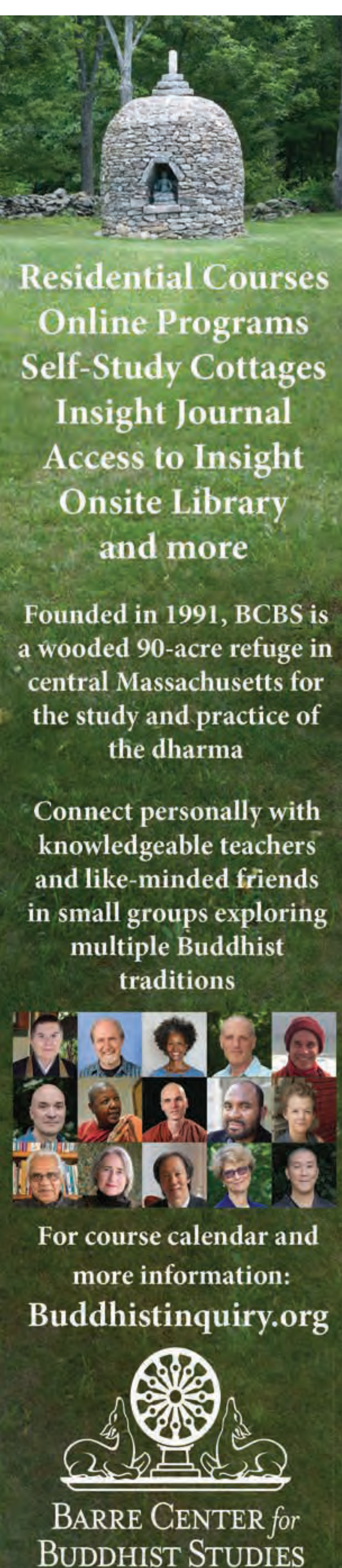
Then again, he would pull it full around like a beard under his chin and stuff it over the far ear. This one always eluded me. Abe Lincoln perhaps? Symbols are always good advertising, but Dao Dua's knees and the overall shape of his body reflected years of really industrial sitting practice and prostrations.

The Coconut Monk always wore a large crucifix over the saffron robe of a Buddhist monk. It rested on a large round saffron collar, similar to what a clown might wear. I'd never seen anything like it. I studiously asked Dao Dua its origin. He scribbled a note which when translated said, "It's really a bib. I invented it. I only eat vegetables, but I always seem to spill my food."

Having discovered the peaceful eye of the hurricane, I felt a little selfish about my niche, but Dao Dua's generosity compelled me to invite friends from Saigon to come down and spend a few nights on the island and enjoy his peace. Most of my friends were combat photographers working for the networks and wire services. They, too, found Phoenix Island and its master the only refuge available when the succor of gallows existentialism ran dry. Quickly Dao Dua realized that he had a built-in public relations department through me and these new war-orphans. In some way


KEYSTONE PICTURES USA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Mixing Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, Dao Dua pushed tirelessly for a peaceful end to the war.



the Aquarian age had delivered AP, UPI, *Time* and *Newsweek,* CBS, the BBC, and French television, as well as *National Geographic,* into his lap.

One full-moon night Dao Dua decided to make a move. I was awakened at about 4:00 a.m. by my friend Dao Phuc, the Coconut Monk's only English-speaking devotee. The wind was blowing small ripples across the Mekong, and Phuc threw his cloak over me against the chill as we walked across the wide prayer circle to the plaster mountain. The morning star had risen over the river palms but the moon was still up and Dao Dua was eating his breakfast of coconuts and hot red peppers. He wanted me to go to Saigon and arrange for my journalist friends to come to lunch as his guests in Saigon's Chinese suburb of Cholon. My motorbike was already strapped into a sampan waiting to take me to the mainland. When we hit shore I started out nervously for town. I knew that if Dao Dua were to meet his luncheon date and leave the island, he was risking imprisonment. As for myself, I was risking my visa and general credibility. In a way, it was really like being Soupy Sales's press attaché.

I contacted everybody I had ever brought to the island, many of whom had grown to love the Coconut Monk. The lunch was a huge feast prepared and served by some of Dao Dua's Saigon-based devotees who ran a Chinese pharmacy. Dao Dua did not appear at first, but about halfway through lunch he arrived in a 1954 Buick Century with a saffron-painted roof. Though he wouldn't leave the backseat of his car, he handed me an outline of his plans. He wanted my friends in the media to know that on the following day he would arrive at the presidential palace, and then march up the boulevard to the US Embassy to present Lyndon Johnson's emissaries with his updated plans for peace.

From *The Other Side of Eden: Life with John Steinbeck,* *by John Steinbeck IV and Nancy Steinbeck* © 2001. Reprinted with permission of Nancy Steinbeck and Prometheus Books (prometheusbooks.com).

After lunch we all went our various ways. Dao Dua had disappeared in his car, leaving us all apprehensive about the mess that we knew would follow any public demonstration on the streets of Saigon. Dao Dua had managed to get off his island by meeting the car at a secluded part of the river, but his presence in the backseat of his car on a Cholon street had started a buzz through the city.

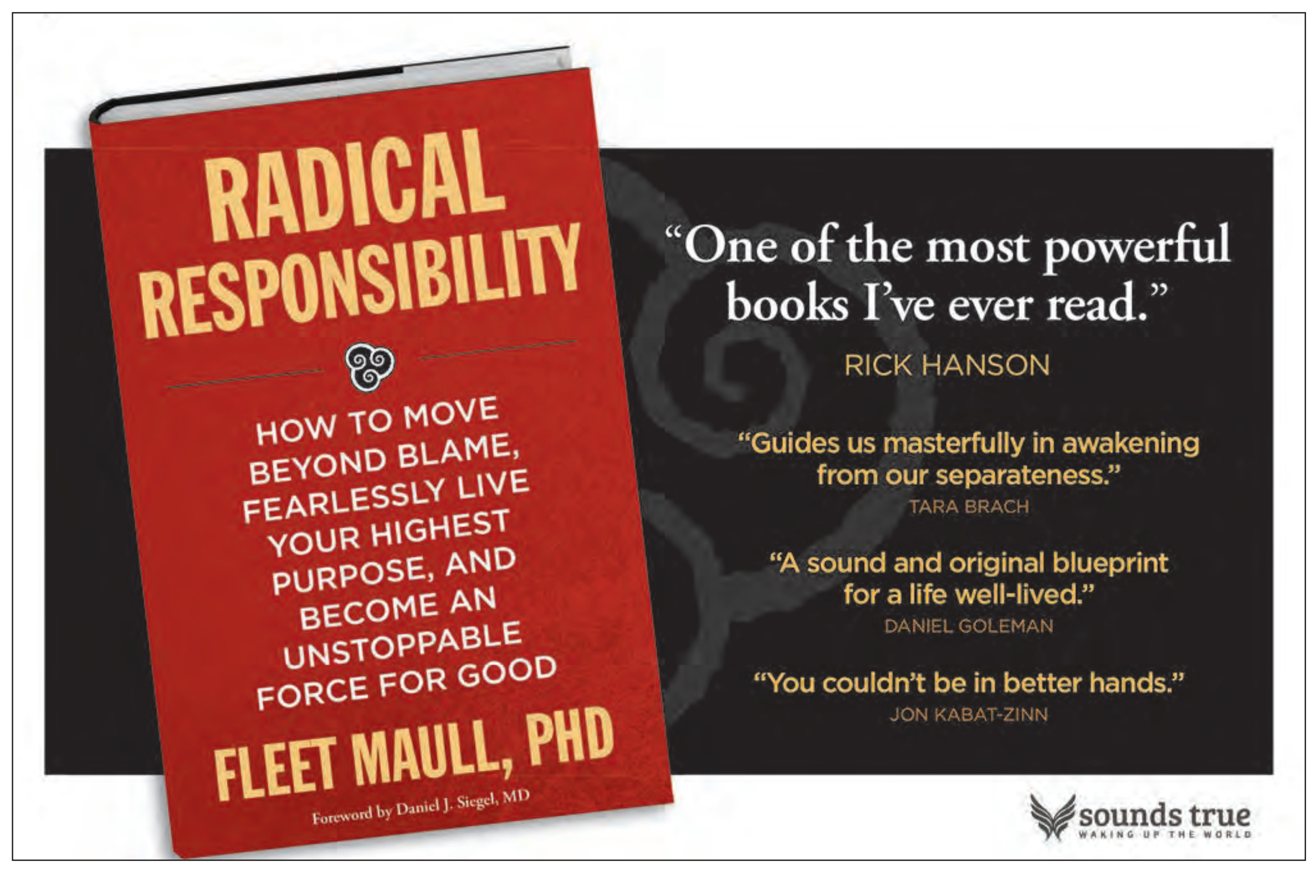
Having seen the head-smashing methods used to break up street demonstrations in Vietnam, I was worried about him. People were passionate and the police often cruel. The solution I thought was to go to the US Embassy right away and warn them that a peaceful monk wanted to drop by and deliver a letter for President Johnson. The political section treated me politely, and after informing them of the next day's activities I left feeling that this little bit of diplomacy would smooth things over. I was very naive. The following day my friends and I rendezvoused in a side street near the palace. Everything looked fairly normal except perhaps for me—a Westerner in maroon pajamas. Dao Dua's car came around the corner and when he stepped out, half the people on the street stopped and stared and began to giggle among themselves, or make prostrations of obeisance to the jungle holy man. The other half turned out to be plainclothes policemen, many of whom had apparently been following me since I left the US Embassy the day before. Police jeeps

> Helicopter gunships began circling overhead to defend US soil from my four-foot-eight-inch teacher.

quickly tore in, blocking the way to the palace, so Dao Dua started strolling toward the embassy. He had brought one coconut with a naturally formed peace sign on the bottom. Actually, *all* coconuts have this, but he thought that there could be the outside chance that the American president might be moved sufficiently to halt the war though this lovely organic sign of universal harmony.

Our corps of friendly photographers and journalists snapped away, as the small band of ten monks and nuns made its way up the street toward the US compound. The police were actually very delicate with Dao Dua. The central command had made a faux pas by sending a captain to lead the operation whose family was from Kien Hoa where Dao Dua was most revered as a saint. In fact, the old man knew him as a boy. Anguish and confusion covered the captain's face as he tried to persuade Dao Dua to please go home to his island and not make any trouble. Dao Dua just kept walking and grinning and as always, pointing his finger to the sky with huge approval as if complimenting the weather or heaven itself.

As we approached the embassy, a company of marines surrounded the building and locked a huge linked chain around the main gate. As I looked up I saw about forty more soldiers on the roof with quad-barrel 50-caliber machine guns staring down at us. Helicopter gunships began circling overhead to defend US soil from my four-foot-eight-inch teacher. At this show, Dao Dua sat down on the sidewalk and



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refused to move. After twenty minutes someone in the embassy began to realize that a little old man was making a ridiculous spectacle out of the police and American military might, all with a single coconut.

Since the old man seemed to have half the press corps cheering him on, the atmosphere began to change into a weird sort of party. Dao Dua started preparing his lunch on the street. By this time the Vietnamese crowd, past their nervousness, were howling with laughter. Eventually, a tall and typically sweatless diplomat came out and accepted the letter through the bars of the gate. He refused the coconut on the grounds that the president of the United States could not accept gifts from foreign dignitaries. Dao Dua was satisfied and moved off. Once again with police escort, he was taken back to Phoenix Island with the threat of more severe imprisonment if he ever set foot on the mainland again. To help make the point, a raid had taken place in his absence, and thirty of Dao Dua's closest monks were arrested.

In his letter Dao Dua had asked LBJ for the loan of twenty huge transport planes to take him and his followers, plus building materials, to the Demilitarized Zone on the Seventeenth Parallel between North and South Vietnam. There, in the middle of the Ben Hai River, Dao Dua would build a great prayer tower and deposit himself on the top without food or water. Along with three hundred monks on one side of the river and three hundred on the other, he would pray for seven days and nights. He assured the American president that this project would bring peace to Vietnam.

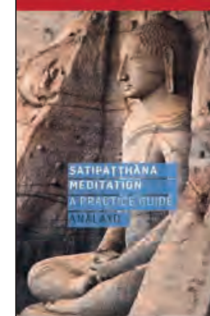
IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS Dao Dua and I played many games together. I was nearly thrown out of the country on several occasions, and it was probably the aura of his wackiness that saved me. Anyway, after this first incident and test of my commitment, I don't think I was ever really taken seriously again as a serious journalist. I, too, was transformed into a nuisance and a nutcase. *Time* magazine ran a picture of me in my robes with the caption:

John Steinbeck IV
A yen for Zen?

In the course of the next few years, with the help of myself and his other new friends, the Coconut Monk escaped his island many times, always to be carted right back by the police, who eventually kept a flotilla of patrol boats circling the island. A police station was established on the edge of the community and soldiers began little patrols on the island. Once in a while, US helicopter jockeys would drop tear gas in the middle of the prayer circle during prostrations, but never once did a bullet penetrate Dao Dua's domain.

It's all over now. Ho Chi Minh is in his grave, and so is Dao Dua. At first I heard that Dao Dua had left his island and moved back to Seven Mountains. This was in 1973. Then later in 1986, in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris I overheard my name and his mentioned by some Vietnamese exiles. The Communists had tried to turn the island into a tourist attraction after the war. Later I learned that the Coconut Monk had been put under house arrest by the North Vietnamese and eventually killed. When I saw him for the last time we didn't say goodbye. He touched his eye, indicating a rare tear. Then grinning, he pointed to the sky where he lived. Memories are obsolete and I can't forget.

John Steinbeck IV (1946–1991) was an award-winning war correspondent, essayist, and author. His relationship with the Coconut Monk inspired his practice of Buddhism for the rest of his life.



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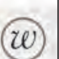

AMERICAN SUTRA
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 51

had not yet finished construction of the ten incarceration camps that were to be used for the duration of the war. While those were being built, Senzaki, along with roughly eighteen thousand other people of Japanese ancestry, had been sent to the Santa Anita Racetrack, where they were forced to live in hastily converted horse stalls. Upon hearing that he would be moving again—this time to the now-completed WRA camp in Wyoming called Heart Mountain—Senzaki wrote another poem, entitled "Leaving Santa Anita":

This morning, the winding train,
like a big black snake
Takes us as far as Wyoming.
The current of Buddhist thought
always runs eastward.
This policy may support the
tendency of the teaching.
Who knows?

By writing that the "current of Buddhist thought always runs eastward," Senzaki is evoking ideas that originate with the Buddha's prophecy that, after he died, his teachings—the dharma—would inevitably be transmitted eastward. In the traditional formulation of Buddhism's eastward advance (*bukkyo tozen*), at least as it is described in Japan, the spread of the religion begins in India, then moves to China and Korea before finding an endpoint in the islands of Japan. But by the late 19th century and early 20th century, some Buddhists who were migrating to the Americas had begun to think of their journey as a further extension of

Summer at Rangjung Yeshe Institute

Early each morning, the Great Stupa at Boudhanath, Kathmandu, is surrounded by hundreds of the faithful doing their daily circumambulations. Nearby, at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery, monks perform puja with trumpets and drums, as all around the neighborhood students enrolled in the Rangjung Yeshe Institute Summer Program rise to breakfast with their homestay families. These students have come from all over the world to study Buddhist philosophy, classical or colloquial Tibetan, Sanskrit, or colloquial Nepali. They have chosen RYI to access the knowledge of highly trained Western academics and Tibetan professors of the monastic college, while living in an immersive language environment.

After breakfast, students make their way through Boudhanath's winding, stone-paved streets to the grounds of the monastery where RYI is located. Students of colloquial Tibetan and colloquial Nepali begin the day with either a master class in grammar or a "boost" class, which employs pedagogical techniques such as drills, games, and charades. These classes alternate with one-on-one conversation practice sessions. Classical Tibetan students have master classes in reading and grammar and review sessions for detailed questions and answers.

Students in the Buddhist Studies course start with a seminar class in academic Buddhist studies, in which they study relevant literature and learn to apply critical thinking skills to their studies. They then take classes with a Tibetan monastic professor who teaches a classical text. In the afternoons they have a meditation class. The course ends with a twelve-day meditation and study retreat where they apply the philosophical study and meditation practice they learned in the classroom.

Sanskrit students alternate between academic grammar classes with Western professors and traditional classes with Nepali paṇḍitas. Similarly, classical Tibetan students study grammar in Western and traditional styles. For students in the Advanced Colloquial Tibetan course, classes are taught completely in Tibetan. Students of Advanced Classical Tibetan attend three master classes and one review class per day, where they read directly in Tibetan while learning more about the historical, religious, and social context of the texts they are studying.

All courses involve four hours of class time per day. After morning classes, vegetarian lunches are provided at the RYI restaurant, giving students an enjoyable opportunity to meet colleagues from other programs and to get to know staff and teachers on a personal level. Many life-long friendships have begun over the tables at the RYI restaurant.

After classes, students often meet in Boudhanath's many restaurants and coffee shops, join the local Tibetan and Himalayan communities for evening circumambulations around the stupa, or simply explore the fascinating streets. Students learning spoken languages then return to their homestays for dinner, which allows them to bond with their hosts, practice the language skills they have learned during the day, and learn about Tibetan and Himalayan culture from the inside. After dinner students often turn in early, knowing that they will once again be woken by the sound of drums and trumpets early the next day.

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this eastward trajectory.

Indeed, once Senzaki arrived at the Wyoming camp, he went so far as to call his makeshift barracks the Tozen Zenkutsu—The Meditation Hall of the Eastbound Teaching. Far from giving up on his faith, Senzaki designated his new home as a Zen meditation hall; a new locus for American Buddhism. Confronted with unthinkable hardships, Senzaki and other Buddhists found that they would have to draw upon the deepest currents of Buddhist thought in order to persist and endure. In this, they were laying claim to the belief that, regardless of circumstance, Buddhism could not only survive but indeed flourish in the United States.

Were it not for Senzaki's Buddhist teachings, which inspired efforts by postwar Zen adherents to preserve the sermons, letters, and miscellany of their teacher whose perspective they valued so highly, it is likely that this contemporaneous record of a Buddhist perspective on the wartime incarceration would simply have disappeared.

Likewise, the diaries, letters, and other fragments of memories about the wartime experience could easily have been relegated to the ash heap of history. But, like the Buddhism they describe, they have endured. In acts large and small, they were preserved by individuals and families who somehow sensed that there was something inherently valuable—and indelible—in the Buddhism that they had been born into or had brought with them.

I CAME UPON TWO SUCH ACCOUNTS in 2000, shortly after the death of my graduate school advisor, Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi, when his widow asked me to help sort out his papers. For over forty years, starting in 1958 when he joined the faculty at Harvard University as an instructor in Sanskrit and later as the university's first professor of Buddhist studies, Nagatomi had mentored generations of scholars of Indo-Tibetan and Sino-Japanese Buddhism, many of whom ended up teaching at leading American universities. I was one of his last students.

His files were, needless to say, voluminous. But buried in his great mass of papers—mixed with dissertation chapter drafts and letters from journals—was a handwritten Japanese document with the name Nagatomi written on it, though not in my professor's familiar script. After a few days, I realized I had come across personal notes penned by Professor Nagatomi's father, Shinjo Nagatomi. Though Professor Nagatomi rarely spoke about it, his father had done pioneering work as a Buddhist priest, first in Canada and then in the United States. The notes I found among my professor's papers included a journal and drafts of sermons Shinjo Nagatomi had delivered in the tar paper barrack that had served as his Buddhist temple in the Manzanar camp in eastern California.

Confronted with unthinkable hardships, Senzaki would have to draw upon the deepest currents of Buddhist thought in order to persist and endure.

Upon request from Professor Nagatomi's widow, Masumi Nagatomi, I spot-translated several selections of the notes. One of them urged the elderly to persevere, despite the loss of their homes, livelihoods, and everything they had worked for as immigrants to the United States. Another exhorted young Japanese Americans to be law-abiding Buddhists loyal to their country, despite the war with their ancestral homeland.

As I learned from Mrs. Nagatomi, at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Masatoshi Nagatomi was fifteen years old and living with relatives in rural Yamaguchi Prefecture, having traveled there without his mother, father, and siblings, who remained home in San Francisco. With the outbreak of hostilities, he found himself unable to return to the United States, and spent the remainder of the war stuck in Japan, where his only news of his parents and sisters would come from the rare International Red Cross letters his father sent him from behind barbed wire.

Conscripted to the shipyards of the port city of Kobe, Masatoshi Nagatomi struggled with others there to survive horrific working conditions and ever-diminishing food rations. Granted a brief leave to visit his relatives, he found himself on a train packed with weary and wounded soldiers that passed through the city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, the day it was bombed. Ordered to close the window blinds, Nagatomi could only peek at the devastation. Amid the chaos of the final days of the war, he resolved to rejoin his family in America as soon as he could.

As Mrs. Nagatomi told me her husband's story, her own wartime story began to emerge. Masumi Kimura (her maiden name) was 10 years old and living with her parents in Madera, California, when the Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor. More than sixty years later, she still vividly recalled the tension and fear that gripped her family and hometown that December day. Word had quickly spread that all the Buddhist priests at the nearby Fresno Buddhist Temple, a temple of the Jodo Shin tradition, had been arrested, and white teenagers had shot up the temple's front door. The board president of the Madera Temple, also Jodo Shin, had also been apprehended by the FBI, a matter of great concern for Masumi's father, who was a prominent board member of the rural temple. Like many residents of the small farming community in California's Central Valley, her parents were *issei*—first-generation Japanese Americans—and Buddhists.

In the wake of Pearl Harbor, in a climate of growing suspicion and hostility toward Japanese Americans, Masumi's father decided to take steps to prove the family's loyalty to America. One day, Masumi was performing her daily chore of lighting the furnace next to their Japanese-style bathtub when her father entered the room. He was

carrying items he had found throughout the house that had Japanese-language inscriptions or "Made in Japan" written on them. Among them were Masumi's precious Hinamatsuri dolls. As tears rolled down her cheeks, she watched him throw the dolls and all the other Japanese artifacts into the fire.

Her father did not burn everything, however. He could not bring himself to destroy the bound edition of Buddhist sutras that had been handed down through generations of the family. Instead, he asked his wife to find boxes and some Japanese kimono cloth while he went outside and dug a hole behind their garage with a backhoe. After wrapping the Buddhist scriptures and the minutes of board meetings from the Madera Buddhist Temple in the kimono cloth, he placed them in tin rice-cracker boxes, carefully lowered them into the hole, and covered them with dirt. By burying them next to the garage, he hoped to be able to find and recover them at some later date.

Adapted from *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War*, by Duncan Ryuken Williams © 2019. Printed with permission of Harvard University Press (hup.harvard.edu).

Shortly thereafter, in April 1942, the Kimuras were ordered to report to the Fresno Assembly Center, which had been set up at the local county fairgrounds. They ended up having to sell their farm to their neighbors for less than one-twentieth of its market value, and, after depositing a single suitcase of their most valued remaining possessions at the Fresno Buddhist Temple for safekeeping, they arrived at the center, where they were quartered in a horse stable designated Barrack E-17-2. They were, however, more fortunate than the majority of Japanese Americans. Instead of being transferred to one of the more permanent WRA incarceration camps, the Kimuras were among the handful of families approved to join work programs east of the military zone, in Utah, where they worked as cheap farm labor for the duration of the war.

After the war ended, the Kimura family returned to Madera in the hopes that they would be able to buy their farm back. But the new owners demanded a sum ten times greater than what the Kimuras had accepted for the farm three years earlier. They had also torn down the garage, making it impossible for the Kimuras to find the precious belongings they had buried near it. Their single suitcase of valuables, which had been stored away for safekeeping, had been lost as well when vandals ransacked the Fresno Buddhist Temple during the war. Unable to raise the money to buy back the farm, the Kimuras went to live with relatives in Los Angeles.

THIS STORY, TOLD TO ME IN the gardens of my advisor's widow in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has stayed with me over the years. Though just one among tens of thousands of stories of Japanese American Buddhist families during World War II, it encapsulates both the loss and the hope that made possible the birth of an American form of Buddhism. Though the Kimuras were willing to let go of their Japanese national identity by burning objects symbolically linked to Japan, the one thing they refused to erase was their Buddhist faith. Indeed, they ended up quite literally placing Buddhism into the soil of America for safekeeping. Like those of Senzaki and many others, their actions demonstrated their firm conviction that their adopted homeland would one day be a place where their faith could grow and flourish.

The Buddha taught that identity is neither permanent nor disconnected from the realities of other identities. From this vantage point, America is a nation that is always dynamically evolving—a nation of becoming, its composition and character constantly transformed by migrations from many corners of the world, its promise made manifest not by an assertion of a singular or supremacist racial and religious identity, but by the recognition of the interconnected realities of a complex of peoples, cultures, and religions that enrich everyone.

The long-ignored stories of Japanese American Buddhists attempting to build a free America—not a Christian nation, but one of religious freedom—do not contain final answers, but they do teach us something about the dynamics of becoming: what it means to become American—and Buddhist—as part of an interconnected and dynamically shifting world.

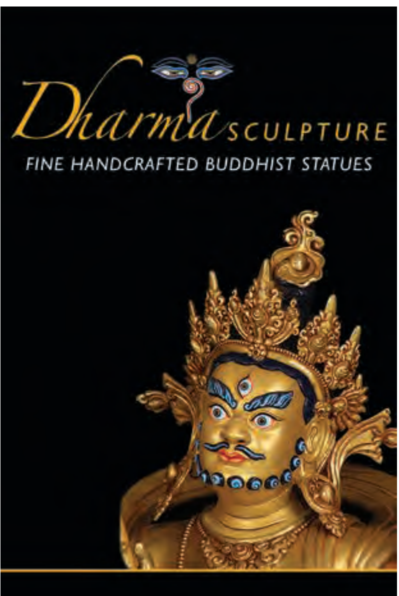
These stories, like Senzaki's poem, constitute an American sutra.

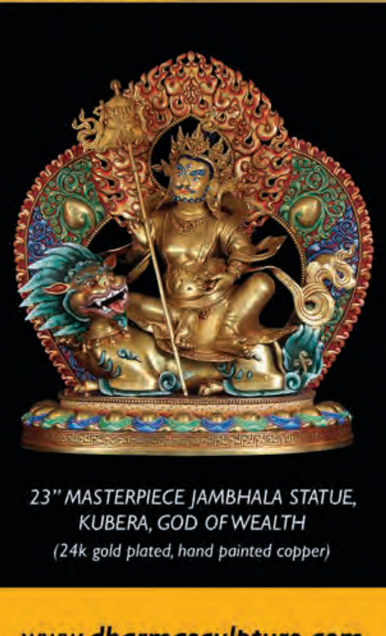
Thus have I heard. ⓣ

***Duncan Ryuken Williams** is a Soto Zen priest and Director of the Shinso Ito Center for Japanese Religions and Culture at the University of Southern California.*

MEET YOSHI MAEZUMI
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55

Does your work as a scientist inform your outlook in areas of life that generally lie outside the domain of natural science: matters of meaning, values, and purpose—in other words, questions about how best to live? One of the things I love most about my work is meeting other people with the same level of curiosity that I have. I think this transcends the boundaries of my own personal research. A few weeks ago, I was invited to speak at the British Ecological Society's Ecology Summer School, which is geared toward inner-city low-income minority college

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students. It was an honor and privilege to work with such intelligent, engaged, and conscious students. They recognize that the upcoming decades present increasing global challenges, including climate change, water and food shortages, overpopulation, deforestation, increasingly large-scale wildfire activity, and so forth. Despite this knowledge, they are optimistic, enthusiastic, and want to make a difference in the world. It is my great privilege to teach and, I hope, inspire the next generation of scientists and global citizens.

When teaching, I often refer to something one of my favorite authors, David Quammen, writes in his book *The Song of the Dodo*: "To despair of the entire situation is another reasonable alternative. But the unsatisfactory thing about despair, in my view, is that besides being fruitless it's far less exciting than hope, however slim." This idea of hope and optimism influences all aspects of my life and shapes how I interact with my students and the world in general.

As the daughter of a prominent Zen master, you, unlike almost all your father's students, were born and raised in an environment in which Buddhism was just part of the atmosphere. How would you characterize your relationship with Buddhism? My earliest memories are of living at the Zen Center of Los Angeles. I remember peering into the zendo when no one was there, the sound of temple bells, the smell of incense filling the air as the students prepared for early morning zazen. Our mom would meditate with us in her lap. When we grew older, we spent Sundays at the Yokoji Zen Mountain Center for service and sitting. I did my first sesshin when I was 14 years old. I clearly recall how difficult it was for me, as a child, to be quiet and sit still. Well, things have not changed much. As I got older, and as a result of the car accident, I found zazen very painful and difficult for my body. As a dancer, I've found that so much of how I interface with the world is through the physical body. I have always found that moving meditation practices, such as yoga, suit me better.

"As a scientist, I am naturally more at home when religious views are not in a contentious relationship with science."

While in college I took a second BA, in Religious Studies. In reading the texts of the major world religions, I was, and still am, struck by the commonality in the basic principles and moral teachings among different belief systems: don't kill, don't cheat, don't lie, be kind, live a good life, and so on. To me, there is more than one way to shine a penny; different teachings and practices suit some people and not others. As a scientist, I am naturally more at home when religious views are not in a contentious relationship with science.

To me, it does not really matter if you are sitting still or moving, as long as what you do helps bring calm and clarity. Be kind and loving to yourself, be kind and loving to others—this practice is what I try to incorporate into my daily life. That said, I was born Zen and raised Zen; I consider my dad's successors to be my aunts and uncles. Zen so infuses my worldview that it would be nonsensical to say I am not a Zen Buddhist, even though I do not formally have a regular sangha or teacher.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY YOSHI MAEZUMI

In my yoga practice, I try to find a balance where I can for a time leave my work and other stresses of life, step on my mat, and simply move and breathe and be present. As I am extremely passionate about my work, I find it very challenging not to bring work home with me: I think about science throughout my waking (and sleeping) hours. Meditation practice becomes crucial for balance.

When you were growing up, did the rather unusual circumstance of having a Zen master dad present particular challenges for you? If so, how did you meet them? My father was away a lot, as much as nine months out of the year, so I really did not spend much time with him while I was growing up. When he came home, he often stayed in his study reading, meeting with his students, resting from jet lag, and so forth. He really did not have much time or energy left to be a dad. Many of his students knew him better than my siblings and I did. After he died, people would tell me stories about the life-changing experiences they had had with him. At first, I could not help but feel envious, but as I've grown older, I have been able to develop wonderful relationships with many of his students. Through their stories and memories, I have been able to get to know him a little better and to see him through their love and appreciation of him as a teacher.

Growing up in a Zen household gave me the opportunity to be curious and ask questions about everything. I was never given very direct answers to my questions; rather, I was encouraged to explore and figure out answers on my own. Today, these qualities inform all aspects of my life, including my life as a scientist. Buddhism instilled in me moral values based on a sense of ownership for my actions and responsibility for their consequences. This idea of cause and effect is often how I observe the natural world and make sense of things around me. Buddhism has taught me much about how to be a good person; science is my passion. I strive to meld these two aspects and live my life to the fullest. My father used to say, "Appreciate your life," and that is precisely what I aim to do. ▼

Hiking to the Lago Ignacito field site in the Bolivian Amazon, 2016

"As I have progressed through my career, I have found that the more I learned, the more questions I had. And the questions kept getting more interesting and interconnected."

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A GOOD ENOUGH DEATH
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64

responsible institutional culture on end-of-life issues. Doctors at UW do not simply present patients with retail options, like items on a menu, and expect them to blindly pick. Its doctors believe they have an obligation to use their clinical experience to act in their patients' best interests, and they are not afraid of making frank recommendations against futile and painful end-of-life treatments. When the meeting was over, the doctor told Anne that her brother "wanted to let nature take its course." He would enroll in hospice. Anne drove him home.

John knew he was dying. He told Anne that he wanted to "feel everything" about the process, even the pain. He took what she called "this Buddhist perspective that if he suffered he would wipe out his bad karma. I said, 'Nah, that's just bullshit. You've done nothing wrong. The idea that we're sinners or have to suffer is ludicrous.'" She looked her brother in the eye. She knew she was going to be dispensing his medications when he no longer could, and she wasn't going to let him suffer. She told him, 'You're not going to have a choice.'"

Anne said she "set an intention": not to resist her brother's dying, but to give him the most gentle death possible and to just let things unfold. On January 15, her birthday, she and John and a gaggle of other family members walked down to Pike Place Market to get a coffee and celebrate. John was barely able to walk: Anne kept close to him so that she could grab him if he fell. It was the last time he left the house.

The next morning, a Sunday, while Anne was sitting with John at his worktable, he looked out the window and asked her, "Do you think I'll die today?" Anne said, "Well, Sundays are good days to die, but no, I don't think it's today." It was the last fully coherent conversation she had with him.

From *The Art of Dying Well: A Practical Guide to a Good End of Life*, by Katy Butler © 2019. Reprinted with permission of Scribner.

HE SPENT MOST OF HIS LAST nine days in bed, as his kidneys failed and he grew increasingly confused. He didn't seem afraid, but he was sometimes grumpy. He had increasing difficulty finding words and craved celery, which he called "the green thing." He would ask Anne to take him to the bathroom, and then forget what he was supposed to do there. His daughter Keely took a leave of absence from law school, and Anne did the same from her job at the hospital. Fellow artists, fellow chanters, former students to whom he'd taught karate, nephews, nieces, and sign-painting clients visited, and Anne would prop him up on pillows to greet them.

Anne managed things, but with a light hand. She didn't vet visitors, and they came at all hours. If she needed to change his sheets or turn him, she would ask whoever was there to help her, and show them how. That way, she knew that other people were capable of caring for him when she wasn't there. "The ones that have the hardest time [with death] wring their hands and think they don't know what to do," she said. "But we do know what to do. Just think: If it were my body, what would I want? One of the worst things, when we're grieving, is the sense that I didn't do enough," she said. "But if you get in and help, you won't have that sense of helplessness."

TIBETAN PRAYER TO BE SPOKEN BY THE DYING

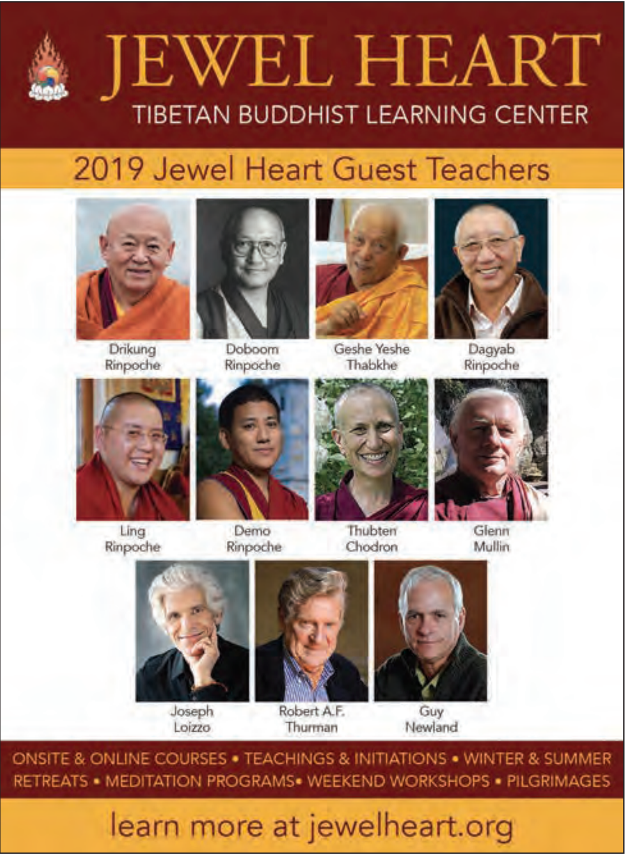
Through your blessing, grace, and guidance, through the power of the light that streams from you:

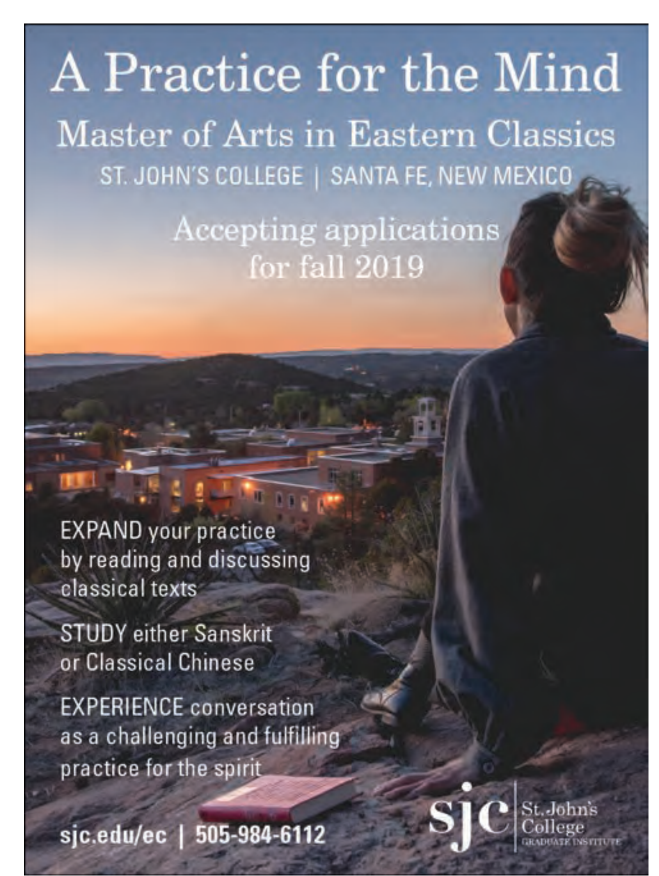
May all negative results from my prior actions and history, may all destructive emotions, may all obscurations, and may all blockages be purified and removed,
May I know myself forgiven for all the harm I may have thought and done,
May I accomplish this profound practice and die a good and peaceful death,
And through the triumph of my death, may I be able to benefit all beings, living and dead.

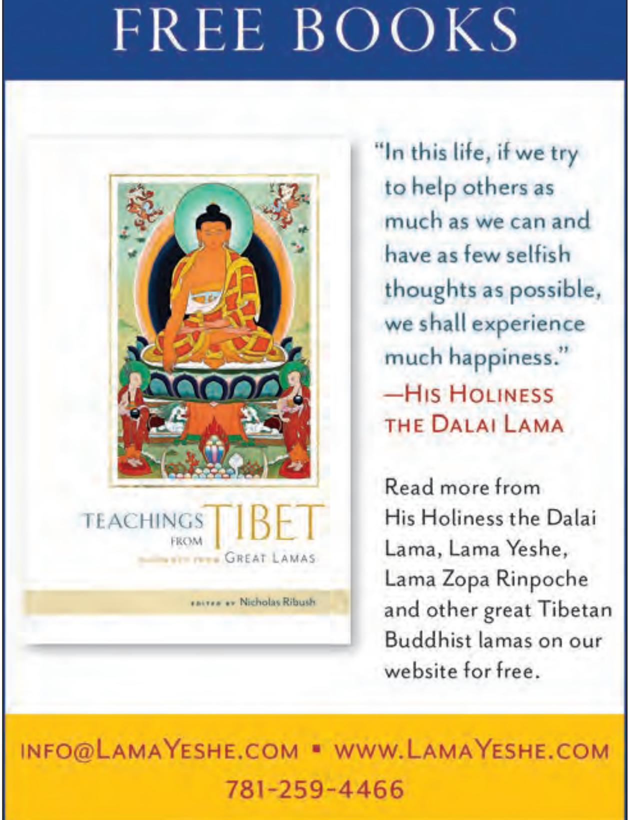
—*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

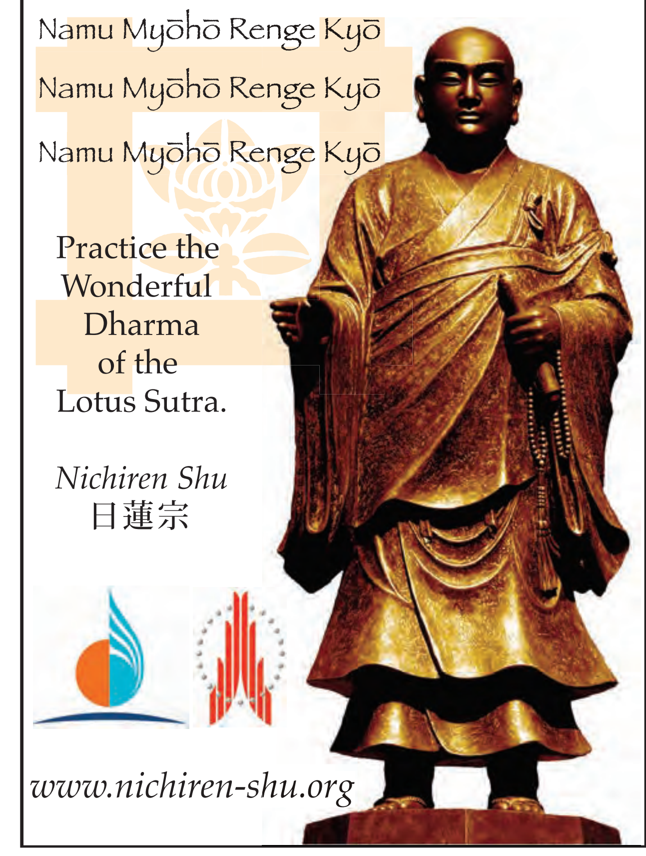
Each day John ate and spoke less and slept more, until he lost consciousness and stopped speaking entirely. To keep him from developing bedsores, Anne would turn him from one side to the other every two hours, change his diaper if necessary, and clean him, with the help of whoever was in the room. He'd groan when she moved him, so about a half an hour beforehand, she'd crush morphine and Ativan pills, mix them with water as the hospice nurse had showed her, and drip them into John's mouth.

One morning her distraught brother Steve accused her of "killing" John by giving him too much morphine—a common fear among relatives, who sometimes can't bear to up the dose as pain gets worse. At that moment, the hospice nurse arrived by chance, and calmly and gently explained to Steve, "Your brother is dying, and this is what dying looks like."









The death was communal. People flowed in and out, night and day, talking of what they loved about John and things that annoyed them, bringing food, flowers, candles, and photographs until John's worktable looked like a crowded altar. Buddhists lit incense and chanted. Someone set up a phone tree, someone else made arrangements with a funeral home, and one of the Buddhists planned the memorial service.

Most of the organizing, however, fell to Anne. It may take a village to die well, but it also takes one strong person willing to take ownership—the human equivalent of the central pole holding up a circus tent. In the final two weeks, she was in almost superhuman motion. She leaned in, she said, "into an element of the universe that knows more than I know. I was making it up as I went along. People contributed and it became very rich.

"That's not to say there weren't times when it was phenomenally stressful. I was dealing with all the logistics, and with my own mixed emotions about my brother. I was flooded with memories of our very complicated relationship, and at the same time I knew my intention was that he be laid to rest in the most gentle way possible."

> **JEWISH PRAYER RECITED AT THE HIGH HOLIDAYS**
>
> **Only God knows who, in the following year, "shall perish by fire and who by water; who by sword, and who by beast; who by hunger and who by thirst." A human being is "as the grass that withers, as the flower that fades, as a fleeting shadow, as a passing cloud, as the wind that blows, as the floating dust, yea, even as a dream that vanishes."**

Hospice was a quiet support in the background. Over the two years of his illness, John's care had perfectly integrated the medical and the practical, shifting seamlessly from prolonging his life and improving his functioning—as thalidomide and the doctors at UW had done—to relieving his suffering and attending his dying, as the hospice nurses and those who loved him had done.

There were no demons under the bed or angels above the headboard. Nor were there beeping monitors and high-tech machines. His dying was labor-intensive, as are most home deaths, and it was not without conflict.

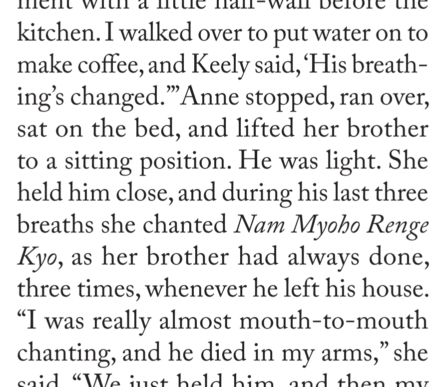
A few days before he died, two siblings beseeched Anne to call a priest to give John last rites in the Catholic church. "It was a point of love for my siblings. They were concerned that John was going to burn in hell," Anne said. "But John hated priests." In tears, Anne called the Seattle church that handled such requests, and the priest, after a brief conversation, asked her to put her sister Dottie on the phone. Yes, Dottie acknowledged, John was a Buddhist. No, he hadn't requested the sacra-

ments. Yes, his children were adamantly opposed. No, the priest told her, under the circumstances he couldn't come. It wasn't John's wish.

Ten days after the family's last walk through Pike Place Market, the hospice nurse examined John early one morning and said, "He won't be here tomorrow." She was seeing incontrovertible physical signs: John's lips and fingertips were blue and mottled. He hadn't opened his eyes in days. His breathing was labored and irregular, but still oddly rhythmic, and he looked peaceful. The hospice nurse left. Anne, helped by John's daughter Keely and his sister Dottie, washed and turned John and gave him his meds. Then they sat by his side. Anne had her hand on his lap.

"It was January in Seattle," Anne said. "The sun was coming through the window and we could hear the market below beginning to wake up. We were just the three of us, talking and sharing our stories about him and the things we loved and didn't love, the things that had pissed us off but now we laughed about. I can't ever, in words, express the sweetness of that moment.

> He was light. She held him close, and during his last three breaths she chanted *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo*, as her brother had always done, three times, whenever he left his house.



"He just had this one-room apartment with a little half-wall before the kitchen. I walked over to put water on to make coffee, and Keely said, 'His breathing's changed.'" Anne stopped, ran over, sat on the bed, and lifted her brother to a sitting position. He was light. She held him close, and during his last three breaths she chanted *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo*, as her brother had always done, three times, whenever he left his house. "I was really almost mouth-to-mouth chanting, and he died in my arms," she said. "We just held him, and then my sister Dottie said her prayers over him."

Anne sat next to her brother and said, "John, I did well."

"I know he would not have been able to orchestrate it any better than how it unfolded," she said.

"It was a profound experience for me. I realized what a good death could be." ▼

***Katy Butler** is a longtime Buddhist journalist, the author of* Knocking on Heaven's Door, *and a* Tricycle *contributing editor.*

TO THE PURE LAND AND BACK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 71

Oh, how happy I am! My mind is firmly planted in the ground of Universal Vow (Amida's workings) and my thoughts flow in the Inconceivable Dharma Ocean.

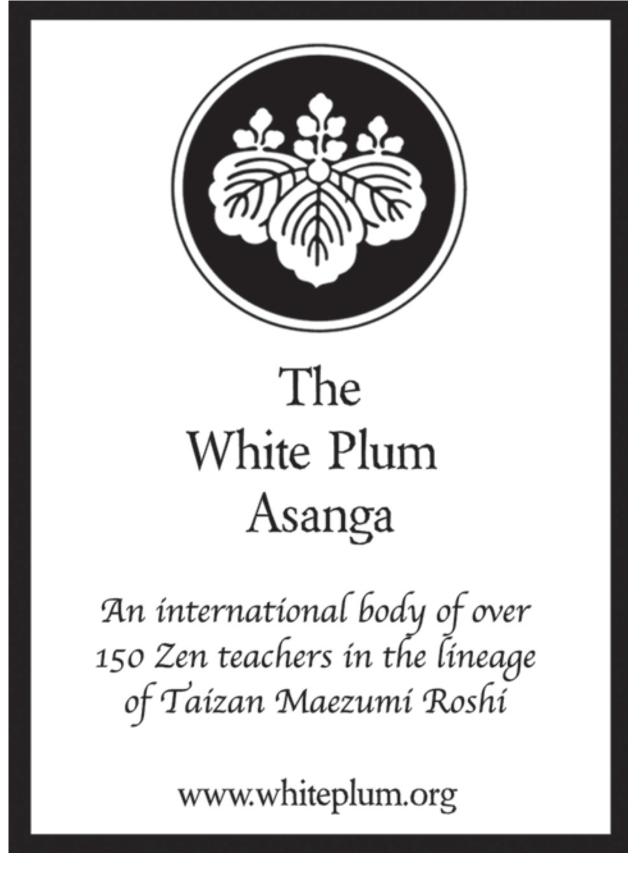
Phase Six: Swimming with Ease and Assurance

The sailor begins to swim again toward the island, but with one important difference. He now trusts the ocean as he would a caring and protecting loved one. He knows that whenever he becomes tired, he can let go, and the ocean will support him just as he is.

Continuing to swim with ease and assurance symbolizes living a life rooted in shinjin. As the sailor now feels safe in the arms of the embracing sea, he finds more room in his heart to make use of his nautical knowledge. He studies the positions of the stars and the moon and the direction of the wind. He then determines with greater certainty the location of the island and swims confidently and energetically toward it. Furthermore, because he is less caught up with concern for his own survival, he is better able to look around him for his sailor buddies. Now, with greater room in his heart, he desires to help by sharing with them his experience of letting go.

> With greater room in his heart, the sailor desires to help his buddies by sharing with them his experience of letting go.

In 1207, Honen and some of his disciples, including Shinran, were exiled from the capital city of Kyoto by the emperor, mainly in response to the charges of the monastic establishment of the time. They claimed that Honen's emphasis on the single practice of *nembutsu* (recitation of Amida's name, "Namo Amida Butsu") appeared to them to ignore or deny the usefulness of essential aspects of Mahayana Buddhism, such as the generating of the aspiration for awakening (*bodhicitta*). They also charged that because Honen taught that all were equally embraced by Amida's compassion, the categorical difference between monk and layperson was undermined. Following exile and being defrocked, Shinran led a life of naturalness and ordinariness, which included getting



I imagine returning as a caring first-grade teacher, a bird with melodious chirps, an enlightened politician, a soothing breeze, dedicated in each birth to assisting others in awakening.

married and having children.

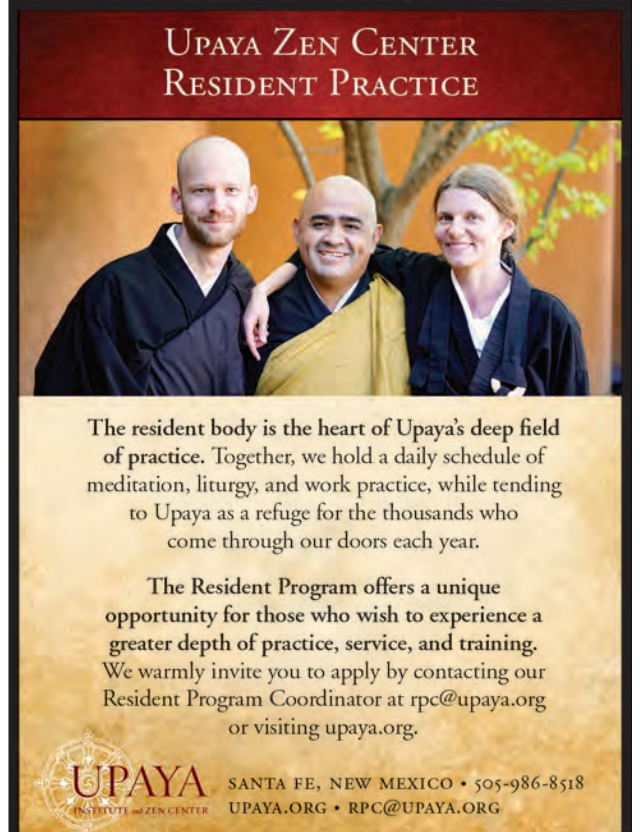
At the same time, he continued to practice and teach others with the dedication of a monk, which led him to describe himself as "neither monk nor layman" (*hiso hizoku*). In my view, Shinran's life of naturalness transcended and encompassed both those categories. Even when he was pardoned and allowed to return to the familiarity and comfort of Kyoto, he headed to a region north of Tokyo, a hinterland with far less Buddhist presence. After some twenty years, he returned to Kyoto. All this time, and until his death at ninety, he devoted himself to the propagation and practice of his Pure Land teaching. He taught those of high and low status, rich and poor, priests and laypersons, those educated and those not. He taught those who were generally considered unfit for Buddhist practice, including women, fishermen, samurai, and even criminals. For Shinran, no one was beyond the reach of Amida's workings.

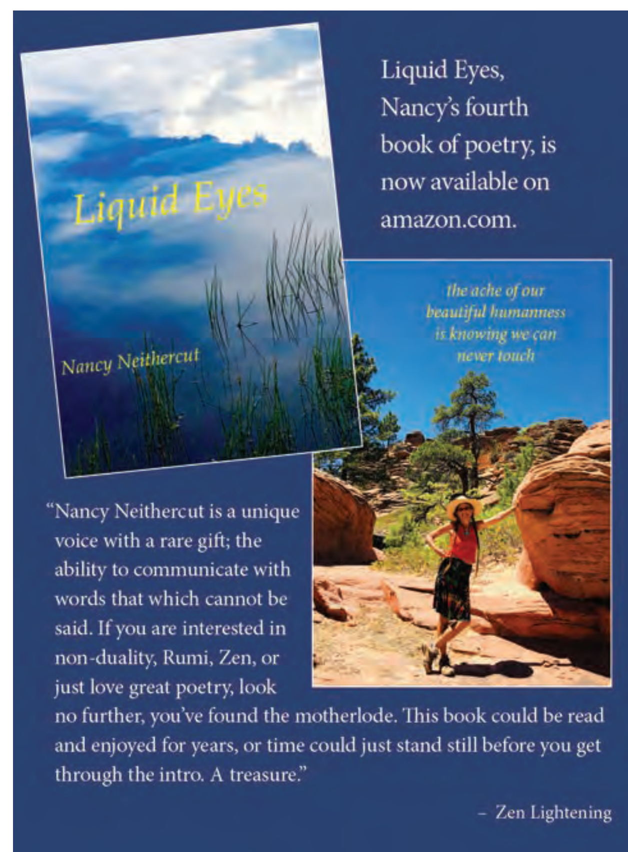
Phase Seven: Liberation

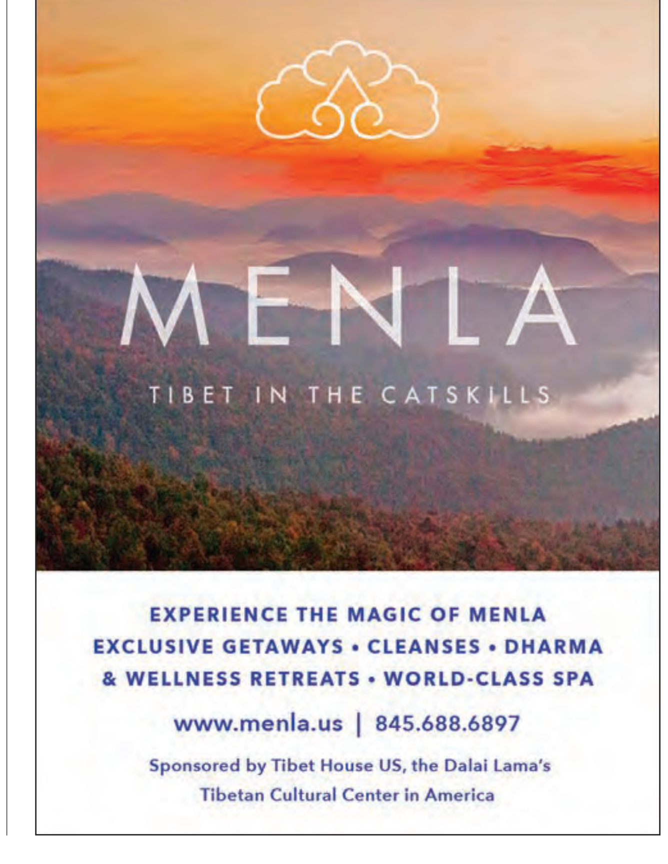
Upon reaching the island, the sailor now takes out a small boat and sets out to locate and help the others who fell overboard.

Reaching the island symbolizes the attainment of full awakening—that is, buddhahood—or birth in the Pure Land at the end of life. Actually, for Shinran, the two are virtually the same, because he taught that when a person of shinjin dies, he or she is born in the Pure Land and *immediately* attains buddhahood. This teaching that one does not spend time in the Pure Land cultivating one's practice toward full awakening is a radical departure from the teachings of earlier Pure Land teachings in India and China. What was key for Shinran was the realization of shinjin awakening *in this life*. But the path does not end there. With the attainment of complete awakening, in keeping with Mahayana cosmology and the bodhisattva spirit of benefiting all beings, one returns freely to the unenlightened realms to assist in the ongoing effort to liberate others.

Shinran does not discuss the exact







ner in which one returns, so I, as a Shin Buddhist, can take the liberty to *imagine* all the possible forms I would like to take. After all, as Buddhas we are endowed with any and all skillful means! I imagine returning as a caring first-grade teacher, a bird with melodious chirps, an enlightened politician, a soothing breeze, and a Buddhist nun, dedicated in each birth to contributing in some small ways to assisting others in awakening.

In closing, it is my earnest hope that my Zen dharma sister mentioned at the beginning may read this essay and change her mind, agreeing that Shin Buddhists are not Christian Buddhists after all; I then will exclaim with joy, "Oh my *God*, that's great!"

***Kenneth Tanaka** is a Jodo Shin Buddhist priest and professor emeritus of Buddhist Studies at Musashino University in Tokyo, Japan. He is also the former president of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies.*

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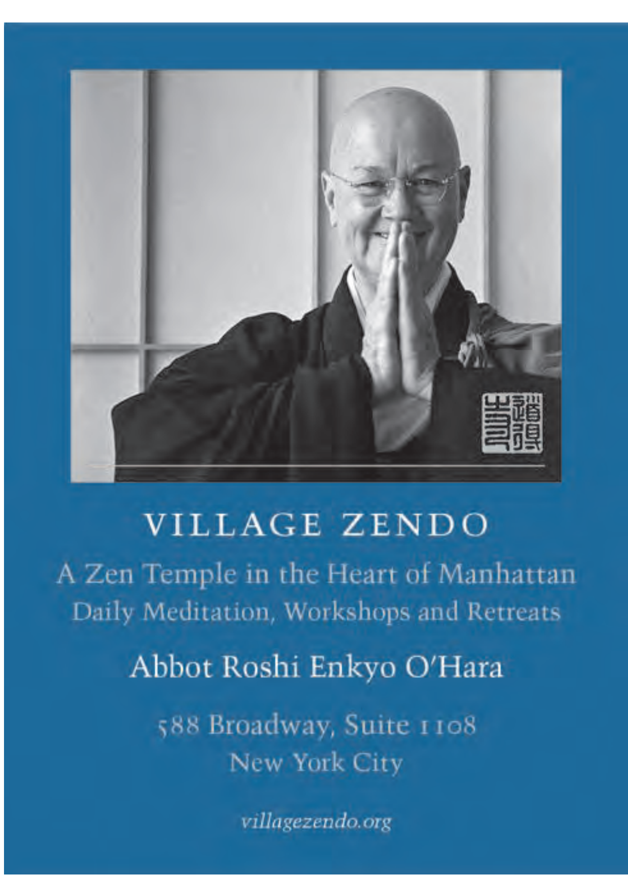
side. He encountered a practitioner of *shakubuku*, the word we use when someone shares the practice with you. I think he was trying to ask her out on a date, and she said, "I'll go out with you, but you've got to come to this Buddhist meeting with me first." He went and said he heard some things that were amazing that he shared with his four sisters. So, adding up them and their kids and so on, it comes to about 20 people.

Do you see any other connections between your Buddhist practice and this work? Regular discussion meetings are a part of SGI, so I'm very used to communicating with people from all walks of life. I grew up with all kinds of people coming to my house and chanting and so on. It's something that I bring to the project: the idea that no matter what color you are, you can be a friend.

There is also an immense respect for history and legacy in our Buddhist practice. We are constantly studying and sharing a lot about the three founding presidents and what they endured. I don't see persecution as a hindrance. I think that's what might be the biggest disconnect for people when they look at the project. Like, "This is horrible. How could you show this to us and make us look at it?" Whereas in our Buddhist practice it's that you go through things that are difficult to endure, and that's the winning, sometimes. There is a feeling of perseverance, to keep pushing forward. "Never give up" is one of our mantras. I think that would be the one connection that I see, not only in the way that I've had to never give up in terms of presenting my work, but also the fact that my ancestors didn't give up, either.



The DHARMA DIRECTORY

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• **American Buddhist Shim Gum Do Association**
203 Chestnut Hill Ave.
Brighton (Boston), MA 02135
(617) 787-1506
info@shimgumdo.org
www.shimgumdo.org
Shim Gum Do Founding Master; Great Zen Master Chang Sik Kim. Zen meditation, martial arts - classes & residential.

• **Barre Center for Buddhist Studies**
149 Lockwood Rd
Barre, MA 01005
(978) 355- 2347
contact@buddhistinquiry.org
www.buddhistinquiry.org
Multi-traditional Buddhist study & practice. Residential and online.

• **Bodhi Path Martha's Vineyard**
West Tisbury, MA
marthasvineyard@bodhipath.org
www.bodhipath.org
Other location at Bodhi Path New York City. 14th Shamar Rinpoche, Spiritual Founder.
Main practice Meditation/Mind Training-Lojong.

• **The Boston Center for Contemplative Practice**
796 Beacon Street
Newton, MA 02459
(617) 435-6641
info@thebccp.com; www.thebccp.com
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Throughout New England
www.boundlesswayzen.org
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• **Cambridge Insight Meditation Center**
331 Broadway, **Cambridge, MA** 02139
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office@cambridgeinsight.org
www.cambridgeinsight.org
Guiding Teachers: Larry Rosenberg, Narayan Liebenson. Non-residential Vipassana retreats, workshops, classes.

• **Cambridge Zen Center**
199 Auburn Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 576-3229
director@cambridgezen.org
http://cambridgezen.org
Zen Master Bon Yeon. Daily practice, monthly retreats, millennial zen group, workshops.

• **Copper Beech Institute**
303 Tunxis Road
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(860) 760-9750
info@copperbeechinstitute.org
www.copperbeechinstitute.org
Brandon Nappi. Mindfulness & contemplative practice, retreats, courses, workshops, meditation groups.

• **Insight Meditation Center of Newburyport**
443 Middle Street
West Newbury, MA 01985
(978) 499-0325
Meditate@IMCNewburyport.org
www.IMCNewburyport.org
Matthew Daniell. Classes, retreats, workshops, community-led groups, weekly sittings, quarterly residential weekend retreats.

• **Insight Meditation Society— The Forest Refuge**
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(978) 355-2063
fr@dharma.org; www.dharma.org
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(978) 355-4378
rc@dharma.org; www.dharma.org
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• **Wonderwell Mountain Refuge**
253 Philbrick Hill Road
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(603) 763-0204
info@wonderwellrefuge.org
www.wonderwellrefuge.org
Lama Willa Miller.
Buddhist meditation and retreat center

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naturalbridge@bodhipath.org
www.bodhipath.org
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Main practice Meditation/Mind Training-Lojong.

• **Bodhi Path Washington D.C. Metro Area**
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dcmetro@bodhipath.org; www.bodhipath.org
Other locations at Bodhi Path Philadelphia, PA & Natural Bridge, VA.
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coldmountainsangha@gmail.com
www.coldmountainzen.org
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Rinzai/Obaku Zen.

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  www.heartcirclesangha.org
  Joan Hogetsu Hoeberichts, Roshi.
  Zazen, retreats, koans, workshops, precepts.

- **Insight Meditation Community of Washington**
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  meditate@imcw.org
  www.imcw.org
  Tara Brach. Vipassana or Buddhist Insight meditation.

- **Philadelphia Meditation Center**
  8 East Eagle Road
  Havertown, PA 19083
  (610) 853-8200
  PhlMedCtr@aol.com
  www.philadelphiameditation.org
  George Heckert. Buddhayana.

- **Soji Zen Center**
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  (917) 856-5659
  info@sojizencenter.com
  www.sojizencenter.com
  Abbot Jules Shuzen Harris Sensei.
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- **Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center, Labsum Shedrub Ling**
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  info@labsum.org
  www.labsum.org
  Joshua W.C. Cutler, Diana Cutler, Directors & Primary Teachers.
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  zengarlandnynj@gmail.com
  www.zengarland.org/about-us/contact-us
  Sensei Cathleen Kanno Dowd.
  Zazen, dokusan, focusing, community service. Interim location

NEW YORK

- **Community Meditation Center**
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  (212) 787-7272
  cmcnewyork1@gmail.com
  www.cmcnewyork.org
  Allan Lokos, Guiding Teacher.
  Insight Meditation (Vipassana).

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  Pine Bush, NY 12566
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  ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org
  www.dharmadrumretreat.org
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  Chan Buddhism, year-round retreats, weekly activities.

- **Empty Hand Zen Center**
  45 Lawton St., **New Rochelle, NY** 10801
  (914) 636-1405
  emptyhand@yahoo.com
  http://emptyhand.org
  Rev. Robert Kaku Gunn, Hoshi, Guiding Teacher. Sitting, dharma talks, classes, retreats, meditation instruction for beginners.

- **Gadenpa Buddhist Center**
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  Long Island City, NY 11101
  (212) 226-1692
  gadenpabuddhistcenter@ymail.com
  www.gadenpa.org
  Ven. Achok Rinpoche. Follows the tradition of Je Tsonkhapa. All are welcome.

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  Loch Kelly. Effortless mindfulness, non-dual &compassion meditation, retreats & awakening training program.

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  christopher.james.hawkins@gmail.com
  www.ordinarymind.com
  Barry Magid. American Zen Buddhism.

- **Rochester Zen Center**
  7 Arnold Park
  Rochester NY 14607
  (585) 473-9180
  info@rzc.org
  www.rzc.org
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  nyc@wonbuddhism.org
  www.wonbuddhismnyc.org
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  yorktownzen@gmail.com
  www.yorktownzen.org
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  registrar@mro.org
  zmm.mro.org
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- **Chapel Hill Zen Center**
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  www.buddhisttempleoftoledo.org
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Josho Pat Phelan, Abbess.
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Theravadin, but all traditions welcome.

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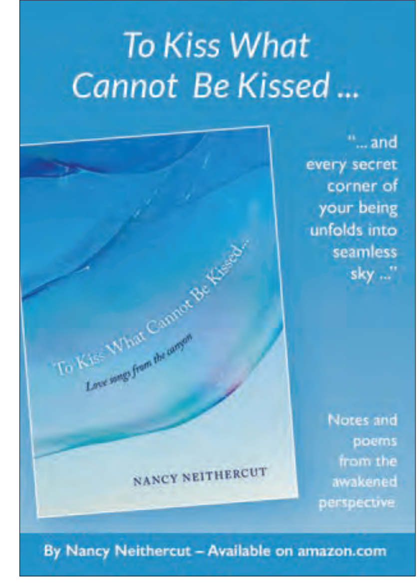

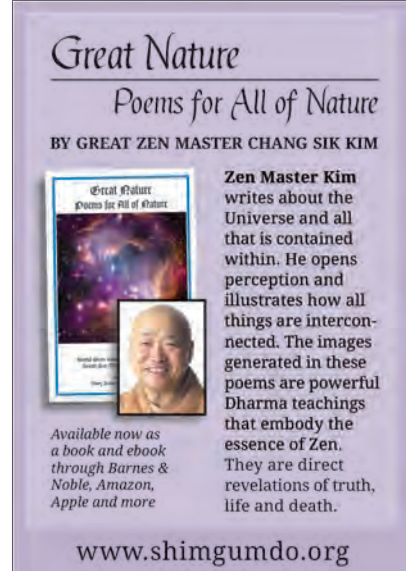

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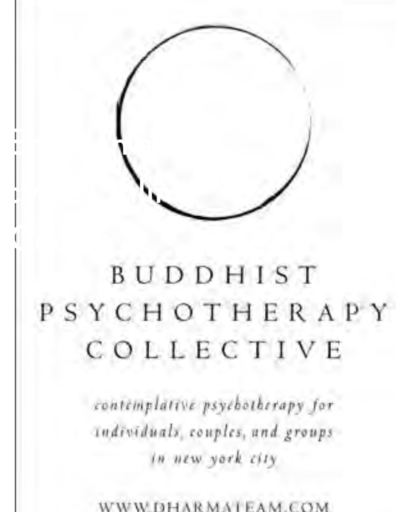

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Parting Words

ARTWORK BY PAMELA PHATSIMO SUNSTRUM; *QUADRA IV*, PENCIL, GOUACHE, AND WATERCOLOUR ON WOOD PANEL, 20 x 20 CM., 2016. COURTESY THE ARTIST

Rumination

I sit up late dumb as a cow,
which is to say
somewhat conscious with thirst
and hunger, an eye for the new moon
and the morning's long walk
to the water tank. Everywhere
around me the birds are waiting
for the light. In this world of dreams
don't let the clock cut up
your life in pieces.

–Jim Harrison

From *Jim Harrison: The Essential Poems*, by Jim Harrison © 2019. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press (coppercanyonpress.org). **Jim Harrison** (1937–2016), an American author, poet, and *Tricycle* contributing editor, was best known for his 1979 novella, *Legends of the Fall*.

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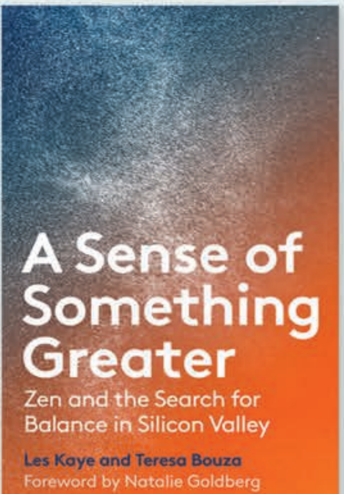

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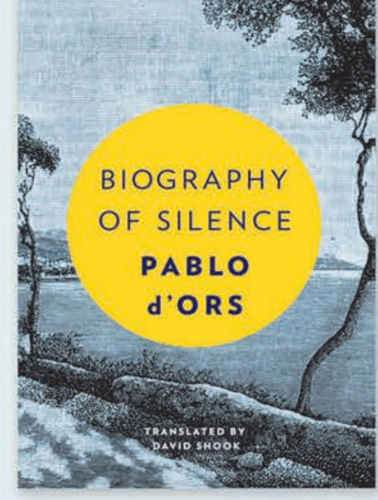

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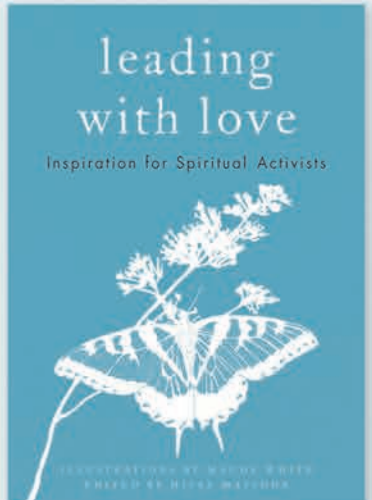

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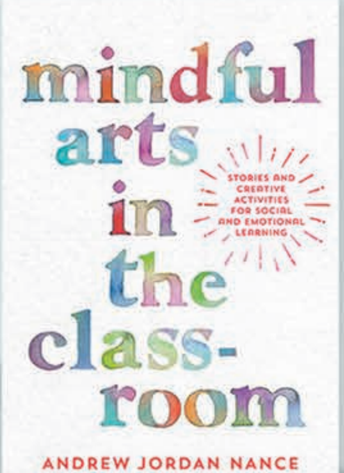

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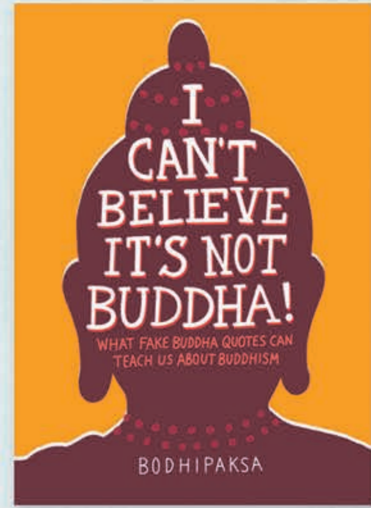

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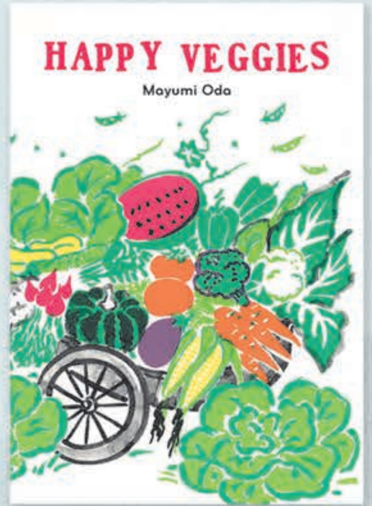

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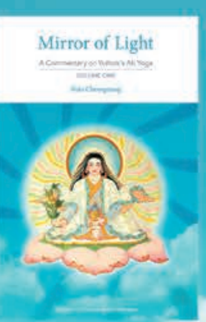

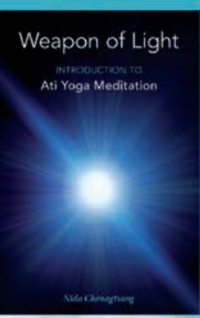

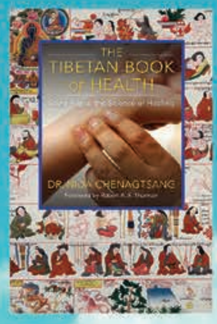

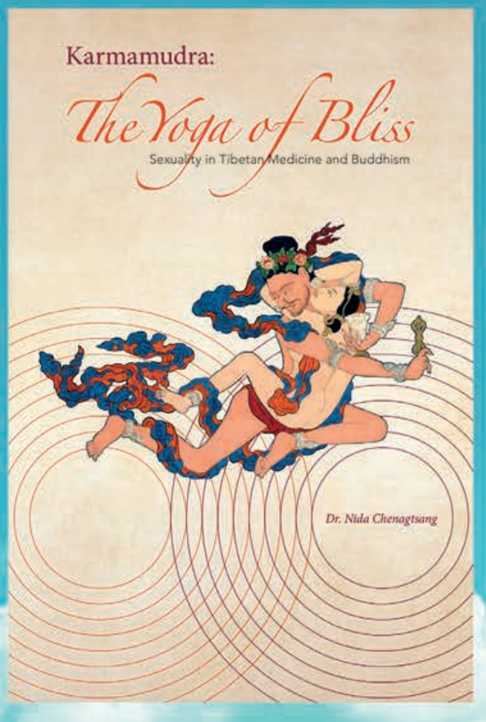

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