UU Sangha

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Taking the Kalachakra Initiation

By Rev. Dr. Judith E. Wright

I have been blessed, as a Unitarian Universalist Buddhist practitioner, with taking the Kalachakra Initiation not once, but twice here in the West.[1] Both times the Initiation was given by His Holiness, the XIV Dalai Lama, with the help of his monks from Namgyal Monastery in India and from the North American seat of His Holiness (also called Namgyal Monastery) in Ithaca, New York.

Over the fourteen days of this initiation, a sacred sand painting entitled "The Wheel of Time" Sand Mandala[2] is created and then used as a central focus of the ceremony. This mandala[3] represents a five level temple that is home for 722 deities. Kalachakra and his consort Vishvamata are placed in the center, on the very top of the temple, embraced in bliss. These two main deities represent the union of wisdom and compassion, qualities of mind imperative to develop as a true Tibetan Buddhist.

During my first initiation, being new to the Kalachakra teachings, I viewed the mandala as sacred art — stunning, beautiful and revealing images from Buddha's time. I came to understand that for the monks and more advanced practitioners, the mandala represents what already exists — an awakened state of mind.[4] A mandala such as this is rich in symbolic meaning, and can be "read" and studied like a text. The purpose of the mandala is to acquaint the students with the tantra[5], and help the student identify with the central deity and its pure surroundings. The Deity Kalachakra symbolizes compassion, and Vishvamata symbolizes wisdom. Their union is the coming together of wisdom and compassion within the practitioner.

Rev. Dr. Judith E. Wright.. First Parish Church Unitarian Universalist of Northborough, Massachusetts.

In practice, the meditator strives to visualize the entire mandala, including all the deities and ornaments in perfect detail, within a drop the size of a sesame seed.[6] This is considered a Buddhist method for improving one's single pointed concentration. This is an amazing accomplishment.

During the initiation, as part of a spiritual purification process, the teacher (His Holiness in this case) leads the meditators into the mandala for the first time, and introduces them to aspects of the enlightened mind in the form of Kalachakra Buddha. The initial Kalachakra teaching was given by Shakyamuni Buddha, well over 2,500 years ago.

Both times I viewed the mandala up close (at the end of the 14 days), I felt the spiritual impact of this mandala on my very being. It is difficult to find the words to express what is experienced, but I knew that these were profound spiritual moments in my life. Since taking the initiation for the first time, I have studied this mandala. Highly skilled Tibetan Buddhist practitioners are able to visualize each of the five floors of this mandala with all of

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Editorial Insights

Some readers surely saw Jane Lampman's article on the rise of American Buddhism in the September 14, 2006 edition of *The Christian Science Monitor*. She observed that "an identifiably American Buddhism is emerging". Her interviews suggested that it's not the particular teachings of the many Buddhist schools that are of most interest to Americans, it's an emphasis on experiential practices like meditation that resonates with most people. Lampman concluded, "One doesn't have to subscribe to a catechism or creed, or be a vegetarian. Nor do people have to give up their religion. That's why some Americans speak of being Jewish Buddhists, for instance." And of course our Fellowship adds "UU Buddhists" to that list.

Lampman cited the number of Buddhists in the U.S. rising by 170 percent between 1990 and 2000 according to the American Religious Identity Survey, with an estimated 1.5 million adherents. The reporter stated that while Zen Buddhism was the major attraction for American converts in the 50's and 60's, now the popularity and influence of the Dalai Lama appear to account for much of Western interest in Buddhist teachings.

In this issue, Judith Wright's article, "Taking the Kalachakra Initiation", ushers us on the sacred path of Tibetan Buddhism with vivid detail and shares the teachings of the Dalai Lama. In the next article, the distinction that Doug Kraft draws between transcendence and transformation, with examples from his travels in India and contemporary American life, is indeed compelling. This issue also includes an excerpt from James Ford's new book *Zen Master Who? A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen*. Deciding which section to feature was no small task! The entire book will be of great interest to our readers and so this excerpt on "The Emergence of Liberal Buddhism" is just a small sample.

The Winter 2007 issue is already underway with plans for another article in the series by Doug Kraft. Also, Laura Milner, a professor of writing and linguistics at Georgia Southern University, will write about the transformative potential of loss for those who give themselves time and space to grieve—and the harm that is done, locally and globally, when we do not attend to our acute and chronic grief. Dr. Milner has been a UU for a dozen years and a practicing Zen Buddhist for nine years. The *UU Sangha* seeks to include many voices and the editor's mailbox is always open at egsmb@yahoo.com. You may also wish to call me on my cell phone at 706-231-2759. **Gerald Bennett, Editor**

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its 722 deities and the different floor plans and wall colorings. I was truly amazed the first time I realized that a meditator uses the mandala as a tool to awaken self through traveling through the mandala in one's mind's eye, and revering each deity along the way.[7] While taking the Kalachakra Initiation, one watches the monks construct this mandala totally from memory over about a six day period from different colored sand.

Such a teaching is aimed not only at benefiting those who create the mandala or attend the initiation. This is an initiation for peace — both within self and the wider world. Open to the general public, the Kalachakra Initiation, while rarely given, has been attended in India by over 100,000 persons at a time when taught by His Holiness. Whole families come, bring picnics, and camp out for days to receive this teaching, this great blessing.

Every morning during the preliminary sessions (11 days) of the Toronto Initiation, His Holiness and his monks chanted and prayed for about five hours,[8] with little or no break. Truly inspiring, these morning sessions opened my mind, and prepared me, and I believe all lucky enough to be present, for the actual initiation (3 days at the end of our time together).

In the afternoon sessions of the Toronto teaching, His Holiness taught for about three hours on Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way.* Nagarjuna, a great pandit,[9] taught of the emptiness of all things, as well as the ever-changing nature of all phenomena. As His Holiness taught in Toronto over the course of these 14 days, he displayed an astonishing ability to vary his teachings according to the skill level of his audience.

For example, one Sunday evening, in a large public teaching, he spoke to over 30,000 people, at the sports center in Toronto. Most of these people were not Buddhist. Here he sat in a white winged-backed chair, and spoke without any notes from his heart, like a grandfather talking to his children. I felt as if he were talking directly to me, and I believe that most in the audience had a similar experience. You could have heard a pin drop — that was how intensely people were listening.

In another context, His Holiness led an interfaith worship service with the religious leaders from Toronto. Here, he was humble yet requested that we all need to work towards respecting one another's religious beliefs.

The third context was where I experienced his teachings daily. He spoke to those of us taking the Kalachakra Initiation (over 7,000 people) with great intellectual depth and wisdom about certain Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist thought, and philosophy.

One of his main themes across different audiences is that what every one desires and deserves is happiness. He stressed that we are all, as human beings, basically the same — mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We all have the same potential to create positive actions, or to go in negative directions, and create harm. Because of our human intelligence, we are able to make distinctions between what is harmful, and what is beneficial — towards ourselves and towards other beings. Some of our choices, according to his Holiness, come from short sightedness. In spite of our potential to create benefit, we may make negative choices that cause us to go in the wrong direction.

Each of us as a human being wants a long and happy life. Tibetan Buddhists believe that a happy existence comes about because of the causes and conditions of our lives. As human beings we are blessed with the capacity to reflect upon the causes and conditions of our lives, and to make changes for better conditions to occur in the future. What is important, according to His Holiness, is our capacity to educate ourselves on how we can become happier.

What is necessary for us as human beings is for each of us to understand that we share basic human values. His Holiness believes that while religions have created great harm, *All religions have the same potential to make a better person.* There is little doubt that all the world religions present its followers with teachings on love, compassion, and forgiveness. Messages are very similar across the world religions: The preciousness of life, the importance of love, forgiveness, contentment, self-discipline. His Holiness believes that there are different approaches, different religious traditions to religious life because of the various dispositions and personalities of people. A particular religious path is more compatible with one

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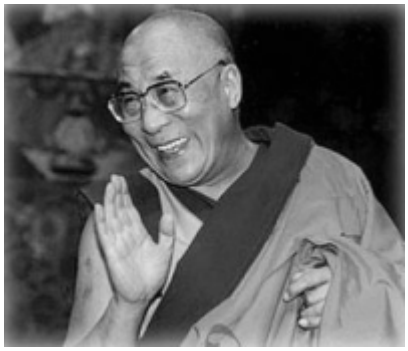
person's personality, and another is more in sync with another's way of being. Thus, for His Holiness, no one religion is **The** religion for every person. Each of the world's religions has the same potential to produce kind and wonderful people.

His Holiness pointed out the need for spiritual discipline within the religious tradition that one is following. He would certainly know, as he is the most spiritually disciplined person I have ever encountered, and one of the highest spiritual beings walking on this earth today.



The 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso). Public Domain.

At the end of the fourteen days of the Kalachakra Initiation, the mandala is ritually destroyed, and then carried ceremonially to a source of water — to Lake Ontario in the case of the Toronto Initiation. As chanting is done, the sand is poured into the lake. There is a profound belief in Tibetan Buddhism (and all of Buddhism) in impermanence — that everything is always changing. This dismantling of the mandala represents on a concrete level, this considered truth of impermanence.

Taking this initiation is considered a great blessing for the practitioners. One is given permission to visualize one's self as Kalachakra, and to gradually transform self and environment from ordinary to extraordinary consciousness. When practiced correctly with pure motivation, this practice can indeed lead to a state of enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. The objective of this practice is to free the individual from his or her own everyday attachments to the concept of an inherently existing self, and to guide one's mind toward a state of clarity and wisdom, so that such a person can become more and more beneficial towards others.

For me, the Kalachakra Initiations were spiritual pilgrimages. Each time, I have been profoundly affected, and my life changed in positive, beneficial ways from taking this initiation and doing the practices that come out of the initiation. I know that if His Holiness offers this initiation again in the West, I will be there. I invite you to consider joining me!

Let me end with this prayer, by Santideva,[10] often spoken by His Holiness:

With a wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
Until I reach full enlightenment.

Enthused by wisdom and compassion,
Today in Buddha's presence
I generate the Mind for Full Awakening
For the benefit of all sentient beings.

As long as space remains,
As long as sentient beings remain,
Until then, may I, too, remain
And dispel the miseries of the world.

[1] My first initiation was in 1999 in Bloomington, Indiana. The second was in 2004 in Toronto, Canada.
[2] See Barry Byrant *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala* (Harper San Francisco), 1992 for illustrations/photes of this mandala.
[3] Tibetan word for mandala is "kyilkhor" and means "center and surrounding environment." Ibid, p. 21.
[4] Ibid, p. 25
[5] "Tantra" means "continuity" or the process of transforming one's impure state of body, speech and mind into a pure state, in order to benefit all sentient beings. The Kalachakra Tantra focuses on practices used to achieve a profound realization of the interconnectiveness of all aspects of our inner and outer worlds.
[6] Geshe Thupten Kunkhem provided me with the comment "within a drop the size of a sesame seed".
[7] There is a video tape made by one of the monks at Namgyal Monastery in Ithaca, New York of the visualization of such a meditation practice.
[8] In his book *How To Practice*, His Holiness states that he chants/prays at least four hours every day.
[9] Nagarjuna is considered, within Tibetan Buddhism and east Asian Mahayana Buddhism to be like a "second Buddha."
[10] Santideva's classic treatise, *the Bodhicaryavatara* or *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* is one of the most widely read and practiced texts in the whole Indo-Tibetan tradition. The Dalai Lama often refers to this text as the primary source of most of the Tibetan Buddhist literature on the cultivation of altruism and mind trainings. See *The World of Tibetan Buddhism* by The Dalai Lama, translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa, p. 59.

Lama (Teacher). Unidentified. Eastern Tibet. Item No. 87650.

Footsteps of the Buddha: Transformation

By Rev. Doug Kraft

A girl with severe spinal scoliosis squats beside a culvert. She uses sand to scrub soot off tin dishes. Ten feet away a man in dingy white trousers (possibly her father?) sleeps on an empty bed frame beneath a tree as music plays softly over a portable radio in the dirt. A cow gazes absently at both of them. Through an empty archway a woman in a vivid blue sari scrubs clothes on a rock. There is no roof on the walls. Apparently several families live in these ruins of an ancient horse stable.

Our narrow path through vegetable fields goes past the girl with scoliosis. The local children walking with us have been friendly to everyone. But they don't acknowledge her. She doesn't look up.

Erika, my wife, pauses next to the girl and says, "Hello." The girl keeps scrubbing. When Erika doesn't leave, she looks up anxiously.

Erika puts her palms together and says, "Namasté," a common blessing and greeting in India.

Our days in India and Nepal were a kaleidoscope of snippets like this. What was that girl's life like? Living in roofless ruins at the edge of a field? Ostracized by peers for a deformity no one could afford to treat? Spirit ready to blossom at a touch of kindness? I don't know if my impressions are accurate or what to make of them if they are.

But that girl tears my heart.

I'd like to talk about keeping our heart open even when it hurts, even when there is nothing we can do about it. I want to talk about having a generous spirit and at the same time keeping good personal boundaries. This is the essence of the path of transformation because it gradually changes how you see yourself.

I want to look at transformation not as an esoteric spiritual discipline in a far off country but as a strategy for living effectively today in our own culture.

Transcendence is different from transformation. The path of transcendence can be pursued with a closed heart: I can ignore poverty, war, stress, loneliness, oppression and other earthly problems. I'm not trying to fix things. I'm rising above them. I can even close my heart to myself. I don't want to get sucked into my physical and emotional needs . I want to evolve beyond having any worldly needs.

Bodhgaya Homestead. Photographed by Doug Kraft.

There is a kind of secular transcendence that is popular in America. We push aside the discomforts of the world by focusing on some small aspect of it. We become absorbed in TV, computers, stereos, books, music, food, alcohol, sex, sports, money, power or other hobbies.

Siddhartha Guatama's spiritual training included deep yogic trance states called "jhanas." To master these, a yogi puts all his attention on refined mental states. He becomes absorbed in these. Secular transcendence induces a low-grade jhanic trance by becoming absorbed not in mental states but in a material object, project or pursuit. When you get on your computer and ten minutes later the clock says an hour has gone by, you've been in a light trance.

The jhanas are very sweet and soothing. Getting caught in our hobby or pursuit can feel wonderful in the moment. There is nothing inherently bad about this. If our nerves are jangled, spirits frayed, or emotions exhausted, it can be healthy and healing to take a break. It's like going to a health spa.

But we can't live forever at a health spa. As Siddartha Guatama learned, the jhanas don't last. Absorption states — whether yogic meditations or secular hobbies — give a bit of respite but no wisdom.

They don't transform anything inside or around us. At best we are refreshed but no wiser. Eventually we come back to the same old same old.

So, we can pursue the path of transcendence without an open heart. It works for a while but ultimately fails. It is more likely to be addicting than enlightening.

The path of transcendence can also be pursued with poor boundaries. "Hey man, we are all one. Need a shirt? You can have mine. I need some money? I'll take

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yours. We'll live in one amorphous love heap." Sometimes the loss of good boundaries can feel sweet and inspiring — like the '60's hippies. But without reasonable boundaries, personal responsibility is lost. We live in a world of limits. We have limits. Boundaries are a way of honoring ourselves and the kind of world we live in.

Erika decided to try an experiment one morning in Bodhgaya, India. She bought two handfuls of half rupee coins: each worth a little more than a penny. She told me, "I want to walk through the center of Bodhgaya and give a coin to every beggar, cripple, leper or person who asks."

"Wow," I said. "I want to watch. I'll take some pictures."

As we approached the center of Bodhgaya, I dropped back thirty feet and got out my camera. I took a picture as Erika put a coin in the first cup. But I only had time for four or five shots. A growing crowd surrounded Erika. They all had their hands out and some were pulling on her shawl and shirt.

I put the camera in my pocket and waded into the crowd. Together we gently extricated ourselves before a full riot started.

The people in that crowd had needs as real as the scoliosis in the girl by the culvert. There is more need, more poignant suffering in the world than we can address individually or collectively. If we try to take care of it all, we will quickly emaciate our resources and get swallowed up in the sea of suffering. And all to no noticeable effect.

So it is wise to manage our personal and material resources intelligently and skillfully. The heart and the spirit have no boundaries. But our time, money and emotions are limited and need to be managed with care. In this world we need good boundaries if we are to be of any help to anyone.

Good boundaries are not an excuse to close our hearts one iota. We can't trade one off against the other and do a little heart and a little boundary. It's not "either or." It's "both and." The path of transformation requires us open our hearts as much as possible *and* at the same time maintain good boundaries.

Keeping the heart open is often difficult. Many people saw us as walking moneybags. A good salary in India is $30 to $40 a month: less than a day's pay at minimum wage in this country. Many people saw dollars signs on our foreheads. It hurts to be seen as the object of someone's need or greed. Those projections often elicited our anger, fear or hurt. Keeping our hearts open meant staying open to these feelings until we could see past them, greet a beggar with genuine warmth even as we said, "No rupees."

India is a wonderful place to practice an open heart and good boundaries because it is so stark and gritty. The issues were personal and in our face: we dealt with them or crashed. We all crashed at times.

In America, we deal with all the same issues. But the situation is subtler. Perhaps you are not wealthy by American standards. But we know what it feels like to be treated as an object of money, sex, comfort, stability, advice or something. Other people's projections onto us can be upsetting. If we get sucked into the projection or deny the feelings they trigger, our spiritual paths collapse. The open heart requires we work with our reactions until we can transform them and see past them.

And in America, the solicitation is not as personal. Rather than a man with one leg and stubs for fingers standing in front of you with an open palm, we get a brochure in the mail about homelessness. Or we get an email about the hundreds of thousands going bankrupt because they are sick and could not get medical insurance. Or we hear reports on TV about flood victims. The suffering is real but not as in-our-face as a woman carrying a small child asking for rupees to buy milk for her baby (this was a favorite come-on in Katmandu).

So we deal with all the same issues in our lives here in America. But if we close our hearts or have poor boundaries, the effects may be subtle enough to ignore. We slowly get depleted or callous or alienated or disenfranchised without realizing the role our hearts and boundaries play in this.

So we need to practice. There is no single right way to keep your heart open and have responsible boundaries. On our latest trip to India, we gave generously to the Prajnavihra School and Sister Mary Lobo: people who were not tourists, who were on the scene, doing effective work and who knew how to use our resources to do the most good. And we said "No" to almost everyone else.

When I was in India a few years ago, I used a different strategy. Each day I set aside about a dollar's worth of small coins and gave them to curbside beggars, lepers, cripples or when I felt intuitively moved. When I'd gone through the coins for that day, I'd stop until the next day.

There is no one right way to practice generosity with wise boundaries. What is important is not that you find the "right" solution but that you wrestle with both issues: how to keep your heart open and how to keep good boundaries in a callous and painful world where the suffering is very, very real.

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We can practice this daily. Life is always presenting us with challenges: we can try to transcend them; we can ignore them. Or we can let them transform us.

For example if you try to stay busy to avoid boredom, this is a form of transcendence as you try to push away or rise above the discomfort of boredom.

Another example: You get a request for money from the Environmental Defense Fund. You drop it in the wastebasket unopened. Is this transcendence, transformation or neither? If you think "I don't want to deal with this," that's a kind of secular transcendence. If you let yourself feel the pull of the needs of the wounded earth but decide you don't have the money, that is transformation. You are letting the situation work on you.

Example: A friend is hurting. You have no advice to offer but just sit down to be present with her. This is a transformational strategy because you aren't pushing anything away.

Example: You make a hard decision to cut back at work because you are exhausted. This is transformational as you keep good boundaries while not repressing your experience.

What are some other situations you have to face?

To summarize, there are two major kinds of spiritual paths: transcendence and transformation. They are very different. I suspect some of Unitarian Universalists are uncomfortable with the word "spiritual" because, for them, it is associated only with transcendence. It is associated with trying to rise above the world rather than engaging responsibly. It is associated with closing the heart or not managing resources wisely. It is associated with escapism and addiction.

But for me, the word "spiritual" has more to do with transformation than transcendence.

Buddhism is a middle way. It is midway between trying to transcend the world on the one hand and getting lost in it on the other. Midway between pushing away and indulging.

Unitarian Universalism is also a middle way. We believe in engaging in the world, but hopefully with a higher vision and heartful perspective.

There are little girls scrubbing dishes next to the culverts in our lives. They may not be as obvious to the eye. But the open heart can sense them. Some want our help. Some only want to be seen so they can smile.

May we let life transform us. It's how we are meant to live.

The Emergence of a Liberal Buddhism

By Rev. James Ishmael Ford

Today, in the living Zen practice centers across the North American continent, the stories of the ancients and the flesh-and-blood stories of our founders meet in our hearts and minds. From that meeting, new stories will appear — some of great value, some not. But it behooves those of us who care about the health of the Zen way to pay close attention. Those who find Zen to be one of the great paths to transformation, who see in it the hope of healing our planet must attend closely to what is actually going on as Zen takes deeper root in our native soil.

Shifting Perspectives and Assumptions

Wherever it has flourished, Buddhism has always engaged the culture, the times, and the issues — just as it is now doing in the West. From this, a new perspective is emerging, a perspective of Western Zen that has traveled a long ways from its Asian origins. It exists along side, sometimes comfortably, sometimes not so, with more traditional visions of Zen for the West.

When the renowned Western Buddhist John Blofeld wrote his introduction to Stephen Batchelor's 1983 book *Alone with Others: An Existential Approach to Buddhism*, Blofeld described the book as "magnificent" and "inspiring." He then added, "The exposition is not intended to be exhaustive, as too much and too varied detail might mar its impact. Hence there are some important omissions such as the operation of karma and the concept of rebirth, both of which are crucial components of the Buddha Dharma."

Fourteen years later Batchelor published his reflections on karma and rebirth in his controversial broadside *Buddhism without Beliefs*. John Blofeld had died a decade before, so we will never know what he would have thought of this analysis which was, in fact, a radical departure from traditional expositions of the Buddha's Way. It's unlikely the old Buddhist scholar and practitioner would have been happy about it. In this latter book Batchelor asserts:

The idea of rebirth is meaningful in religious Buddhism only insofar as it provides a vehicle for the key Indian metaphysical doctrine of actions and their results

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known as "karma." While the Buddha accepted the idea of karma as he accepted that of rebirth, when questioned on the issue he tended to emphasize its psychological rather than its cosmological implications.

Developing this argument, Batchelor presents a modern, rational, and secular vision of Buddhist teachings. A detailed consideration of his understanding of Dharma is beyond the scope of this volume. But he is one of the first to systematically present perspectives held, often unconsciously, by many and possibly most contemporary Western Buddhists.

Here, I suggest, we find the meeting of East and West. Here our underlying Western rational and humanistic perspectives encounter the Dharma: challenging it, being challenged by it, and ultimately synthesizing it. To frame this more helpfully, there is a new Buddhism emerging: a Buddhism clearly continuous with its source and, at the same time, quite different from traditional Asian Buddhism.

Looking closely, we can't ignore the fact that many assumptions held by Western Buddhists differ-sometimes subtly, sometimes radically — from those held by "traditional" Buddhists. Many of these shifting assumptions are of great value — but they are shifts and need to be noticed and noted as such. (Although, in fact, they are so pervasive among Western Buddhists and popular Western Buddhist writers, it's hard not to notice them.)

What we don't notice about ourselves is the most dangerous part of who we are. For instance, Western Zen communities often make the claim that the Zen teacher transmits an ahistorical path: the once and future way of awakening, teachings unchanged from the time they came from the mouth of the Buddha himself. This can be profoundly misleading.

It is seductive for new movements to see themselves returning to the pure traditions and original teachers, as Donald Lopez observes this in his preface to *A Modern Buddhist Bible*. Certainly, many who hold contemporary Buddhist views see themselves — truthfully, we see ourselves — as returning to the tenets of an original Buddhism.

Bhikkhu Bodhi-a Western Buddhist monk, renowned English translator of the Buddha's teachings, and critic of both Batchelor's book and the contemporary Buddhist movement — summarizes several tenets of what he calls "Western Buddhism."

Rev. James Ishmael Ford.. First Unitarian Society in Newton, Massachusetts.

However, since many of these tenets are in fact held by Buddhists of most traditional schools — including, as some critics suggest, the current Dalai Lama — perhaps Donald Lopez's term "modern Buddhism" is better. There is much truth in the term "modern," particularly if we don't confuse it with "contemporary"; after all, this new Buddhism has roots going back more than a century. But people do confuse modern and contemporary. Therefore, I think the most appropriate term to describe this emerging and pervasive perspective is "liberal Buddhism."

The word liberal derives from Latin and means, among other things, "free and generous." Thus liberal Buddhism is a Buddhism that contributes most genuinely to freedom and is most generous. But whatever we call it, this new Buddhism has, like every tradition everywhere, both strengths and shadows.

The Secularization of Zen

Bhikkhu Bodhi notes three particular elements marking what I am calling liberal Buddhism. One is a shift from monastic to lay life as the "principal arena of Buddhist practice." Second, there is an "enhanced position of women" in this newer Buddhism. Third, we also find "the emergence of a grass-roots engaged Buddhism aimed at social and political transformation." And underlying all this-Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests a fourth characteristic: a pervasive secularization of the Buddha way. This

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often-missed shift is perhaps the most important of all. Let's look at an example of this trend.

Liberal Buddhism sees Buddhist meditation disciplines and Buddhist teachings, in general, to be "scientific." But this belief — held by both newcomers and elders — is untrue. Scientific method requires that there be a possibility of falsification. And experimental science requires replicability: the same practices done the same way should reliably produce the same results.

But never, not even in liberal Buddhism, does one hear that if one does the practices and does not achieve liberation, then Buddhism is somehow "proven" false. Rather, if one does the practices without the promised experiences, most Buddhist teachers will say one has simply not done the practices correctly. And while this may be a form of scientism, it simply isn't science.

The seed of this appeal to science for justification is twofold. What allows this claim to be made is that Buddhism is at heart profoundly empirical. Buddhist insight is based on the experiences of many people over many centuries. Indeed, Buddhist philosophies and psychologies all flow from introspection and examination of those experiences. And empiricism, while not science, is the mother of science. Thus we can see how easily the shift from empirical to scientific might happen.

The second factor driving the appeal to science is the desire of exponents of liberal Buddhism to appear to be up-to-date, current, modern. This impulse had particular appeal in the nineteenth century, when our Buddhist forbears were first asserting their insights as equal to or perhaps better than those offered by Western religions. And it seems as compelling to Buddhists now as it did then.

Appeals to contemporary physics as "proof" of some aspect of Buddhist doctrine is typical of liberal Buddhism. And here, I might add, we find some real shadows: a whole collection of logical fallacies. First among these is the old chestnut, Appeal to Authority: the fallacious belief that if a credentialed person says something, it must perforce be true.

There is however a more dangerous effect of unconscious scientism, which is the inclination toward reductionism, another shadow of secularism. Reductionism causes Buddhism to become nothing more than a nostrum for improving one's self-esteem or tennis game, or for getting an edge in business or war. This is not what Zen is about; nor, frankly, is it about relaxation, calmness, achieving less anxiety or attenuating depression. While it may indeed have salutary effects on all these things, ultimately it is about something else.

Buddhism is a religion. While not particularly concerned with cosmologies and the workings of gods, it is profoundly concerned with the same questions as all religions: how best to address the situations in which we find ourselves here and now. I further assert that Buddhism is, quite properly about salvation, from the Latin salve, to heal. It makes assertions about the how and why of our hurt and offers us a path to liberation, to wholeness.

And yet, liberal Buddhism, while harboring shadows, has enormous possibilities. Out of its broad inclination to identify with the ideals of science, we find a willingness to see the disciplines studied within scientific institutions. At first this was mostly in the realm of bio-feedback studies. But, while these undoubtedly have some value, they tend to be akin to studying a horse by examining its feces. Measurable relaxation or any other outcome is a by-product of Buddhism, not the thing itself.

The continued exploration of assumptions underlying liberal Buddhism, and the positive aspects of its secularization — these are profound shifts in emphasis supporting lay practice. In particular, the contours of Western Zen reveal a shift from Zen monastery to Zen center as the normative institution. These and other aspects of the liberal Buddhist perspective are compelling for many of us.

For instance, anyone visiting a range of Western Zen centers will find women at every level of leadership. And related to that, openly gay and lesbian people are almost uniformly accepted in these centers, often in leadership positions. This is all unheard of in the East. And these are core perspectives of liberal Buddhism.

These new leaders and the perspectives they bring all help to create an even richer, more socially engaged vision of the Dharma than that which we inherited from our traditional teachers. Indeed, while it's calumny to claim Buddhism is "passive" and disengaged from the world, an inclination to withdrawal is indeed the shadow of Buddhism. Thus it is with these social aspects of liberal Buddhism that we in the West have particularly enriched the treasure we've been given.

(Continued on page 10)

Another potential problem, aside from the spectre of disengagement, is that Buddhist organizations in East Asia have usually worked with the approval and, in many instances, support of the state. In China monasteries were often supported by large land grants — including serfs. In Japan, the ruling classes quickly saw how Zen, particularly Rinzai Zen, could be adapted to support the needs of the warrior class. This became a mutual relationship. As we now know, in the Second World War the Zen churches were second to none in their enthusiastic support of the imperialist assertions of Emperor and state. On the other hand, in the past, many Buddhist leaders and teachers have seen themselves as moderating the excesses of various rulers, even as others have felt it their patriotic duty to support the nation in times of crisis.

In sum, we must be heedful of a host of Zen's demons as well as its promises as we explore and indeed help create a Western Zen path that we may hope will serve our grandchildren and generations beyond.

Reminders and Opportunities
From Sam Trumbore, UUBF President

strumbore@uumin.org

Is it time to RENEW your membership? Please check the address label on this issue for your renewal date. The form below is for renewals and new memberships.

Plan to attend the upcoming UUBF Convocation April 13-15, 2007! We have an engaging format that has time for learning, practice, networking, relationship building, inspiration and entertainment. We've structured the program to move at a little slower pace than our first Convocation. The addition of another 24 hours makes a big difference. What is new this year is adding Saturday workshops. Right now we are in the planning stages to:

- Have a continuation of Friday's program with Bernie and Eve
- Invite Tibetan monk Ven. Lobsang Phuntsok (he was with us in 2005) to speak on his engaged Buddhism project
- Invite a speaker on the National Prison Sangha
- Learn about Zen Mountain Monastery environmental work
- Have movement oriented and mandala painting workshops.

If you have ideas for workshops you'd like to see, please let me know. Our goal is to have as many UUBF Practice Groups represented as possible. Please see if you can bring a delegation from your group to our Convocation. Doesn't matter if people have been practicing for a short or long time, all are welcome. Register Today!

See the Next Page for the Registration Form

NEW MEMBERSHIP, RENEWAL ($20 CONTRIBUTION)
or CHANGE OF ADDRESS FORM

FIRST NAME : _____

MIDDLE : _____

LAST: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE, PROV. _____

COUNTRY _____

MAIL TO: Richard Swanson, 823 Main St., Colchester, VT, 05446-7192, USA, (802)878-5992

Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship

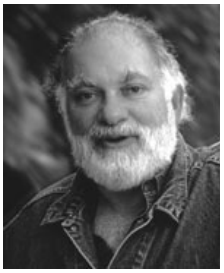
Convocation 2007

Thursday dinner, April 12 through lunch Sunday, April 15, 2007

Garrison Institute, Garrison, New York

Unitarian Universalist Buddhists Bearing Witness

Our exploration for this gathering will be socially engaged Buddhism. What are appropriate and skillful actions for Buddhists who have taken the vow to liberate all beings, and also UU's who affirm a faith in the inherent worth and dignity of every person?



with **Bernie Glassman & Eve Myonen Marko**

Roshi Bernie and Sensei Eve are founders of the Zen Peacemakers order. They collaborated in writing the book ***Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Instructions on Making Peace***. Glassman is the first western dharma heir of Maezumi Roshi (1976) and a pioneer of the American Zen movement. He has taken the dharma to the marketplace founding the Greyston Mandala, a network of community development organizations based on Buddhist values. He has also organized meditation retreats at Auschwitz and on the streets of New York City.

With special performances by

The **Faithful Fools Street Ministry**

of San Francisco and

Jason Shelton

UU Minister of Music, Nashville, Tennessee

Registration:

Supersaver: before 7/15/06..... $60
Early bird: before 3/1/07 ..... $80
Regular..... $100

For more details visit: http://www.uua.org/uubf

Accommodations (per person, per night):

Single room ..... $86 /$80 with house job
Double room ..... $71 /$65 with house job
Triple or dorm room ..... $56 /$50 with house job
Commuter ……$44 (no house job option)

Garrison info & directions: http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/

Mail registration to: UUBF Registrar c/o Richard Swanson 823 Main St. Colchester, VT 05446 email: UUBFregistrar@uumin.org

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

UUBF group or congregation _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Double or triple occupancy: ___Yes, please assign roommate

or My roommate(s) will be: _____

Note any questions or special needs on reverse or email registrar.

Please circle:

 # attending: 1 2 ____

 # nights : 0 1 2 3

Room size: 1 2 3 w/ job commuter

Deposit enclosed: $_____

(minimum deposit is registration fee for each attendee)

UU Sangha
c/o Richard Swanson
823 Main Street
Colchester, VT 05446-7192

Return Service Requested

UU Sangha Fall 2006

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