What is Enlightenment?

An inquiry into the most important spiritual questions of our time

Ken Wilber

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Eckhart Tolle
Joseph Goldstein
Father McNamara
Sheikh Tosun Bayrak
Elizabeth Lesser

what does it mean to be IN THE WORLD but NOT OF IT?

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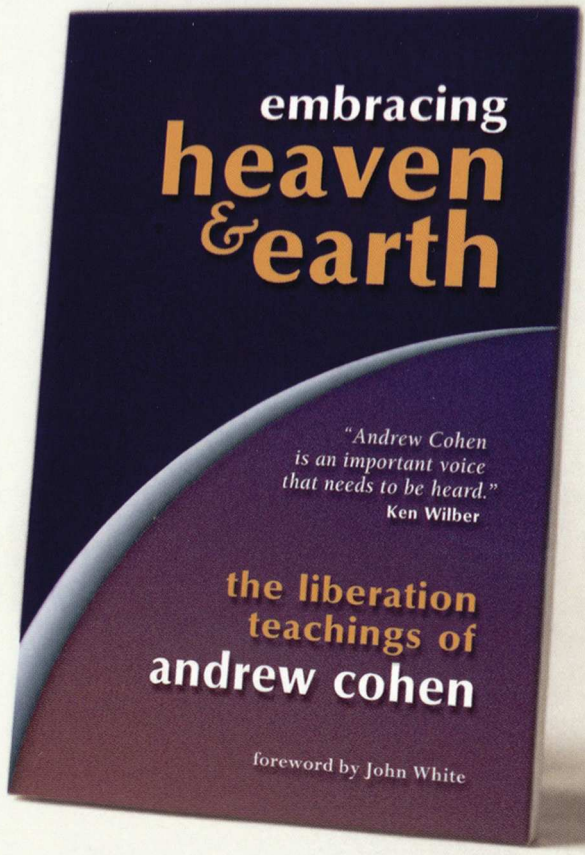

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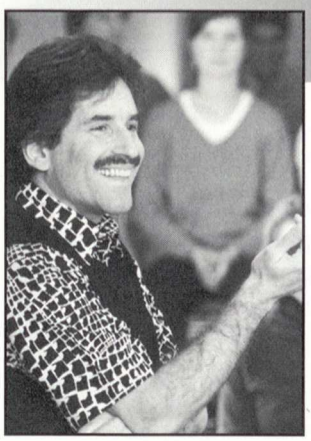

andrew cohen

founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine

Andrew Cohen is not just a spiritual teacher—he is an inspiring phenomenon. Since his awakening in 1986 he has only lived, breathed, and spoken of one thing: the potential for total liberation from the bondage of ignorance, superstition, and selfishness. Powerless to limit his unceasing investigation, he has looked at the "jewel of enlightenment" from every angle and given birth to a teaching that is vast and subtle, yet incomparably direct and revolutionary in its impact.

Through his public teachings, his books, and his meetings with spiritual leaders of almost every tradition, he has tirelessly sought to convey his discovery that spiritual liberation's true significance is its potential to completely transform not only the individual but the entire way that human beings, as a race, live together. In sharp contrast to the cynicism that is so pervasive today, yet with full awareness of the difficult challenges that we face, he has dared to teach and to show that it is indeed possible to bring heaven to earth. This powerful message of unity, openness, and love has inspired many who have heard it to join together to prove its reality with their own lives, igniting an ever-expanding international revolution of tremendous vitality and significance.

Andrew travels extensively every year giving public talks and intensive retreats. Communities dedicated to living his teachings have formed throughout the world, with a network of centers in the United States, Europe, India, and Australia, including an international center in the Berkshire mountains in western Massachusetts, where he now has his home.

As well as being the founder and guiding inspiration behind *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, Andrew Cohen is the author of several books, including *Freedom Has No History, An Unconditional Relationship to Life, Enlightenment Is a Secret, Autobiography of an Awakening,* and the newly released *Embracing Heaven & Earth.*

The International Fellowship for the Realization of Impersonal Enlightenment is a nonprofit organization founded to support and facilitate the teaching work of Andrew Cohen. It is dedicated to the enlightenment of the individual and the expression of enlightenment in the world.

For more information about Andrew Cohen, his teachings, and publications, please contact the center nearest you.

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dare to embrace the revolutionary implications of enlightenment

What is Enlightenment?

"I have found and continue to find that there is so much confusion, misunderstanding, and misinformation as to what enlightenment actually is and what it really means. That is why we publish this magazine as a vehicle to present our ongoing investigation into this question, and to share our discoveries with those who are also interested in this vast and most subtle subject."

Andrew Cohen, Founder

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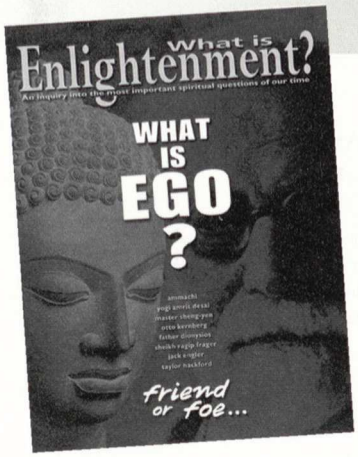

Issue 17, Spring/Summer 2000

We'd like to hear what you think about the issues we raise. Please send your letters to the editor to:
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A BOND OF TRUST

As a new reader to *WIE*, I would like to commend the editors on an "enlightening" Spring/Summer 2000 issue devoted to a greater understanding of the ego.

For example, Archimandrite Dionysios ["The Enemy Within"] interpreted the temptation of Jesus in the desert as a vindication of the ascetic life in which one learns to "be ready in each moment to die." This is a powerful image for me to incorporate into my own life. Perhaps I can live in the non-ascetic world by observing my own ego as it strives to attain its wants. Through the process, it may be possible to die to the desires of the ego when temptations arise—at least some of the time.

I was likewise impressed with the teachings of Mata Amritanandamayi ["When You Go beyond the Ego, You Become an Offering to the World"], who also addressed the need to die to the ego. When asked how it is that some spiritual teachers succumb to certain ego-generated behaviors, she responded that these individuals are not truly self-realized. In the same vein, Master Sheng-yen ["No Escape for the Ego"], when asked the same question, responded that these persons think they are enlightened while they are not. Sheng-yen also argues that ego-driven teachers assume that they are free from the moral obligations demanded of those who are not liberated. Finally, he contrasts these teachers with the Buddha who, upon enlightenment, continued to follow the precepts of the teachings.

Let me commend Andrew Cohen for his sensitive interview of Amrit Desai ["Yoga, Ego and Purification"]. He was open to the ideas expressed by the teacher and conducted the interview in an exemplary manner. There were many fine points made by Yogi Desai with which Mr. Cohen agreed and which, in my opinion, were in keeping with sound spiritual principles.

But Yogi Desai, at the end of the interview, stated the following: "I don't consider anything wrong or bad. It's just an experience." The statement is surprisingly devoid of responsibility given the circumstances surrounding Yogi Desai's tenure at Kripalu. I am struggling to understand how the arguments he makes concerning the role of the guru as an example to his or her followers relates to spiritual integrity. I perceive no sense of personal accountability regarding his relationship to his students. He even argues that it was their projections onto him rather than his own behavior that caused them pain and disillusionment.

It seems to me that when one accepts followers along a spiritual path, one acknowledges a bond of trust that must not be broken. Like a responsible parent, a reliable guru takes complete responsibility for the integrity of the relationship, at least in the beginning.

A bond of trust was broken—of which he seems completely oblivious in this interview. I am more astounded at his attitude than the behavior in which he engaged. It is tempting to write him off as just another charlatan who misled his students and now fails to own up to his own lack of commitment.

Yogi Desai does imply that he is not completely enlightened, much to his credit. Given that admission, I wonder why Deepak Chopra has chosen him to head his new ashram? Am I missing something?

Nancy Murray, Ph.D.
Mount Washington, Massachusetts

A DISCOURAGING PROSPECT

My issue of *WIE* finally arrived and, of course, I eagerly dove right in. Reading the interview with Amrit Desai by Andrew Cohen has me very disturbed. There are so

The ego provides traction
for transcendence and an
infrastructure for immanence.
The ego is not chopped liver.

Ann Schranz
Thonotosassa, Florida

many questions; I hardly know where to begin.

It is quite an interesting experience to "listen in" as two modern-day spiritual teachers have a discussion together. The first question that arose for me was: "Why do we look to the guru, and what is it that is being sought?" In any other field of learning, the goal is clearly defined and there is a logical progression of attainment culminating in graduation. I think the disciple of a spiritual guru is in a very vulnerable position. As this interview reveals, there may be no assurance given as to the goal, the practices, or even the attainment of the goal by the one who is teaching.

These two teachers seem to agree that "spiritual experiences" do not guarantee the absence of ego. This is very confusing! If the enlightened master lives as a human being, *ego and all*, what is the point? Desai's statement that "there always has to be *some degree* of integrity" just doesn't make sense. How can there be *degrees* of integrity? In my dictionary "integrity" is defined as wholeness; moral purity; uprightness.

On the one hand Amrit Desai states that "it is the function of the disciple to be like a swan that can separate the milk from the water," but on the other says that "I would like to see the disciple being in a more nonjudgmental space. Because judgments are very likely to come up—about the teacher, because the teacher is going to be a button-pusher." He then goes on to say that people project images that the guru "is very evolved, highly developed, self-realized." Talk about a double-bind! Shouldn't that be the definition of a guru?

All in all it is a very discouraging prospect to think that as a disciple, one must completely surrender to a guru who is admitting that he is going to be pushing buttons, testing faith as other gurus have done by sleeping with prostitutes, prescribing harsh practices and renunciation, etc., when there is not even the certainty that the guru is living his own teachings.

This article has stirred up questions in me as to why I would surrender my own integrity to assume the role of disciple when the goal is

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SPECIAL THANKS TO: Arthur Green, Jeff Cox

uncertain, the path unclear, and the teacher impure?

Heather Braun
via email

TO CAST NO SHADOW

I was blown away by the interview with Yogi Amrit Desai by Andrew Cohen. *Does* yoga purify the ego? Does the system of yoga, as a spiritual practice in pursuit of liberation, actually work? Could a system that promises and delivers mystical experiences of oneness and ecstasy and that develops mastery in concentration and self-discipline leave untouched an imperative examination and purification of our motivations? It seems to me that the vast majority of yoga practitioners and masters have not given themselves to finding out what utterly pure motivation is—the idea of "casting no shadow" that Mr. Cohen spoke about in the interview.

Look at Amrit Desai. He doesn't appear to be interested in, nor does he acknowledge, his own obvious violations of the *yamas* and *niyamas* [moral and ethical codes of conduct] and the devastating effect he had on his students. Because he is a master of kundalini yoga, we expect to see a living example of a master able to live free from, as Cohen states, "fundamental contradiction." Yet, it seems as if Desai couldn't care less about this. What he offers to those interested in yoga as a path to perfection is his admission: "The practice of the *yamas* and *niyamas* gets even more difficult the further one goes." If this is his experience, then it implies that there is no guarantee of what his actions will express next. Is this true mastery? Does more deceit and heart-closing devastation lie ahead?

Yogi Desai is an example of the failure of yoga practice, in and of itself, to purify the ego. In one of his questions, Andrew Cohen suggests that "ego transcendence is absolutely dependent upon perfect stabilization in the *yamas* and *niyamas*." It would appear, from this dialogue, that commitment to this kind of stabilization and ego-purification simply isn't part of Desai's vision of yoga or of liberation.

Lisa Andrews, yoga teacher
Cambridge, Massachusetts

YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL

The latest issue of *WIE*, "What is Ego? Friend or Foe" is an impressive and interesting source of information regarding the understanding of ego. I particularly acknowledge the magazine for presenting a full spectrum of possibilities in defining ego.

What a treat to be able to read about Sheikh Ragip/Robert Frager—"The Man with Two Heads." I was intrigued to become aware of an individual who holds in thought two sides of the "ego coin" at the same time. What a freeing idea!

My hat goes off to the interview with Kaisa Puhakka ["The Transpersonal Ego: Is there a New Formation?"] and her ideas concerning transpersonal ego. When she recommended that everybody *walk* their life without having to read from the correct map, I was sure some of my ego flew off with the hat. There's nothing like being blown into another freeing idea in the pursuit of enlightenment.

I must mention my delight in reading Paul Lowe's comment, "It just is!" ["Self Acceptance or Ego Death?"]. What an inclusive approach. My consciousness is more than ready to add a loud YES in support of the ISNESS he speaks about.

The above three points helped me see how humanity is simply and naturally evolving its consciousness by transcending separateness. But why separate these ego discoveries into friend or foe? Why place

stuart davis

not available anywhere

a particular interpretation in a box with a label? For me, the freedom to express, moment by moment, requires eliminating the boxes. One moment a circumstance may be best served by playing with a traditional idea of ego and the next moment a completely fresh approach is the best workable truth. Who knows? Maybe my ego is saying you can have it all?

Helen Borth
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY

I particularly enjoyed your article on Archimandrite Dionysios' teachings and understanding of the ego.

I have good news for you and your readers. God does not expect his children to annihilate their basic being and personality in order to be restored and reconciled to him. The gospel teaches overwhelmingly the benefit of knowing him, which is Life and Abundant Life in the here and now, with eternal life waiting for the faithful. There is not much personality annihilation going on in Christianity.

But the Scriptures do teach the need to put God on the throne. Everybody serves somebody. Most people these days only truly serve the god they see in the mirror every morning. The Scriptures do call for the death of this sort of arrogance, egotism, and pride in order that one may be truly born again to serve the one true and Living God.

J.K.
Houston, Texas

THE MASTER AND HIS COACHMAN

I am extremely grateful for the time and effort that you all devote to producing *WIE*. Sometimes I wish you could produce more issues each year—but then I realize it

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from the editors

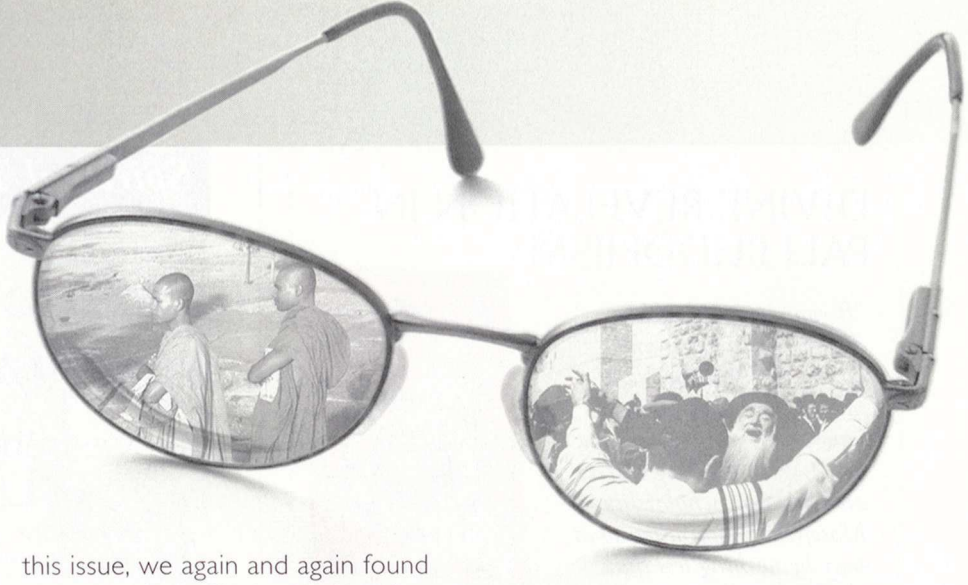
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT"?

Few questions have captured humanity's collective religious imagination like this one. The question of how to live a truly spiritual life in a world more often than not devoted to the pursuit of pleasure and material gain has most likely been an important theme in spiritual discourse since the first sparks of the religious impulse ignited in the human heart. Wary of the seemingly endless barrage of temptations that inevitably accompany the pursuit of fame, wealth, romance, and power, many of history's greatest sages have insisted that the only way to walk safely through this world is to relinquish all possessions, sever all ties to family and career, and take up the empty-handed life of a homeless ascetic or monk. Others, though still cautious about the temptations of the world, have encouraged a moderate engagement with the activities of worldly life, either out of obligation to society and family or as a means to test one's ability to remain unensnared by worldly attachments. And still others have created elaborate codes of conduct and ritual to sanctify life in the world, to infuse even the most seemingly mundane activities with a sense of the sacred and holy. Despite their often radical differences in approach, however, what these great teachers have all had in common is a healthy respect for the power of the things of the world to lure the serious aspirant away from the spiritual life.

But times change. And in contemporary spiritual dialogue, both within and outside of religious traditions, discussion of the challenges that worldly life presents to the seeker of enlightenment seems to have all but disappeared. While more and more people are speaking and writing about the spiritual life, the life they describe almost always implies a total immersion in the activities and duties of the world. Perhaps, as some would argue, with the advent of our modern psychological understanding of human nature, these are more enlightened times which call for a more humanistic approach. But as the East-meets-West spiritual melting pot endeavors to update the world's traditions in the light of contemporary Western values, it seems that an all-important question may be getting lost in the mix: As the most materialistic culture in the history of the world rushes to embrace the spiritual, how is it going to reckon with the challenges that engagement with the world has always presented to the serious seeker? If the dwindling populations of most monastic institutions (and the undeniable shortage of isolated caves and mountaintops) are any indication, chances are, most of us won't be renouncing the world anytime soon. But might there nonetheless be something to learn from the time-tested traditions of old that could still apply to our modern, "more enlightened" Western context? It was this question, and the countless sub-questions it invites, that inspired our inquiry for this issue.

It is hard to imagine a better starting point for an exploration of spirituality and "the world" than the teachings of history's most famous renunciate, the Buddha. As the legend goes, the former prince, who abandoned his wife and kingdom to pursue enlightenment, eventually inspired over 10,000 men and women to join him in living homeless in the forest—several hundred of whom are said to have attained enlightenment. While we had long been familiar with the Buddha's teachings and at least the rudiments of his life story, it wasn't until we began to explore what he had to say about the importance of renunciation that we began to glimpse the power and precious simplicity of the humble life to which he called his followers.

One afternoon, after reading passage after passage describing the unparalleled peace of mind and purity of heart to be found in a life unencumbered by possessions and worldly responsibilities, one of my coeditors and I suddenly found ourselves in the grips of a shared renunciate fantasy. Gazing out the window of our hilltop solarium at the lake and hills across the valley, my friend queried, "Brother, where shall we make our camp tonight? Against the shores of yonder lake or in the hills beyond?" "Perhaps the lake would be best," I replied, mesmerized by the thought of having no more pressing decision to make than that of where to rest my head, "Those houses along the far shore would likely serve us well in our morning alms round." "The lake it is," my friend concurred, his bright mustard khakis for a moment seeming to resemble the folds of a saffron robe. "But first, let us repose in this open field for a few hours of meditation before sunset. How rare it is to come upon such an unobstructed view."



I don't know who broke a grin first, but as we began to chuckle about our brief theatric interlude, it was clear that for both of us, in addition to providing a bit of comic relief, the journey had also stirred a genuine longing. In that moment, faced with the radical simplicity and singularity of a life unencumbered by worldly cares, it was hard to imagine how the spiritual life could work any other way. Suddenly it all seemed so simple.

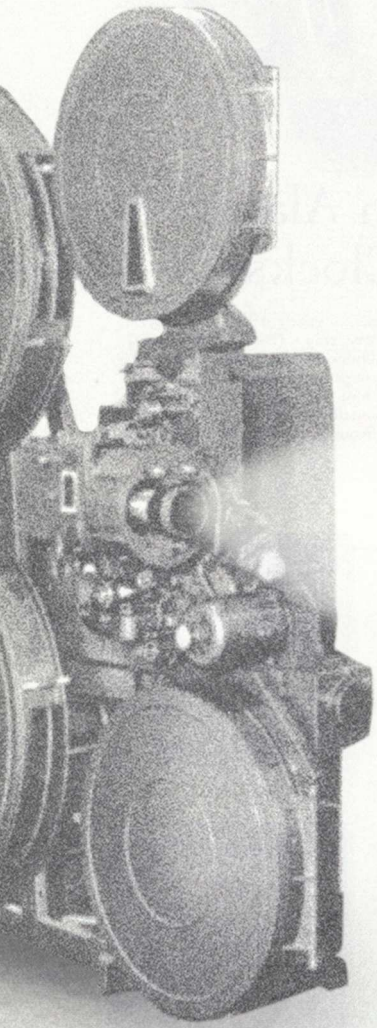
A few days later, however, around a table in that same solarium, we began to explore the teachings of Orthodox Judaism. Through the words of great Jewish theologians like Abraham Heschel and Leo Baeck, we learned of a relationship to the world in which every aspect of worldly life—from work to family to sexuality to creative pursuits—is embraced and included on the spiritual path. Sharing their conviction that the fullness of God's vision can only be realized through active and appropriate participation in His creation, they described how an elaborate code of law, conduct and ritual elevates even the most mundane of activities into rich expressions of devotion. As the five of us were drawn ever deeper into this Hebraic vision of wholeness, we soon found ourselves overwhelmed by the seeming perfection of this all-embracing spiritual life in which one's every movement is sanctified. In the midst of that richness and fullness, which seemed at that moment so utterly complete and life-affirming, I couldn't help noticing that the lake and hills across the valley were beginning to lose their glow.

Throughout our research for this issue, we again and again found our enthusiasm flipping back and forth between those views that call us to leave the world, those that encourage us to embrace the world, and those that aim to chart a middle course between the two. In the midst of this merry-go-round of perspectives, we were soon faced with an obvious question: What about us? What is our relationship to the world? As spiritual practitioners who have abandoned our former lives to live together in a community dedicated solely to the pursuit and expression of liberation, we generally tend to think of ourselves as most closely aligned with renunciate communities like the Buddha's. We rise early in the morning for several hours of spiritual practice. We often participate in extended meditation retreats. Some of us have taken temporary vows of celibacy in order to explore more deeply our relationship to the powerful force of sexual desire. We definitely have a healthy respect for the deluding power of the world. And the very foundation of our life together is a spiritual teaching that calls for the giving up of anything that stands in the way of our liberation. On the other hand, like the Orthodox Jews, we are passionately committed to bringing the spiritual vision to bear on every aspect of human life. Many of us are in committed sexual relationships. We almost all have careers in the world. We eat well and exercise. We occasionally go out to see movies and hear live music. And all of this is part of a dynamic ongoing exploration of what it means to live a spiritual life in which no aspect of our humanity is avoided or left out. Are we world-renouncers? World-embracers? Both? While the attempt to align ourselves with a traditional spiritual category ultimately proved impossible, it did help to reveal just how complex this subject can be—particularly these days.

The inquiry contained in this issue is perhaps unique in our time. For while it dips deep into the well of traditional wisdom on a subject often lost to modern ears, it also seeks again and again to bring that wisdom to bear on the emerging questions and paradigms of the new spiritual era. Engaging in dialogue with spiritual teachers from across the ideological spectrum, we have tried to uncover the full range of complexity and subtlety involved in humanity's attempt to come to terms with the world on the spiritual path. As the extraordinary breadth of vision in the interviews on the pages ahead will reveal, creating this issue has been a truly remarkable adventure, and one that we hope will bring clarity to the way all of us view our place in both the world—and the heavens.

–Craig Hamilton

andrew cohen



what does it mean to be in the world but not of it?

A few months ago, one of my students asked to meet with me. He is a stage actor who has recently become a movie star. He told me that he had been offered a significant role in a big Shakespeare theater production and said that, because of its high visibility, this part would definitely lead to many important contacts. The reason that he wanted to speak to me was that over the last few years he had mainly been making movies and had had plenty of down time, which he had used to immerse himself in the spiritual life. But he wondered, if he was to take this part, whether the inevitable intensity and busyness would threaten the new-found, liberating depth and clarity that he had come to treasure more than anything else. I said simply, "Let's find out!" We did.

Several months into the run of the play, he said he was beginning to "lose perspective." He went on to describe how he was being attracted by the "world." "It's a very compelling environment for the ego," he said. "In the theater, unlike in film, there is an immediate response from the audience. I mean, every night people are waiting outside for me to sign my name on little bits of paper. My ego gets really puffed up and it feels *good*. You know, many famous, powerful, and influential people are coming to see this play. And when I become aware that they're in the audience, I always find myself getting distracted. I want to impress them so they will come see me backstage, and as a result I always end up compromising my performance. After the show, if no one's waiting for me, I'm very disappointed. The truth is, something dark and distasteful has entered my being—I feel a hunger growing in me for more and more power. *Power in the world.*"

"You know, it's crazy," he went on to say, "when I come in on Monday, after spending all of Sunday doing spiritual practice with my friends, my colleagues tell me, 'You're glowing—what happened to you?' and when I say, 'I'm happy!' they never know what to say."

a report from the trenches

I became a spiritual teacher in 1986. And I knew then that if I was in any way attached to the world and what it represented, I would never be in a position to truly be able to help others to free themselves from the chains of ignorance, selfishness, and attachment.

As time passed, I traveled around the world and spread the compelling message of liberation here and now. Many who spent time with me discovered a liberating depth and clarity in which the experience of profound freedom was not only an idea but a living reality. In those days, I never presumed that the people who were listening to me would have to give up the world and what it represented in the same way that I had had to. At that time I was convinced that, for most, the spiritual experience would be enough. More than enough to liberate their minds from the empty promise of fulfillment that the "world" holds out to all but the wisest among us. *But I was wrong.* I saw one person after another who, in spite of having recognized in the spiritual experience that deep and abiding happiness can only be found within, would fall prey again and again to the seductive illusion that lasting happiness *can* be found in the world. Even though they had recognized that the promise of the world was just an illusion, a mirage, ultimately empty of any real substance, most were, in the end, still unable to resist its powerful allure. It was only then that I began to understand what many of the greatest masters have told us throughout the ages. *To be free, to be truly free in this world, we have to give everything for that freedom.* One iota less than everything will never be enough because of the overwhelming power of the mind's ability, in the blink of an eye, to create an entire universe of apparent meaning where none actually exists. The only way any of us can protect ourselves from being seduced by this greatest of illusions is to ensure that any and all fears and desires based on the ego's unquenchable thirst for power have been given up, renounced, or transcended. Only when our quest for liberation is embraced without any conditions whatsoever will it become possible for us to be FREE. Free means *free from illusions.* It is then that we will be, *for the first time,* undistracted, completely available, fully present, here and now *in* this world.

A Buddhist teacher was once asked if it was really necessary to renounce the world in order to become liberated. And his response was, *"Even the Buddha had to renounce the world!"* If, like the Buddha, we are sincere in our desire to liberate ourselves from the chains of ignorance, selfishness, and attachment, it is always dangerous to underestimate the enormous promise that the world represents for the human ego. Indeed, its profoundly compelling nature can instantly bury our precious desire for liberation. If, like my student, we have already embarked on the spiritual path and yet still continue to seek for happiness, contentment, and fulfillment outside of our very own Self, then it is inevitable that in spite of our spiritual efforts, we will remain, as he is, painfully trapped in the grip of the world's allure. ■

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THE NEW AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

featuring an interview with

Elizabeth Lesser

and an article by

Ken Wilber

Integral Transformative Practice: In This World or Out of It?

SOMETIMES IT TAKES AN OUTSIDER TO PUT THINGS IN CONTEXT. So it was that in the closing frames of his 1992 film *Road Scholar,* NPR commentator Andrei Codrescu captured a perspective on this country that only an Eastern bloc expatriate could have seen. "Paradoxically," he reflected, "America is the most materialistic country on earth—and it's also the most spiritual."

Codrescu's words strike a chord perhaps because while the glossy veneer of consumerist America seems almost a force-field against the sacred, it is nonetheless hard to imagine another place on the globe where an unbridled zeal for the pursuit of "the good life" dwells in such close quarters with an equally intense religious fervor. America is, after all, a nation whose defining ideals have always rested with equal footing on both the inalienable right to "the pursuit of happiness" inscribed in our Declaration of Independence, and the aspiration for religious freedom that inspired the pilgrims to set sail for a New World. Even today, as the hurricane winds of technological innovation promise to propel us to ever-greater heights of sensual and material fulfillment, recent polls report that 94% of Americans believe in God or a "universal spirit," 66% believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, and 33% have had at least one spiritual experience.

With the American psyche precariously poised between these two worlds, it should perhaps come as no surprise that, as we begin to chart the waters of the third millennium, a new form of spirituality is taking root in the promised land, which aspires to finally unify our collective split personality in a single, holistic vision. Weary of the world-shunning, body-negative, life-denying spiritual legacy of traditional "patriarchal" religion, a new breed of spiritual pioneers is emerging, armed with the tools to forge a revolutionary, inclusive "spirituality of wholeness," in which the long-standing walls between the sacred and the secular, the sublime and the mundane, the spiritual and the worldly will be once and for all brought to the ground. In her book *The New American Spirituality,** Omega Institute cofounder Elizabeth Lesser writes, "Sin-based religions have made it their mission to control the world, not to love it for what it is. The less controllable aspects of our humanness—erotic love, rage and anger, beauty and sadness—have been labeled too passionate or irrational to be trusted." But in the "new American spirituality," she explains, "everything is sacred—your body, mind, psyche, heart, and soul. The world is sacred, too, with all of its light and darkness."

In this wholehearted embrace of the world and all its parts, many activities once considered merely

*reissued in paperback as *The Seeker's Guide: Making Your Life a Spiritual Adventure* (Villard, Oct. 2000)

"worldly" or mundane are now becoming widely accepted as powerful vehicles for transformation. Indeed, as the avalanche of new books championing the spiritual potential inherent in sex, business, politics, art, sports, and childrearing attests, in this new all-embracing spirituality, every aspect of life—from work to worship—is coming to be honored as an equally valid and valuable part of the spiritual path. With the advent of this new paradigm, even the nuclear family has, perhaps for the first time in the history of mysticism, arrived at centerstage as both the training ground for and ultimate test of spiritual attainment. Bestselling author and Buddhist meditation teacher Jack Kornfield writes, "Family life and children are a wonderful temple. . . . In both child-rearing and love relationships, we will inevitably encounter the same hindrances as we do sitting in meditation. . . . Spirituality has shifted from going to India or Tibet or Machu Picchu to coming home."

This widespread movement to marry the sacred and the secular—while as yet lacking any definable center—has nonetheless inspired many of today's leading technologists of the soul to generate new programs for spiritual development engineered in accordance with its holistic, world-honoring ideals. Foremost among these is the new hybrid spiritual path known as Integral Transformative Practice. Championed by such influential spiritual thinkers as Esalen Institute cofounder Michael Murphy, human potential pioneer George Leonard, and today's foremost philosopher of the spirit, Ken Wilber, this new "holistic" system of human development aims to create a true modern "householder's path" in which the part-time practitioner strategically and ongoingly engages in a full range of transformational practices, each designed to address a different dimension of human development—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Its proponents hold that by simultaneously engaging in, for example, weightlifting, tai chi, psychotherapy, reading, community service, nature hikes, and Zen meditation, one can proceed steadily toward the goal of a truly balanced or integral transformation, even while remaining fully immersed in one's worldly responsibilities.

Perhaps the most innovative and controversial feature of this cutting-edge spiritual technology, and of the "new American spirituality" as a whole, however, is that many "hierarchical" elements, once considered essential to the spiritual path, are being rapidly left behind in favor of a more open, individualistic approach. In particular, the traditional notion that the seeker should submit him- or herself to both the authority of scripture and the guidance of a spiritual teacher has been replaced by a strong emphasis on the importance of "self-authority" on the search. Lesser writes, "It no longer makes sense for an authority to describe to you the sacred truth and the path to discover it. Now *you* map the journey." This bold move to "democratize" the spiritual search—leaving behind the consensus of over 2,500 years of accumulated wisdom—may be the most certain evidence we have that a spirituality truly American has established itself among the panoply of approaches aiming to elevate us to our higher potentials.

From the early days of our research for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, an exploration of this "emerging American wisdom tradition" beckoned. For while this modern endeavor to bring spirituality down to earth is by no means history's first attempt at a world-embracing spiritual path, in its effort to categorically abolish the distinction between the spiritual and the secular—and its commitment to the preservation of "self-authority"—it is clearly treading on wholly unexplored ground. With the impact of this new spiritual path now being felt in almost every sector of contemporary spiritual culture, the opportunity to take a closer look at the implications of this shift in worldviews—particularly for the higher aims of spiritual pursuit—was one we couldn't pass up. In the pages that follow, we feature two distinct views on the ever-expanding terrain of the "new American spirituality." The first, a conversation with Elizabeth Lesser, takes a candid look at the underpinnings of this emerging spiritual paradigm through the eyes of one of its leading proponents. The second, an essay by Ken Wilber, is a thought-provoking inquiry into the relationship between "relative practices," such as Integral Transformative Practice, and the ultimate goal of spiritual life. Together, these two pieces provide a compelling, multifaceted exploration of one of today's most influential spiritual experiments—an experiment that appears destined to have far-reaching effects on the way now and future seekers relate to the world, and the spirit.

by Craig Hamilton

Statistics from: Gallup Polls, Dec. 1999 and March 2000; *Mother Jones*, "Believe It or Not: Spirituality Is the New Religion," Nov./Dec. 1997, p. 54. **Quotations from:** Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*, Bantam Books, New York, 1993, pp. 291, 293, 310; Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality: A Seeker's Guide*, Random House, New York, 1999, pp. 60, 159-160.

at play in the fie

an interview with

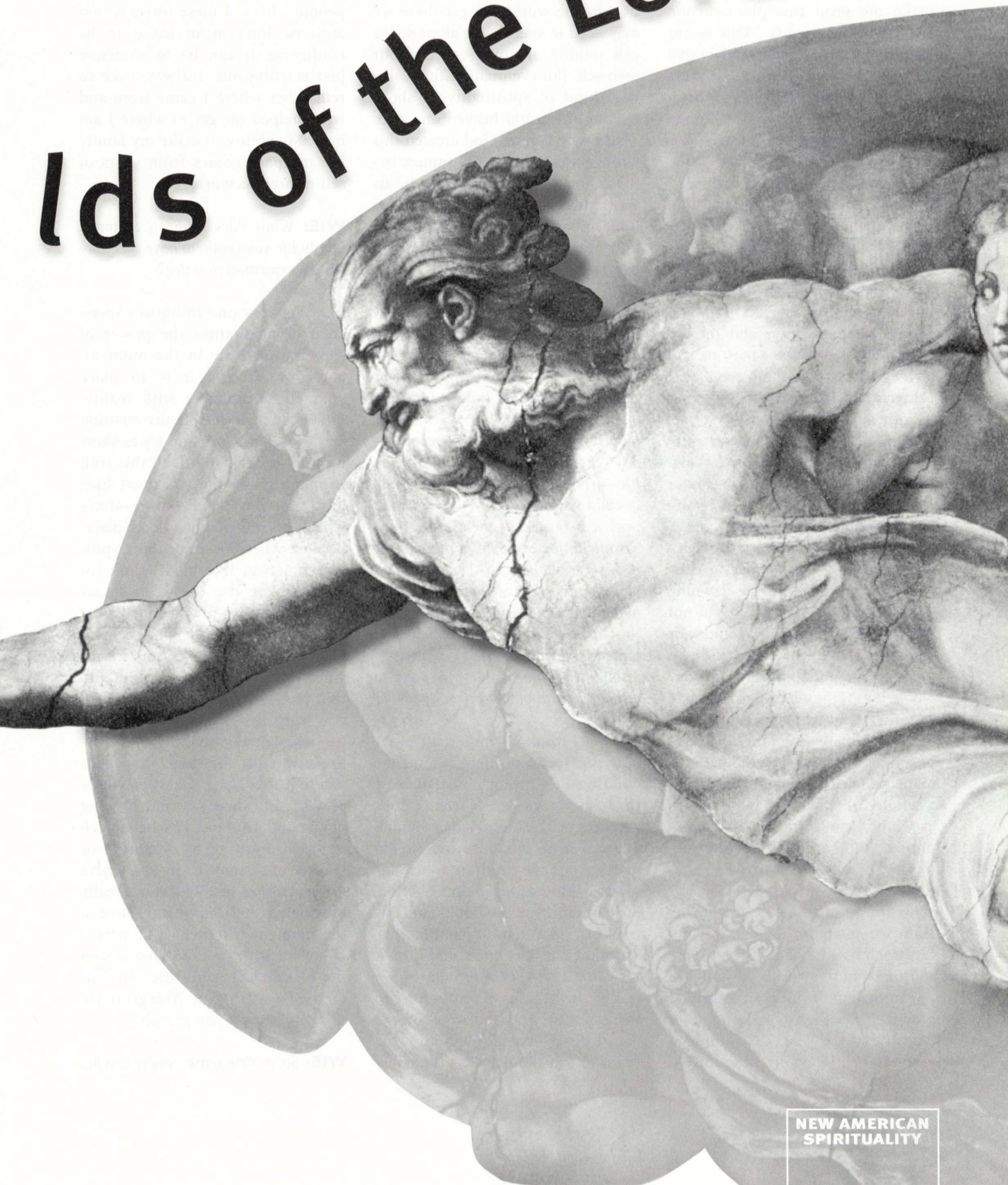
Elizabeth Lesser

by Craig Hamilton

WIE: *Your book,* The New American Spirituality, *chronicles the emergence in the modern West of what seems to be a completely new approach to spiritual life, drawn from the best that psychology, mysticism, mythology, and myriad other disciplines have to offer. One intriguing way in which this "uniquely American wisdom tradition" is changing the modern spiritual landscape is through its endeavor to integrate the spiritual vision into every aspect of our daily lives in the world. Could you speak a little about what you've deemed the "new American spirituality" and its call for a world-embracing approach to spiritual life?*

ELIZABETH LESSER: Well, I know some people find the thought of America being linked with the word "spiritual" very much at odds, because America's so materialistic and so fast and so focused on

lds of the Lord



NEW AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

the outer. But there are two aspects to America that I love, that make me term this phenomenon "American spirituality." One is our love of democracy, and the fact that we've had over two hundred years to integrate into our psyches what it means to be a democratic human being—meaning someone who has self-authority as opposed to being dependent on an outer authority. The democratic psyche is one that wants to choose his or her own way of life, to say, "This is what spirituality means to me and this is how I'm going to pursue it." The other aspect is our diversity, the fact that you could live in a town and on the same street there'd be a mosque and a synagogue and a church and a yoga center and a therapist's office and a bodyworker. We just don't feel comfortable anymore having only one religion, one way of searching. So that's what's American about American spirituality: the diversity and the democracy of the search.

Now another big part of what's changing about how we pursue spirituality has to do with the dawning recognition that spirituality is not just something you do on Sunday or something you leave the world to pursue; you integrate it into your whole life. We're realizing that while walking away from the world and getting to know our inner self may be an essential stage on the path for many people, ultimately that leaves a whole other part of who we are as whole beings unexplored, unexpressed. Who are we in relationship to other people? Who are we in relationship to power issues, to work? Who are we as a man, as a woman? How we push up against society can teach us a lot about who we are spiritually in the world.

In the end, I think any spiritual practice, whether it's living as a hermit for six years or joining a monastery or living in community—ultimately the path to God leads us to each other; it leads us to integration in the world. To get there we may need to spend time alone so we can solidify our own ego and our own self. But eventually I think this new kind of spirituality is about making the world heaven on earth. That's why I think God created this strange experiment of human beings: not so that each one of us would live isolated in order to know him, but so that together we would know the joy of our humanity as an expression of God.

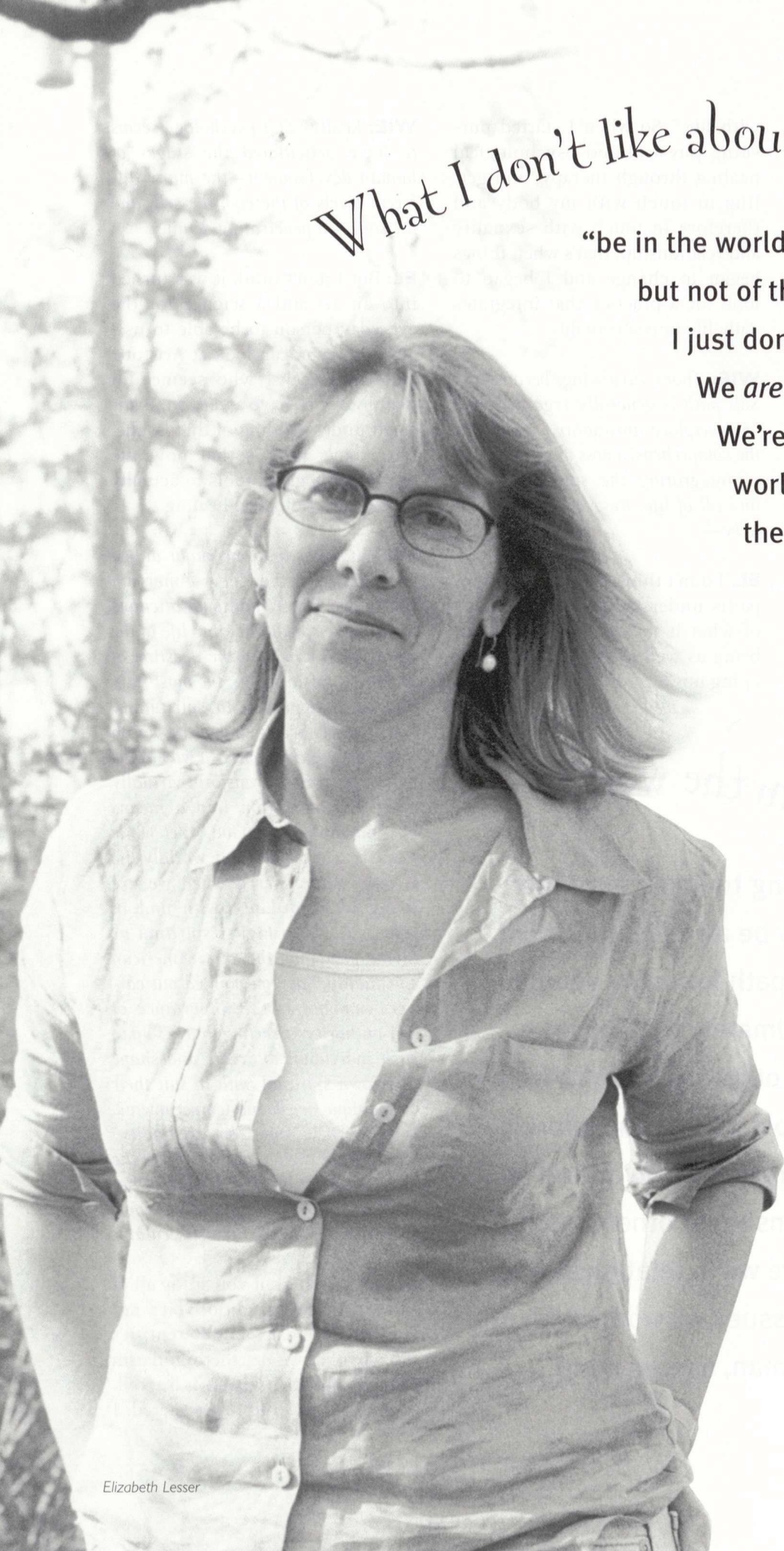
WIE: *It seems that in much of contemporary American spirituality, life in the world is not only seen as something that needs to be embraced or included in spiritual life but in fact is often regarded as the very vehicle for our transformation. Many people today regard specific aspects of worldly life—from sexuality and relationship to child-rearing to work—as spiritual practices in and of themselves. Jack Kornfield, for example, writes in one of his recent books, "The sacrifices of a family are like those of any demanding monastery, offering exactly the same training in renunciation, patience, steadiness, and generosity." This is a sentiment that you seem to echo at several points in your book.*

EL: But I think it's important to realize that Jack Kornfield is someone who lived as a monk for five years in Asia. He gained a tremendous amount of self-knowledge, which allowed him, when he did finally marry and have children, to use his married life as *sangha* and dharma. Jack himself, in his books and his teaching, never fails to mention this. But some teachers don't, and I think it's unfair for people who have reaped the benefits of self-inquiry to then turn around and say, "By the way, I discovered through all those years of self-inquiry that it's really about being with other people. So forget that—just be with other people." Even if these teachers and authors don't mean for it to be confusing, it can be to someone just starting out. I always like to remember where I came from and what helped me get to where I am now. My ability to make my family life my path comes from years of self-awareness work.

WIE: *What does it mean to make family life your path, to have everyday life as a spiritual practice?*

EL: Well, it's one thing to experience in meditation the power of showing up fully in the moment, and how freeing it is to place yourself so squarely with reality. But when you get off the cushion and you go to work and try to show up fully in reality with all this stuff happening—people you don't like, jobs that have a deadline—that's when the *real* practice takes place. Because when we speak about spiritual practice, like meditation, for example, we use the word "practice" because it's practice for living. We don't do it to become a great meditator. We do it as practice for when we are with our kid and they're having a tantrum, and all you want to do is smack them or run away or do anything but show up fully with that kid who needs you to just be there. Or when you're at work and there's so much going on around you and you have such an opportunity to be distracted or to lash out—that, to me, is where my practice of meditation has really blossomed. So I can be fully alive to the moment whether I like what's going on in it or not. That's been the blessing of a full life, of children, of work, a mate. You get to try to practice what you preach.

WIE: *So in this sense, you're saying*



Elizabeth Lesser

What I don't like about the statement "be in the world but not of the world" is that I just don't think it's true. We *are* of the world. We're made from the world; our very cells are the world.

that spiritual disciplines like meditation feed your real *spiritual life, which is the life of action?*

EL: And they feed each other. I find that what I learn in my training through spiritual practice—meditation and prayer—helps me very much to be a passionate person in the world who's compassionate, awake, intelligent. But life in the world also makes my practice much more meaningful because it's *for* something. It's *for* the world, it's for my children, it's for my relationship.

WIE: *Early in your own search you, in some sense, left the secular world behind when you joined together with a group of fellow seekers to live communally under the guidance of the Sufi teacher Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan. Now, twenty years later, you're writing and speaking about the value you've found in integrating the spiritual path into your daily life in the world. What was it that changed for you?*

EL: If there was any hinge in the revolving door of my life, it was when I got involved in psychotherapy and added that to my spiritual

practice. It was an inner change. Prior to that, my practice had been about transcendence, transcending the parts of myself that I had labeled antithetical to spirituality—the parts of me that weren't loving, the parts of me that yearned for romantic and sexual fulfillment, and the parts that I determined to be insatiable, so why follow them? And what happened was that I was becoming more and more able to find this refined communication with spirit, to touch other realms in meditation, but less and less happy as a person. I was unhappy in my marriage and in daily life, and my physical body wasn't that healthy. That was when I decided, "This isn't working. I can't believe that God would mean for me to be able to communicate with him, but not be able to communicate with life." So when I started pursuing physical and psychological healing through therapy, and getting in touch with my body and therefore in touch with sexuality and relationship, that's when things began to change and I began to look for a practice that integrates daily life into spirituality.

WIE: *That's surprising, because the Sufi path is generally regarded as a "marketplace spirituality," known for the comprehensiveness of its approach to integrating the spiritual vision into all of life. But you didn't find it to be—*

EL: I don't think that most Eastern paths understand the psychology of what it means to be a human being as well as what we're developing now.

Walking away from the world

and getting to know our inner self may be an essential stage on the path for many people, but ultimately that leaves a whole other part of who we are as whole beings unexplored, unexpressed. Who are we in relationship to other people? Who are we in relationship to power issues, to work? Who are we as a man, as a woman?

WIE: *Really? Sufi psychology seems to have articulated the stages of human development—the many different levels of the ego, the self, and the soul—in penetrating detail.*

EL: But I don't think it was turned into an art and a science for the everyday person to be able to use. Similarly, you can look at Aristotle and the Greeks, who seemed in many ways to have a very sophisticated understanding of the psyche. But what's new is that now the everyman is given tools to actually pursue psychological healing.

WIE: *It seems that one major difference between the "new American spirituality" and traditional attempts to integrate spirituality into life in the world has to do with the question of authority. Historically, the most fully integrated approach to spirituality has probably been found in the Jewish tradition, which teaches "a way of life that endeavors to transform virtually every human action into a means of communion with God." Yet while Judaism teaches that our worldly life is only made sacred when we are living in accordance with and in submission to a higher spiritual or divine principle, the "new American spirituality," as you pointed out earlier, emphasizes the importance of self-authority, asserting that it's up to each individual to create and shape their own spiritual path to suit their own unique needs and temperaments. If in the "new American spirituality" there is no higher authority on the basis of which life is sanctified, what is it that makes our life in the world sacred as opposed to merely secular?*

EL: Well, I think if you study all of the great world traditions, it's not the message that's so different; it's the way that we get there. Judaism indeed says everything is sacred. Jesus said, "Everything is sacred. I

and my Father are one." You know, life and God are one. The great native traditions say the same thing. But if you follow someone else's way to get there—if you have a rabbi, and that rabbi says, "You do this, and this is good; this will bring you into holy communion with the Lord. And this is bad; it will make you stray"—on the one hand, that makes it so much easier to stay part of a moral community. That works. That helps the moral community stay together. It creates a glue. So I honor what they were trying to do—the patriarchal rule-based religions. I honor that. I honor the intention. But it doesn't work. If it worked, we wouldn't be in the mess we're in today. So to me the whole evolutionary process is about each individual becoming whole and coming to an understanding of God on his or her own. Because if you are told to do something, it does not transform your whole self. You do it because someone's telling you to do it. You do it because you're afraid that if you don't do it, you'll go to hell. You do it for the sake of somebody else. And it just doesn't work.

WIE: *Are you saying that it wouldn't be possible to seek the guidance of a teacher and apply oneself to the teachings and practices of a tradition not out of fear of damnation or a desire to please but simply because one had a genuine, heartfelt longing to become liberated, to discover the source of wisdom in oneself?*

EL: I think it can work, but the people for whom it can work are already very self-realized. I think *bhakti* paths—devotion to guru or devotion to scripture—can work and have worked for many. But I think that those people are already on the path more significantly than others. I think people come into this world karmically at different levels of realization. So for someone like Saint Catherine, who, at the age of nineteen, gave herself over to the Virgin Mary, I totally believe that was a true path. Or someone who follows his rabbi with great selflessness and sacrifice, or what the Sufis would call the path of *fana-fi-sheikh,* which is annihilation through your teacher—I do think it's a righteous path and I think it can work. But the problem comes when you try to take that into a huge, organized religion and apply that to everybody at every level of incarnation and realization. Let's say someone has enormous authority issues—let's say they were beaten by their father, and their relationship to authority is filled with fear and self-loathing and hatred—and you try to take that person and put them into a patriarchal, authority-based religion. I don't see that working. That person's path of healing is probably going to have to be therapy work, so that they can see where their stuff about authority is affecting their search.

So for those traditional paths to work, I think someone either has to come into this world as an on-fire mystic—like "give me God or give me nothing"—or has to be very psychologically mature, with a strong, healthy ego where boundary issues have been worked through adequately so that when they annihilate their own ego into the ego of the teacher, it's not being done out of projection or the need for a mommy/daddy figure but out of the true understanding of what it means to surrender to the guru.

WIE: *So the path of self-authority is for people who haven't cultivated that intensity of focus and purpose?*

EL: Absolutely.

WIE: *If one doesn't have that kind of strong, pure spiritual intention and hasn't already reached a high level of evolution, when they're encouraged to stick to their own devices and find their own way, what is going to prevent their spiritual practice from becoming just another ego-centered pursuit?*

EL: Well, you've certainly hit upon the great problem here. First of all, it just seems to be part of the human experiment that it's all messy and experimental and evolutionary. So I'm not saying that "Oh we'll just do this, this, and this, and it'll all work." It's a process. I think we're involved in some grand experiment that we don't even understand fully. We're now moving out of patriarchy into another way of being, which I think is about self-authority. So I can't give you a straight answer as to what's going to keep us from making huge mistakes as we move away from the order of organized religion into the disorder that we're in right now. I think we're going to have to make a lot of mistakes and learn from that, both on the collective and individual level.

WIE: *So to return briefly to my question, in contrast to a traditional path like Judaism, where daily life in the world is said to be sanctified through adherence to God's will, how in this new paradigm of spirituality does one's life in the world become sacred or holy, as opposed to merely worldly?*

EL: When I look at the physical world—which includes our bodies and therefore our sexuality, our food, our families, our work—the physical world to me *is* holy. There's nothing we have to do about earth, matter, mating, eating, sleeping, relating. All of that is holy. Why? Because it was created by the Holy Creator. If we had refined enough, spiritual enough eyes, we would just be dazzled by the absolute glory

and sense and beauty of everything, of our breath, of the insect world, of everything. Everything is holy. That's not the problem. The problem is our own internal neuroses and misinterpretation and fear—fear of death, fear of each other. Spiritual work is not about sanctifying matter. Matter already *is* sacred. It's about clearing away our misinterpretations, taking the blinders off our senses, some of which have been put there by cultural misunderstanding, by fear of what would happen if people were truly relating as the sacred, ecstatic beings that we are. There's just a terror that if all we did was dance in the fields of the Lord, something would go terribly awry. So to me, spiritual work is about purifying our own experience, our own way of experiencing what's happening at every moment, so that we don't have to reject life—we can play in it.

WIE: *Throughout history many spiritual masters have declared that if we want to be free in the midst of the many activities and responsibilities of the world, we have to find a way to* transcend *the world, to be "in the world but not of it." The nineteenth-century Indian saint Sri Ramakrishna said, "Live the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment. . . . Live in the world like a cast-off leaf in a gale." The Hindu text Srimad Bhagavatam says, "While moving among the objects of sense, remain unaffected by them." And one Sufi poet declares, "To leave the world is not to abstain from property, wife and children, but to act in obedience to God and to set the things of God above those of the world." In light of what you've been saying about the sacredness of the world and everything in it, do you feel it is even necessary to transcend the world, to be "in the world but not of it"?*

EL: I think those texts reveal that a lot is lost in translation, both from one language to another and also when the spoken words of a mystic are put down on paper. I don't want to say that those texts are wrong, but as written I don't agree with them. So I think that probably their original meaning was lost.

On the other hand, they may indeed be the words of a fearful, patriarchal way of thinking. By "patriarchal" I mean this sense of a fear of annihilation, a fear of the loss of the individual self, this sense of holding on to power and domination over the other. When I experience the world as sacred and physicality as sacred and myself and you as sacred, it makes what we have here enough. I don't need anything else. I don't need God to be anything more than what I'm experiencing right now. *This* is holiness. This is it; I'm home already, as opposed to, "This isn't good enough. I want something more glorious, more incredible." I think there's a lot of ego in that.

WIE: *But one could find thousands of similar passages throughout the mystical literature of the ages, and while it's possible that they may have all been misinterpreted, it seems that many of the greatest mystics did repeatedly speak about the world with caution. Pointing to the tremendous subtlety of discrimination and singularity of focus required on the spiritual path, they have often warned us to be wary of the temptations of the world—of ambition, romance, lust for power, greed—saying that all of these things can pull us away from the path.*

EL: Okay, I think what I was doing right then was something that I was accusing other people of doing earlier—forgetting that a lot of the reason for my ability to play in the fields of the Lord on earth with a sense of equanimity and joy comes from years of spiritual practice. So yes, it is true that the aggression and the grasping in the world provide endless opportunity for your ego to get seduced and to be harmful to others and to create more and more of those veils that I was talking about. Every day there's huge opportunity in the world to turn away from God, to turn away from the love and the ecstasy that are here all the time. And therefore, part of spiritual practice is disidentifying with the parts of the world that keep us veiled from the truth. Ultimately, though, when one's eyes and heart are purified, the world does show up as being fine just the way it is, and perfect and beautiful and holy. So walking the spiritual path is walking a razor-sharp edge of being in the world—not rejecting anything as not being part of God—but at the same time not getting seduced into one's own darkness and shadow.

What I don't like about the statement "be in the world but not of the world" is that I just don't think it's true. We *are* of the world. We're made from the world; our very cells are the world. So it's a self-hatred thing to say that we're not of the world. And it's crazy-making because as long as we're made of the world, and our very brain cells and the way we interpret reality are stuff, are matter, it's sort of fruitless to try to only be spirit.

WIE: *What would you say, then, to individuals who have pushed this issue to the extreme—religious luminaries such as Jesus, the Buddha, Shankara, and Teresa of Avila who renounced the world entirely and encouraged their followers to do the same?*

EL: But they didn't renounce it. Let's take the Buddha, for example. He was raised in the belly of the world, as a prince in a castle. He

had everything. He was married, he had a child, he had wealth. He was the epitome of the worldly being. So then, as an antidote to such worldliness, he went into seclusion, into renunciation, into asceticism. But it is said that the moment he was finally enlightened was when, after weeks of fasting to the point of emaciation, he accepted a bowl of milk. He drank it and said, "How wonderful. All things are enlightened exactly as they are." And it was from that renunciation that the "middle way" came to be known. But he had to know both of those extremes. He had to know total worldliness and he had to know total renunciation for him to come to the middle way—which is living at play in the fields of the Lord, knowing that we are from somewhere else on a visit here on planet earth and are put here to enjoy the beauty and to learn from the suffering, to live as human beings.

Jesus did a very similar thing. He didn't totally renounce the world. He renounced the way religion was being practiced in Jerusalem at the time. He kicked over the money-changers' tables and said, "We're to live more simply." He lived with a band of friends in community. He loved other human beings. He may or may not have had sexual relations; we don't know.

WIE: *But according to traditional accounts, even after his enlightenment, the Buddha continued to live apart from the world, calling people to join him in living the homeless, renunciate life in the forest. In the Pali Canon he is quoted as saying, "The household life is a dusty path full of hindrances, while the ascetic life is like the open sky. It is not easy for a man who lives at home to practice the holy life in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection." And in Jesus' case, there are several instances in the New Testament where he tells people to abandon the world without even turning back to say goodbye to their families. There's a famous quote: "If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor . . . and come follow me."*

EL: Well, I read that as metaphor. Now some religious adept or scholar might say, "Yeah, that's because you're lazy." But let's take the Pali statement you read there. I think that in order to break the trance that we're all in—where we forget who we really are, and we get caught up in all the pain and distraction of human life—it does take different things for different people. And for someone who's deep in that trance and whose life has become so empty of meaning and who is so unkind to himself and others, it really could take something as radical as that. It could take his saying, "I'm leaving my wife; I'm leaving my home. I am so lost, I need to completely shake

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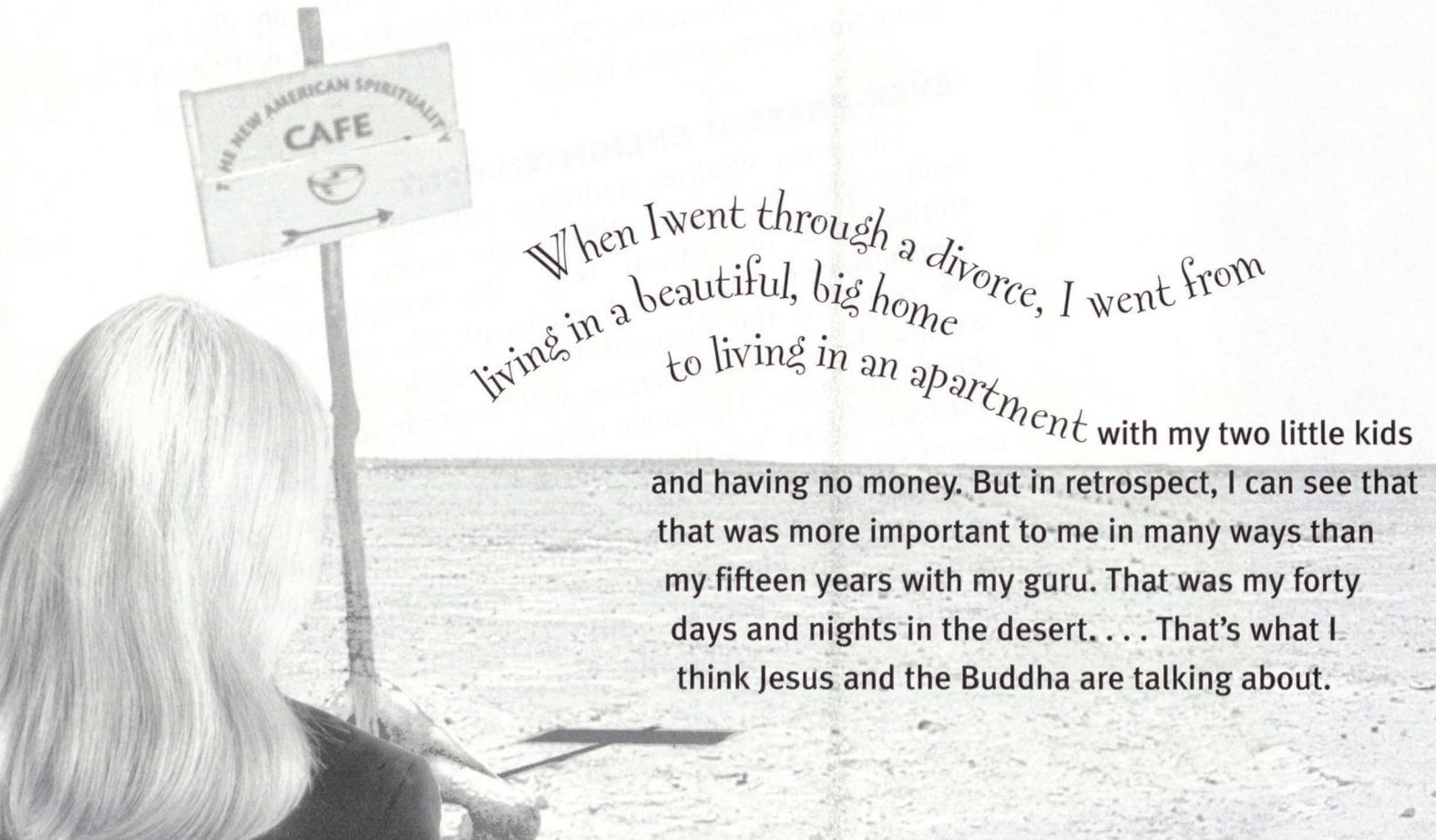
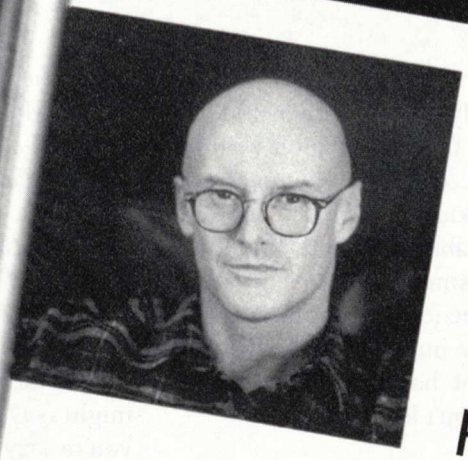


When I went through a divorce, I went from living in a beautiful, big home to living in an apartment **with my two little kids and having no money. But in retrospect, I can see that that was more important to me in many ways than my fifteen years with my guru. That was my forty days and nights in the desert. . . . That's what I think Jesus and the Buddha are talking about.**



INTEGRAL TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE:

In This World or Out of It?

by Ken Wilber

Andrew Cohen [founder of *What Is Enlightenment?*] has asked me to say a few words about the main topic of this issue, namely, being in the world but not of it. And further, how the "new" spiritual practice of Integral Transformative Practice relates to this issue. Andrew has some concerns about these issues, concerns that I share, and I am glad to contribute what I can to this discussion. Let's start with Integral Transformative Practice (ITP)—what it is, and more important, what it is not.

EVER-PRESENT ENLIGHTENMENT

The great wisdom traditions generally maintain that reality consists of at least three major realms: the gross, the subtle, and the causal (e.g., the *Nirmanakaya*, the *Sambhogakaya*, and the *Dharmakaya*). The gross realm is the realm of the material body and the sensorimotor world—the world you can see with your physical senses in the waking state. The *subtle realm* is the realm of the mind and its displays, which you can see in a vivid form in the dream state, in certain states of meditation, and (it is said) in the afterlife *bardo* realms. All of those are subtle states of consciousness. The *causal realm* is the realm of pure formless consciousness, unlimited and unbounded, radically free and radically full. The causal realm is

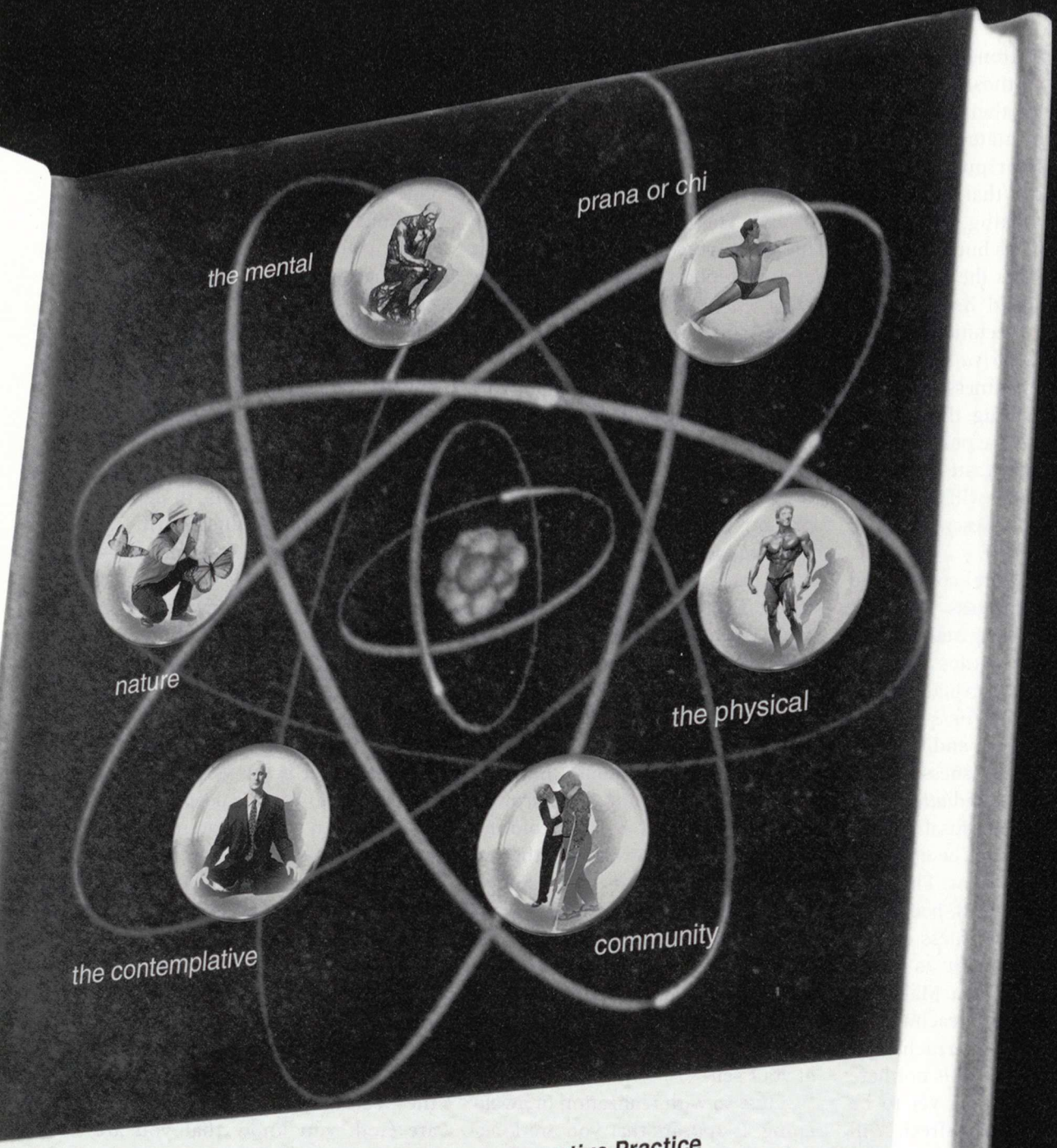


Figure 19b—Dimensions of Integral Transformative Practice

experienced by everybody in deep dreamless sleep (which is pure formlessness without an object), but it yields its final secrets only when it is entered with full consciousness, which happens with certain profound meditative states, various types of satori or initial awakening, and vastly expanded states of boundless consciousness.

But the traditions also maintain that, beyond those three great realms and states, there is a fourth state (*turiya*), the state of the ever-present Witness or pure Self, the great mirror-mind that impartially witnesses the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states but is not itself a separate state: it is the Witness of all those states, and itself neither comes nor goes. (Technically, there is a fifth state, *turiyatita*, which occurs when the Witness itself dissolves into everything that is witnessed, and there is the pure nondual realization of One Taste. For this simple introduction, I will treat them together as the ever-present nondual Self or pure Witness.)

The waking state comes and goes, but the Witness is ever-present. The dreaming state comes and goes, but the Witness is ever-present. The deep sleep state comes and goes, but the Witness is ever-present. Extraordinary and remarkable states of consciousness can be *reached* and *practiced* and *attained* in the gross, subtle, and causal realms. But the Witness cannot be attained, because it is ever-present. The Witness cannot be practiced, because it is ever-present. The Witness cannot be reached, because it is ever-present. As Sri Ramana Maharshi often said, "There is no reaching the Self. If Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not here and now but that it has yet to be obtained. What is got afresh will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say the Self is not reached. You *are* the Self; you are already That." Or the great Zen Master Huang Po, "That there is no reaching enlightenment is not idle talk, it is the truth. Hard is the meaning of this saying!" You can no more reach enlightenment or attain the Self than you can attain your feet or acquire your lungs.

Notice: the clouds float by in your awareness, thoughts float by in your mind, feelings arise in the body, and you are the Witness of all of those. The Witness is already fully functioning, fully present, fully awake. The enlightened Self is one hundred percent present in your very perception of this page. Enlightened Spirit is that which is reading these words right now: how much closer can you possibly get? Why go out and start looking for the Looker? The great search for enlightenment is not just a waste of time; it is a colossal impossibility because the enlightened Self is ever-present, as the Witness of this and every moment.

This is why there is, in strictest truth, no reaching enlightenment, no finding the Self. And yet, of course, it certainly appears that there are those who are more awake to this fact than others—we call them "enlightened"—and in a sense that is true. But what actually happens in these cases is not the *discovery* of enlightenment but a profound *recognition* of something that is already present. It is like looking into a store window and seeing a hazy figure looking at you. You move your head around until you can see who it is, and with a sudden shock you realize that it is your own reflection in the window: you are looking at your self.

Just so with realization or awakening. It appears that you are looking at the world "out there," which seems very real and very separate from you, but then suddenly there is the realization—the simple recognition—that you are simply looking at your Self, and your Self is the entire World as it is arising moment to moment, right now and right now and right now. When you Witness the world impartially, the world arises in the Witness, and you and the world are one. You do not see the sky; you are the sky. You do not hear the birds singing; you are the birds singing. You do not feel the earth; you are the earth. All of this comes in a sudden, spontaneous, uncaused, tacit recognition, the recognition of nondual One Taste, your very own Self, the Original Face you had before your parents were born, the Self you had before the universe was born; this pure, ever-present, nondual Self, spaceless and therefore infinite, timeless and therefore eternal—and yet it is the only thing you have ever really known. You *already* know that you are you; and that *you* is, in deepest truth, pure and nondual Spirit.

That realization or recognition—which *seems* to have a beginning in time—actually carries one other recognition: there has never been a time that you did not know the Self. You have *always* known, in the deepest center of your awareness—in what Ramana Maharshi called the I-I (because it is the Witness of the little I or ego)—in the deepest center of your own pure awareness, you have always known that you will never really die (because the Self is timeless), and you already know that you have always been here (because the Self is ever-present). You already know all this, way in the back of your mind. You are perfectly aware that you are the Witness of this moment. You know that you are the absolute; you know that you are God; you know that you are Goddess; you know that you are Spirit, and you know that every sentient being in the entire Kosmos can make that simple statement: when I abide as the pure Self, I-I am God. I have always known this; you have always known this. And you have always known this because the Self is ever-present.

This tacit recognition seems to have a beginning in time, until it occurs, whereupon it becomes clear

The great traditions generally make a distinction between absolute truth and relative truth.

- Relative truth deals with the manifest, ordinary, dualistic world—the world of samsara
- and absolute truth deals with the infinite, unbounded, unqualifiable, ultimate truth—the truth of nirvana.

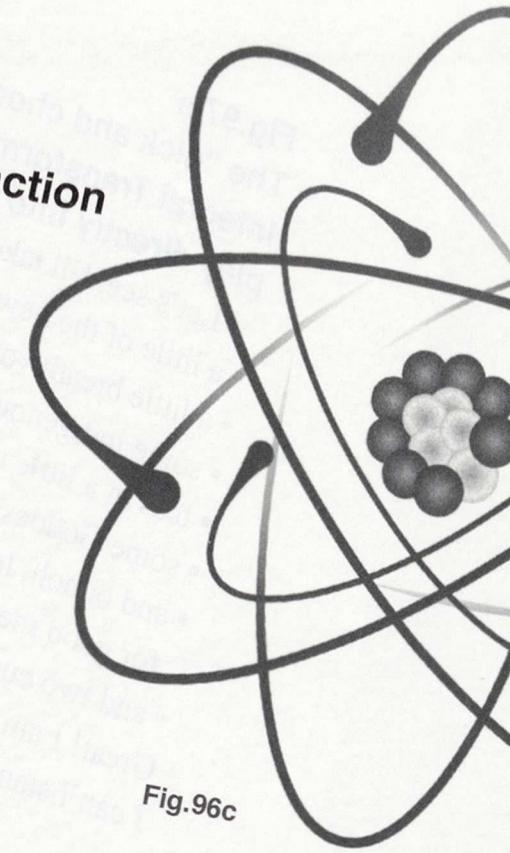


Fig.96c

that it has always been completely obvious. "Oh, *That!*" This profound realization never began because it never ended. There is the recognition "I am That," and the simultaneous recognition that I have always known this. Zen calls it the gateless gate. On this side of the gate that "separates" us from enlightenment, the gate seems to be real—until we pass through it, turn around, and see that it was never really there: thus, gateless in truth. But it is much simpler than that. You are the Self, you are the Witness, you know it now, and you have known it always.

This ever-present recognition is often called "enlightenment." It is a simple, profound, irreversible recognition, just like looking in the window and *recognizing* yourself, whereupon you also realize that it has always been so. A wonderful description of such an awakening can be found in Andrew's *My Master Is My Self*. Simply upon seeing his Master, Andrew *recognized* his own Self—just like that!—and there is only one Self in the entire Kosmos, hence the title.

Strictly speaking, this awakening or realization was not *caused* by anything. It was not caused by his teacher H.W.L. Poonja, not caused by Andrew, not caused by meditation, not caused by anything—because, in fact, it is ever-present. You cannot cause something that is already here.

Still, on this side of the gateless gate, there are certain factors that seem to *facilitate* this awakening. Of these, *satsang*—or simply sitting in the Presence of those whose realization is brilliant, clear, and radiant—is probably the most profound. But there are countless other facilitating factors, including meditation, the many yogas (*raja, jnana, bhakti, karma, kriya, laya*) and—as we will see—ITP. But none of them can actually *cause* you to awaken because the awakened Self is already ever-present, and you already know it. So when enlightenment occurs, it almost appears as an "accident." As Baker Roshi put it, "Enlightenment is an accident. Meditation makes you accident prone."

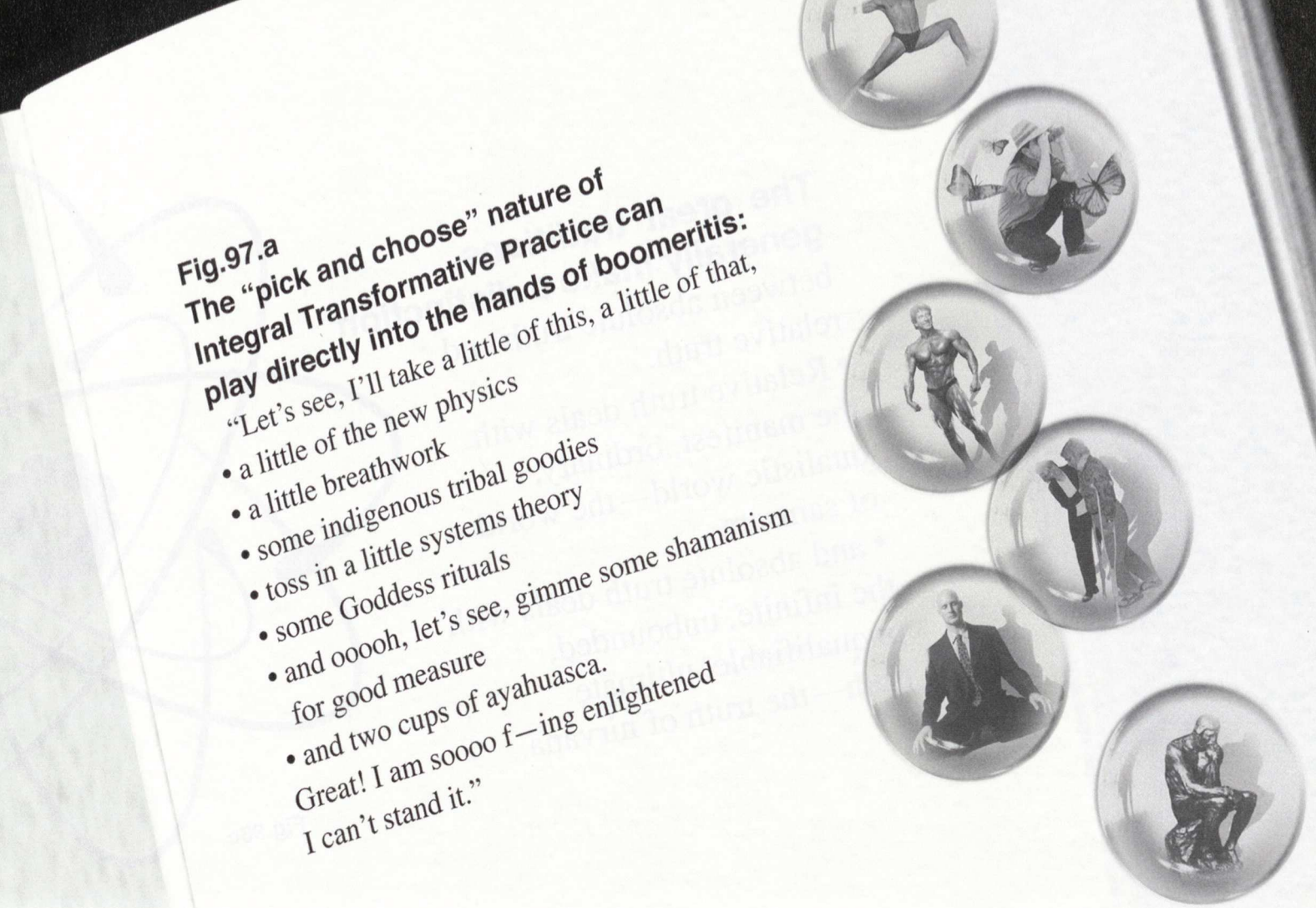


Fig.97.a
The "pick and choose" nature of Integral Transformative Practice can play directly into the hands of boomeritis:

"Let's see, I'll take a little of this, a little of that,
- a little of the new physics
- a little breathwork
- some indigenous tribal goodies
- toss in a little systems theory
- some Goddess rituals
- and ooooh, let's see, gimme some shamanism for good measure
- and two cups of ayahuasca.

Great! I am soooo f—ing enlightened I can't stand it."

Truth be told, nobody really understands all the factors that can help facilitate enlightenment. If they did, we would all be enlightened by now. Moreover, many of the states taken to be "enlightened" are actually states of the subtle or causal realm. That is, they are extraordinary experiences—luminosities, interior sounds, states of formlessness, bliss, and ecstatic expansion—that all have a beginning in time. But the Witness does not have a beginning in time, because it is ever-present. That which has a beginning in time is merely finite and temporal; it comes, it stays a bit, and it goes. But the enlightened Witness does not have a beginning in time; it is ever-present and you know it is ever-present (you are aware of the Witness right now, as that which is reading this page). Enlightenment, in fact, is the only thing that *never* begins (for it is *always* ever-present).

In short, you do not *become* enlightened; you simply wake up one morning and *confess* that you always already are, and that you have been playing the great game of hide-and-seek with your Self. And if that is the game you are playing, then certain "facilitating factors"—from meditation to ITP—can be engaged as part of the game, until you tire of their worthlessness, grow weary of the great search, admit the impossibility of becoming enlightened, and realize that you are already so, abiding then as the timeless Self that you have always been, smiling with the sudden shock that my Master is my Self, and I have been looking into the Kosmic window at my own reflection.

Absolute and Relative Truth

The great traditions generally make a distinction between absolute truth and relative truth. Relative truth deals with the manifest, ordinary, dualistic world—the world of *samsara*—and absolute truth deals with the infinite, unbounded, unqualifiable, ultimate truth—the truth of nirvana. Now ultimately these two worlds, *samsara* and nirvana, are not-two, or nondual, but this is a useful distinction.

The relative world of *samsara* includes the gross, subtle, and causal realms. All of those are dualistic, for they embody some form of the

subject-object dualism. Even the causal or formless realm is dualistic because it is set apart from the world of form. So all of the extraordinary states of consciousness that can be *achieved* or *attained* or *practiced*—all of them really only deal with the relative, dualistic world, however otherwise wonderful they might be.

But the absolute truth is the truth of the ever-present Self, the nondual, unqualifiable, omnipresent Spirit, where my Master is my Self, and that Self is timelessly and eternally present in all that arises in this and any world. And while you can reach and attain relative states, you cannot reach the absolute, for it is ever-present.

Now, *all* forms of spiritual *practice*—including Integral Transformative Practice—deal with the *relative* truth. They all involve paths, roads, techniques, and practices that can very effectively help get you into gross, subtle, and causal states, and those states can be very beneficial in themselves. But enlightenment deals with the *absolute* truth, and there is no road, no practice, and no path that can reach that which is *already* the case. Relative practices can be very useful—"meditation makes you accident prone"—but they cannot, in and of themselves, produce or cause enlightenment (because enlightenment is already ever-present).

Here is what I believe is Andrew's first major concern that he conveyed to me about spiritual practices in general and Integral Transformative Practice in particular, namely: these paths often confuse relative practices with absolute enlightenment. In other words, they offer various types of subtle egoic consolations and translations instead of radical transformation and pure recognition of the Self. And that, further, all of these relative practices are just subtle (or not so subtle) ways for the ego to keep playing its game of taking control of the universe, and thus these practices can at times actually hurt more than help.

I think Andrew is quite right on this point, and it is a concern I share. In fact, I dealt with this topic in a previous essay in *WIE*, "A Spirituality That Transforms." But before we get to that, let's note that the fact that practices such as ITP deal only with the relative realm doesn't mean that they can have no benefits at all. So let's look a little more closely at what relative practices such as ITP can—and cannot—do.

Integral Transformative Practice

The idea behind ITP is simple: in an attempt to become more "accident prone," the more dimensions of the human bodymind that are exercised, then the more transparent to the Divine they become, and thus the more accident prone the individual is. ITP therefore attempts to simultaneously exercise many of the major aspects of the gross, subtle, and causal dimensions. Put differently, ITP attempts to exercise the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of the self, and to do so in relationships with others and with the larger world (including community and nature).

You can think of this as a modular type of setup. Think of, say, six columns. These columns represent the physical, the emotional-sexual (*prana* or *chi*), the mental or psychological, the contemplative or meditative, the community, and nature. Each column has the many practices that have proven beneficial for that dimension. For example, column one—the physical—might have things like aerobic exercise, weight lifting, healthy diet, swimming, and so on. Column two—*prana* or *chi*—might have hatha yoga, qi gong, tai chi chuan, etc. Column three—the psychological—might have things like visualization, affirmations, and various types of psychotherapy. Column four—the contemplative—might have *zazen*, vipassana, self-inquiry, centering prayer, etc. Column five—community—might have various types of community service, hospice, helping the homeless, or any sort of relational, compassionate care and engagement with others. And column six—nature—might have recycling, nature hikes and nature celebration, and so on. The idea of ITP is simple: pick at least one practice from each column and practice them concurrently. The more dimensions you practice, the more effective they all become, the more you become one big accident-prone soul.

But remember, *those are still practices in the relative realms, and they yield only relative truths*. Andrew's second major concern is that these practices will again simply become a new playground for the ego. And there is no doubt that such indeed can happen. But then, what else is new? The ego will take anything, including *satsang* with a perfect master, and screw it up royally, just in order to extend its own power and its own reach. Welcome to *samsara*. But Andrew is quite right to blow the whistle on this, and I support him wholeheartedly in that. Andrew has always been a strong voice reminding us of absolute Freedom and Emptiness, not just relative safety and release, and I stand firmly with him on that crucial issue.

Andrew had just finished reading a book manuscript of mine called *Boomeritis*. It is a chronicle of the ways that the ego will take virtually anything—from physics to systems theory to the great wisdom traditions to meditation—and turn it into a game of one-upmanship: "I've got the new paradigm that will be the greatest transformation in the history of the world; I've got the greatest spiritual path that has ever been devised; I'm part of a new integral

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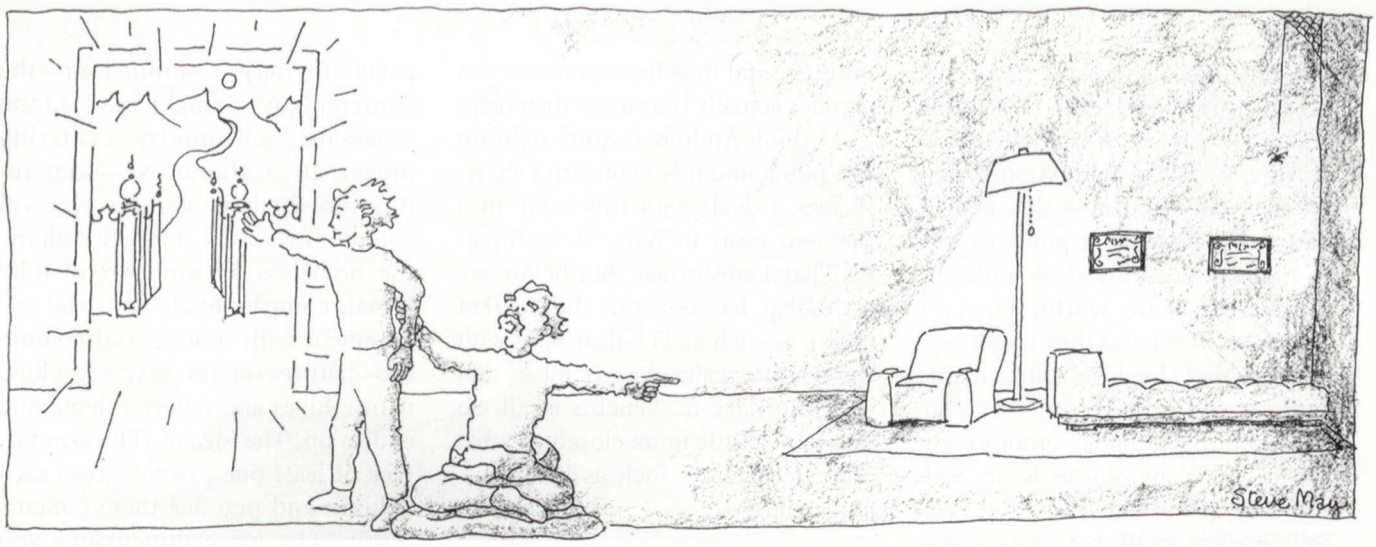

Sid Arthur of Sausalito

by Brad Roth

A postmodern fable *about the perennial question that every true seeker of enlightenment struggles with at some time in his or her life: Should I stay where I am or should I give up everything in order to devote myself entirely to the spiritual quest?*

On the eve of his departure from his palatial Marin County, California estate, a young seeker, Sid Arthur of Sausalito, describes over hot cappuccino with his spiritual teacher Lloyd Hirshfeld the passion growing within him that has inspired him to unconditionally abandon his worldly life and attachments in order to go forth into the unknown in his search for enlightenment.

Sid Arthur begins: Lloyd, I feel compelled to share with you my growing unease and discontent with the life I am presently living. When I traveled into the city the other day, I felt as if I recognized for the first time the extent of the suffering inherent in human existence. I saw the incredible fragility of life. I became aware of the appalling degree of physical and social degradation that plagues the world we live in. I experienced directly the ever-imminent realities of disease, aging, and death, and suddenly the worldly pursuits of myself and my peers seemed to be mere folly. I saw at once the foolishness and futility of striving for things impermanent, and in the light of this revelation, I began to re-evaluate my priorities. There is now a growing conviction in me that I must find a radical alternative to the life I am presently living. I know that I must break through the dream and drama that I and so many seem to be caught up in and are subject to. I feel consumed by a passion to know that which is true, that which is changeless, and to attain the peace of deepest understanding!

Lloyd Hirshfeld: This sounds very good. How do you propose to do this?

Sid: This evening I will leave my family, my palatial Marin estate, and all that I possess, in order to devote every cell of my being to waking up, to penetrating the layers of confusion and ignorance that all sentient beings are suffocated by.

Lloyd: Excuse me, Sid, but did you say you were going to leave your parents, your home, wife, and child?! Why on earth would you feel it necessary to do something like that?

Sid: Despite the anguish I know this will cause my family, my decision to go forth on the path to final liberation is an utterly choiceless choice. I must be as free as the open sky to undertake this highest and most noble pursuit of the good and the wholesome. The household

life is a crowded and dust-ridden enterprise, filled with the pursuit of other concerns, inevitably containing much misery. It holds no interest for me. I find it distasteful, and it is certainly not a suitable environment for the kind of search I have in mind.

Lloyd: You certainly are very inspired! But Sidney, leaving your wife and child and all that you own sounds very extreme! What about your responsibilities as a householder—as a citizen of the world, for that matter? You mustn't forget the world. Pursuing your own liberation without regard to these concerns can make the whole endeavor quite a self-centered occupation—and self-centeredness is the very antithesis of freedom. Why don't you try to do both: work on yourself, seek freedom, and at the same time serve in the world and help to alleviate the suffering you see all around you?

Sid: So much of the suffering I see around me is due to ignorance, which I feel compelled to break through. If I seek to alleviate the symptoms of ignorance without having fully addressed and conquered the causes of ignorance in myself, I will never cut the cords that bind me! I must devote myself wholeheartedly and without distraction to the pursuit of nirvana.

Lloyd: I also felt this kind of passionate idealism when I was younger. But you know, Sid, I found that by retreating from the world in the way you're suggesting, I actually wound up avoiding many of the issues I needed to face.

Sid: But Lloyd, I feel strongly that I must remain unshackled by the chains of the world. Only with a mind free from the cares of the world will I be able to cultivate the keenness of discrimination necessary to cut through all that binds me to it.

Now, now, Sidney, you do not want to be too flurried in your passion! The aversion with which you are speaking about being in the world really does make me wonder if perhaps there isn't something you're trying to avoid or escape from.

Lloyd: Well, the results might be unbalanced; whereas pursuing liberation in the context of worldly life ensures that we will be faced with all that life has to offer. Issues such as relationship, sexuality, money, and power sooner or later make themselves known. In my own case, after years as a monk, I found that in my emphasis on spiritual practice, my life had become unbalanced. In fact, all that focus on meditation eventually caused me to repress other important parts of myself that simply weren't being addressed in the practice. Rather than looking honestly at myself and these issues, I conveniently placed myself in a context where I just didn't have to face any of these things—*all in the name of being "spiritual."* I also knew many other monks who, for the very same reasons, were not dealing with these issues in themselves. You see, Sid, pursuing liberation in the world makes it harder to hide out or avoid dealing with the real, nitty-gritty nuts and bolts of our humanity.

Sid: But why pursue liberation "in the world," when the world, in the way that you are speaking, is an expression of the very ignorance I so desperately want to free myself from? I seek not that which is of the world, not that which is subject to "birth, aging, ailment, death, sorrow, and defilement," but rather I seek "the unborn, unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme surcease of bondage"; I seek nirvana!

Lloyd: Very well, Sid, but you know, freedom isn't about realizing something that is somehow *separate* from the world, nor is it about discovering a state or condition that is other than who we already are. Rather, it's about coming to a place of maturity and ripening naturally. You can try to run away from the actualities of life, as I myself once did, but one day, when you return to the world, you are bound to find that the multiple demands of day-to-day living are likely to push the old buttons just as they did before.

Sid: You say "when I return to the world," but why would I return to a burning house? I'm not leaving on a vacation, but with the desire to give all of myself to the realization of the unborn, unmanifest Reality! I have no interest in the things of the world, in the pleasures of the world, in the enticements of the world. They bring no rest, no higher knowledge, no everlasting peace or contentment. In a world of ceaseless craving and striving

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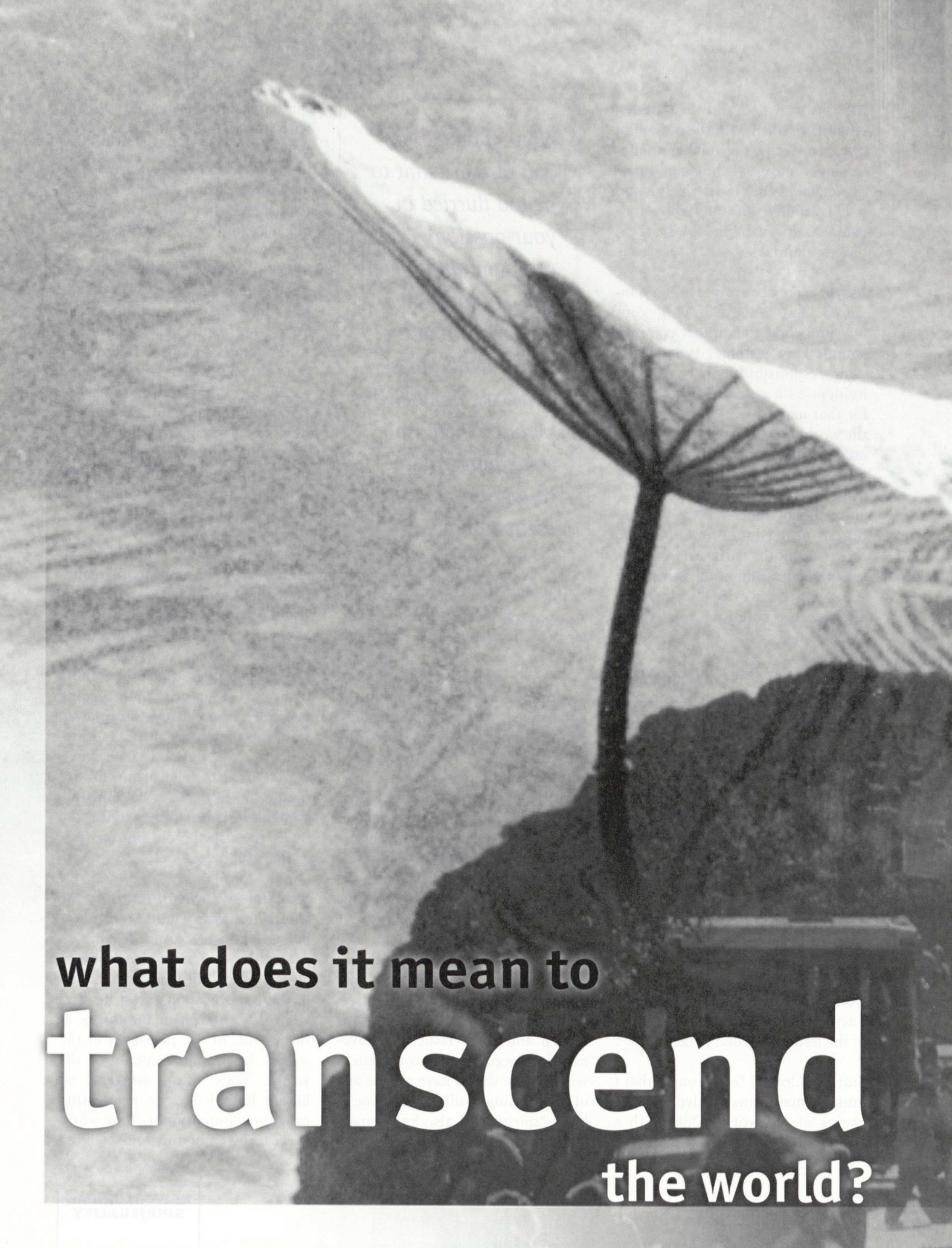

what does it mean to
transcend
the world?


Northern

what does it mean to transcend the world?

featuring interviews with
Eckhart Tolle
and
Joseph Goldstein

IN THE EAST-MEETS-WEST SPIRITUAL DIALOGUE THAT HAS been occurring with greater and greater intensity in recent years, "transcendence" has become a familiar term on the lips of many modern-day seekers. What does transcendence mean? "To transcend" means to go beyond or to rise above limits; to triumph over restriction; to be prior to, beyond, and above the universe or material existence. The concept of transcendence is especially significant for all those who are interested in enlightenment. The Buddha, the Enlightened One, whose insight into the nature of reality is described in the Heart Sutra as "wisdom gone beyond," is a shining example of one who, through his awakening, clearly "transcended" this world. In spiritual terminology, to transcend the world means to free oneself from all bondage and attachment associated with the two perennial enemies of enlightenment—fear and desire. The "world" is that matrix of relationships that is based upon the unenlightened mind's conditioned relationship to those foes. Transcendence of the world, then, is the sought-after goal for most seekers of enlightenment.

But the notion of transcendence does not appeal to the hearts and minds of all spiritual seekers. In fact, there is a growing chorus of critics from different philosophical schools in the spiritual marketplace who insist that the concept of transcendence, or giving undue emphasis to "going beyond" fear and desire in pursuit of "enlightenment," inherently denies the unavoidable reality of our incarnated existence—the reality of our relationship to the earth, our bodies, and our emotions.

Two compelling examples of the "transcend the world" enlightenment paradigm are Joseph Goldstein, one of the most highly respected American Buddhist meditation teachers, and Eckhart Tolle, the German-born enlightened mystic whose runaway spiritual bestseller *The Power of Now* has captured the attention of thousands. Tony Schwartz, in his book *What Really Matters,* describes the pivotal moments in Goldstein's life thus: "It was at Columbia, where he majored in philosophy, that Goldstein was first attracted to Eastern religion. He read the Bhagavad Gita—the classic poem written around 500 B.C. that describes the spiritual struggle of the human soul to let go of desire and transcend the self. 'It rang bells for me all over the place. . . . When I look back at my marked-up college copy I see that I was drawn to all the elements of nonattachment.'" After graduating, Goldstein joined the Peace Corps and was sent to Thailand, where he eventually discovered Buddhism. He "felt an immediate connection to the teachings . . . but only when he sat in meditation did he feel something stir deeply inside him. . . . 'I'd done a lot of thinking in my life, and I knew its limitations,' he said. 'This was an opening to a whole other world.'" After leaving the Peace Corps, he went to Bodh Gaya, India, where he spent several years practicing Buddhist meditation under the Bengali master Anagarika Munindra. During that time, "Goldstein's discipline became legendary, even among his fellow practitioners." He returned to America in 1974 and was invited to teach at the founding session of Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, where he met Jack Kornfield, who became his teaching partner. What happened that summer resulted in an explosion of interest among many young Americans in vipassana meditation, the Theravadan style of practice Goldstein had learned in India. That led to the founding of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, in 1976—one of the largest Buddhist meditation

centers in North America, which is now also Goldstein's home. Goldstein divides his time between his personal meditation practice, teaching meditation retreats around the world, and his writing projects.

Eckhart Tolle says, in a brief introduction to his book *The Power of Now,* that "until my thirtieth year, I lived in a state of almost continuous anxiety interspersed with periods of suicidal depression." Tolle was a research scholar and supervisor at Cambridge University when he woke up one night "with a feeling of absolute dread." While contemplating his predicament, he said, "I could feel that a deep longing for annihilation, for nonexistence, was now becoming much stronger than the instinctive desire to continue to live." Following this thought process, "I cannot live with myself any longer," brought him to the shocking recognition that the "I" and the "self" *were not one and the same.* This realization catapulted him instantaneously into a powerful spiritual experience that completely transformed his life. "I knew, of course, that something profoundly significant had happened to me, but I didn't understand it at all. It wasn't until several years later, after I had read spiritual texts and spent time with spiritual teachers, that I realized that what everyone was looking for had already happened to me. I understood that the intense pressure of suffering that night must have forced my consciousness to withdraw from its identification with the unhappy and deeply fearful self, which is ultimately a fiction of the mind. . . . A time came when, for a while, I was left with nothing on the physical plane. I had no relationships, no job, no home, no socially defined identity. I spent almost two years sitting on park benches in a state of the most intense joy. . . . People would occasionally come up to me and say: 'I want what you have. Can you give it to me, or show me how to get it?' And I would say: 'You have it already. You just can't feel it because your mind is making too much noise.'. . . Before I knew it, I had an external identity again. I had become a spiritual teacher." Tolle, now fifty-three, has spent the last ten years working with small groups of individuals in Europe and North America. He lives in Vancouver, B.C.

Goldstein and Tolle, as individuals and as teachers, are proponents of *transcendence of the world* as the path to freedom. Contrary to the ancient Jewish path, which stresses embracing the world, or the traditional Buddhist path, which stresses renouncing the world, they both stress that true happiness can be found *solely* through transcending the deeply conditioned attachment to the "I" concept. As Goldstein says in the following interview, "In recent years, my practice has gotten simpler and simpler. It basically comes down to one thing that the Buddha said: 'Nothing whatsoever is to be clung to as I or mine.' That's it. That's the practice. That's where the freedom is." And Tolle echoes a similar position, "In concrete terms, at its most basic, it simply means to say 'yes' to this moment. That is the state of surrender—a total 'yes' to what is. Not the inner 'no' to what is. And the complete 'yes' to what is, *is* the transcendence of the world. It's as simple as that—a total openness to whatever arises at this moment."

The freedom Tolle and Goldstein speak about has become the most popular expression of enlightenment dharma in the postmodern world. Their emphasis is that freedom is *only* an inner matter. And in these revolutionary times of "enlightened" spirituality—where the essence of the highest dharma is being taught free from what many feel is the unnecessary baggage of life-denying patriarchal religion—the democratic and individual-centered path to enlightenment that they teach has understandably become one of the most palatable approaches for the Western seeker.

What both Tolle and Goldstein share is this rigidly undogmatic enlightenment teaching—a teaching in which any undue emphasis on form as a support for the pursuit of freedom is usually seen to be an expression of ego or mind-concepts or "shoulds," which in the end have nothing to do with freedom itself. Indeed, they both fervently resist the notion that enlightenment could ever have anything to do with doing anything other than letting go of those ideas, concepts, and attachments that, in the spiritual revelation, are recognized as being false, wrong, and untrue. They are both examples of "personal enlightenment"—in which *transcendence* of the world and personal salvation are pursued in such a way that the individual always remains free from excessive involvement with the ordinary world. Firmly devoted to the path of unconditional freedom, they avoid any kind of engagement that would risk creating attachment. Indeed, with both feet rooted in the realm of the unmanifest and treading very lightly on this earth, both Goldstein and Tolle, as individuals, are clear demonstrations of a deeply detached engagement with this world. Both are not in sexual relationships, have no children, and have organized their lives in a way that ensures that there's plenty of time for personal space.

by Andrew Cohen

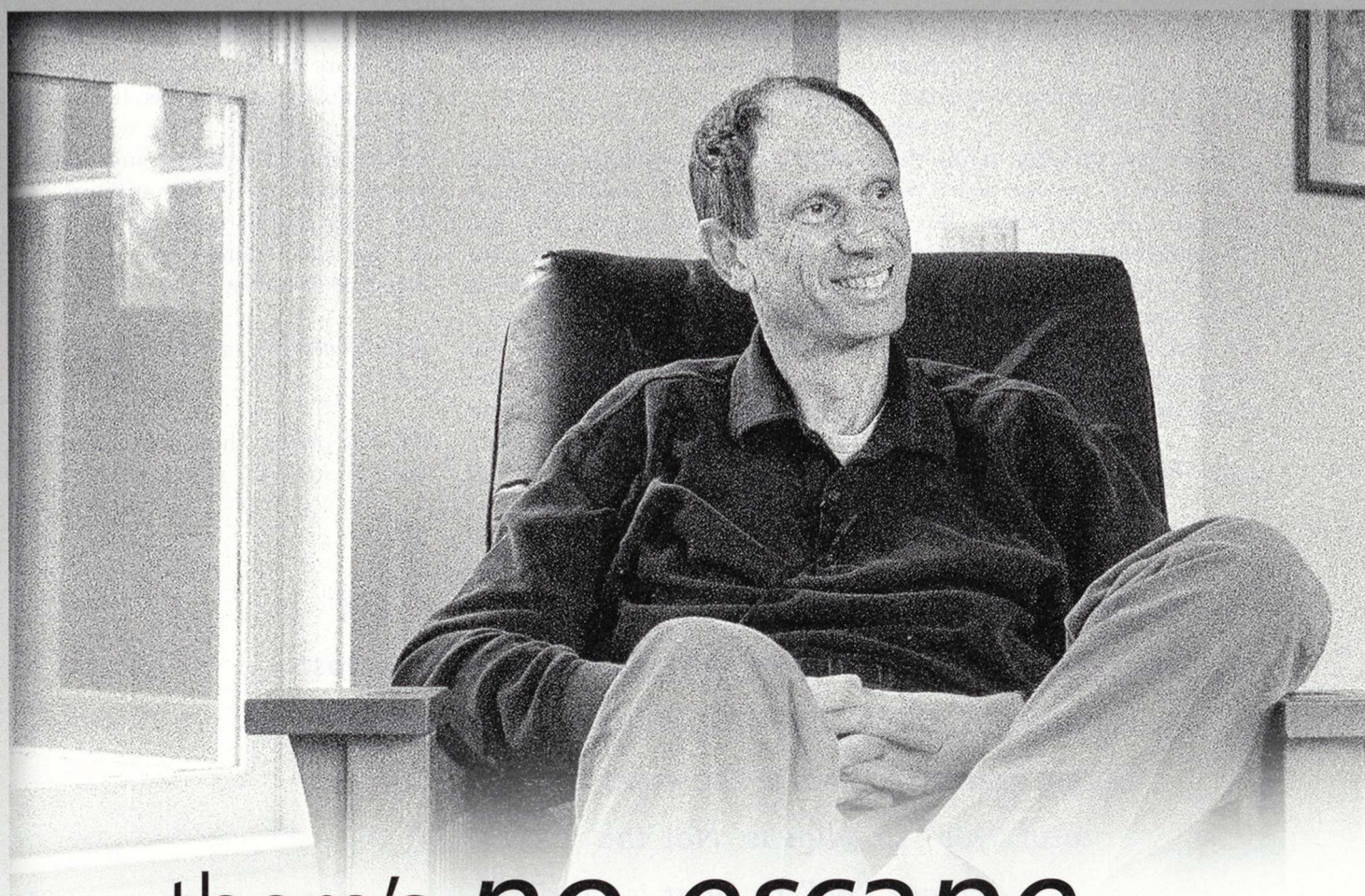
Quotations from: Tony Schwartz, *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America,* Bantam Books, New York, 1995, pp. 310-11; Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now,* New World Library, Novato, 1999, pp. 1-3.

Ripples on the surface of Being

an interview with
Eckhart Tolle
by Andrew Cohen

ANDREW COHEN: *Eckhart, what is your life like? I've heard that you're a bit of a recluse and that you spend a lot of time in solitude. Is that true?*

ECKHART TOLLE: That was true in the past, before my book *The Power of Now* came out. For many years I was a recluse. But since the publication of the book, my life has changed dramatically. I'm now very much involved in teaching and traveling. And people who knew me before say, "This is amazing. You used to be a hermit and now you are out in the world." Yet I still feel that inside nothing has changed. I still feel exactly the same as before. There is still a continuous sense of peace, and I am surrendered to the fact that on an external level there's been



there's *no escape* from the world

an interview with
Joseph Goldstein
by Andrew Cohen

ANDREW COHEN: *Joseph, you seem to be someone who has given up the world to devote your life to the practice of meditation and the pursuit of liberation, and also to be a spiritual guide to others. You're not a monk, but compared to most people here in the West, the life you live would be considered to be monk-like indeed. Since you have devoted your life to the Buddha's path of awakening, why didn't you become a monk?*

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I don't feel like I lead a particularly renunciate life—I'm very engaged with the world. I am involved with various institutions like the Insight Meditation Society, the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, and a new long-term retreat project, and I travel and teach. I also live comfortably, so I want to dispel any illusions. I'm not really living a renunciate life devoted to

a total change. So it's actually not true anymore that I am a hermit. Now I'm the opposite of a hermit. This may well be a cycle. It may well be that at some point this will come to an end and I will become a hermit again. But at the moment, I am surrendered to the fact that I'm almost continuously interacting. I do occasionally take time to be alone. That is necessary in between teaching engagements.

AC: *Why is it that you need to take time to be alone, and what is it that happens when you take the time to be alone?*

ET: When I'm with people, I'm a spiritual teacher. That's the function, but it's not my identity. The moment I'm alone, my deepest joy is to be nobody, to relinquish the function of a teacher. It's a temporary function. Let's say I'm seeing a group of people. The moment they leave me, I'm no longer a spiritual teacher. There's no longer any sense of external identity. I simply go into the stillness more deeply. The place that I love most is the stillness. It's not that the stillness is lost when I talk or when I teach because the words arise out of the stillness. But when people leave me, there is only the stillness left. And I love that so much.

AC: *Would you say that you prefer it?*

ET: Not prefer. There is a balance now in my life, which perhaps

Sometimes people say, "It sounds wonderful, but how do you get there?" In concrete terms, at its most basic, it simply means to say "yes" *to this moment. That is the state of surrender—a total "yes" to what is. Not the inner "no" to what is. And the* complete "yes" *to what is, is the* transcendence of the world.

intensive meditation practice, even though I take periods of time each year to do that.

AC: *But compared to most other people, your life* is *monk-like. You live away from the world in a meditation center. You're not now in a sexual relationship. And everything you're involved with has to do with the propagation of the dharma and teaching meditation.*

JG: One of the reasons I never became a monk is that when I started practicing I was in India, which is not a Buddhist country. Most of my first teachers were laypeople, and even though I later had monks as teachers, the lay model was the form that I grew up with. I did ordain just very briefly, but I was never particularly pulled to the formality of the monastic discipline.

AC: *Had your initial teachers been monks, do you think you might have ordained?*

JG: I might have if I had started practicing in Thailand or Burma. Although I feel that this life as a layperson suits me, and in a way it suits the time. I think a lot of the work that we've done over the last twenty-five years was easier because we did it as laypeople.

AC: *To become a Buddhist you have to "take refuge" in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Buddha is said to have been one who had gone beyond or transcended the world. The dharma is the Buddha's teaching of liberation, a teaching that liberates us from attachment to the world and that enables us to get off the wheel of becoming. The* sangha *is the community of our spiritual brothers and sisters, those with whom we share a bond of mutual commitment to enlightenment and the spiritual life. The relationship with the* sangha *stands in contrast to those relationships that are based upon worldly or materialistic values. And just like the monks, the Buddha's householder or lay disciples* also *had to take refuge in the Triple Gem, even though they remained immersed in the activities of the world. But because they took refuge, their allegiance was no longer to the world or to its materialistic values but was now to enlightenment, which means the transcendence of or nonattachment to the world.*

These days, I know the definition of the Triple Gem is being reinterpreted by some, like your old teammate Jack Kornfield, to be more inclusive, so that now the worldly life can be seen as being a perfect vehicle for spiritual practice just as the life of renunciation was seen as the perfect context in the time of the Buddha. In his recent book After the Ecstasy, the Laundry, *Kornfield says, "The sacrifices of a family are like those of any demanding monastery, offering exactly the same training in renunciation, patience, steadiness, and generosity." But in an interview you gave two years ago you said, "One of my teachers was once asked, Is it really necessary to renounce the world in order to get liberated? He said, 'Well, even the Buddha had to renounce the world!' And he had a few* paramis *[previously developed spiritual qualities]!"*

So, is it necessary to renounce the world in order to become liberated? It's an important question, I think, because some new views in East-meets-West dharma, like the one championed by Kornfield and also by Elizabeth Lesser, author of The New American Spirituality, *seem to use the Buddha's personal example of renunciation of the world more as a* metaphor *for nonattachment rather than thinking that his example need necessarily have any literal implications. Was your teacher correct when he reminded us that even the Buddha literally had to give up the world in order to be free? And in your opinion, is Kornfield correct when he says that family life offers exactly the same training that monastic life does?*

JG: I find it difficult to comment on family life very authoritatively because I haven't been in it. In Buddhism, the path to liberation is talked about in terms of stages of enlightenment, each one uprooting different kinds of obstacles or defilements of the mind. And in the Buddhist texts, there are many stories of people reaching very high levels of awakening as householders. The people I know who have lived the household life successfully have had a tremendously strong commitment to making their life in the world their practice. We can say, "My life is my practice," but whether it *is* or not is for each person to examine carefully. The householder path in some ways seems to be more difficult than the path of a renunciate because there are that many more distractions.

But I think we all need to take a very honest look at what our spiritual aspirations actually are. I don't think it's an either/or. It's possible within the household life, but it takes very strong intention and commitment. I had one teacher, a woman called Dipa ma, who was highly enlightened and had unbelievable levels of concentration and *samadhi* [meditative absorption]. Her development of wisdom, compassion, and the powers of mind was extraordinary; she was an incredibly accomplished yogi. *And* she was a

wasn't there before. When the inner transformation happened many years ago, one could almost say a balance was lost. It was so fulfilling and so blissful simply to *be* that I lost all interest in *doing* or interacting. For quite a few years, I got lost in Being. I had almost relinquished doing completely—just enough to keep myself alive and even that was miraculous. I had totally lost interest in the future. And then gradually a balance re-established itself. It didn't re-establish itself fully until I started writing the book. The way I feel now is that there is a balance in my life between being alone and interacting with people, between Being and doing, whereas before, the doing was relinquished and there was only Being. Blissful, profound, beautiful—but from an external viewpoint, many people thought that I had become unbalanced or had gone mad. Some people thought I was crazy to have let go of all the worldly things I had "achieved." They didn't understand that I didn't want or need any of that anymore.

So the balance now is between aloneness and meeting with people. And that's good. I'm quite attentive to that so that the balance doesn't get lost. There is now a pull toward increasing doing. People want me to talk here and talk there—there are constant demands. I know that I need to be attentive now, so that the balance is not lost, and I don't get lost in doing. I don't think it would ever happen, but it requires a certain amount of vigilance.

AC: *What would it mean to get lost in doing?*

ET: Theoretically, it would mean that I would continuously travel, teach, and interact with people. Perhaps if that happened, at some point the flow, the stillness, might not be there. I don't know; it may always be there. Or physical exhaustion may set in. But I feel now that I need to return to the pure stillness periodically. And then, when the teaching happens, just allow it to arise out of the stillness. So the teaching and stillness are very closely connected. The teaching arises out of the stillness. But when I'm alone, there's only the stillness, and that is my favorite place.

AC: *When you're alone, do you spend a lot of time physically being still?*

ET: Yes, I can sometimes sit for two hours in a room with almost no thought. Just complete stillness. Sometimes when I go for walks, there's also complete stillness; there's no mental labeling of sense perceptions. There's simply a sense of awe or wonder or openness, and that's beautiful.

AC: *In your book* The Power of Now *you state that "The ultimate purpose of the world lies not within the world but in transcendence of the world." Could you please explain what you mean?*

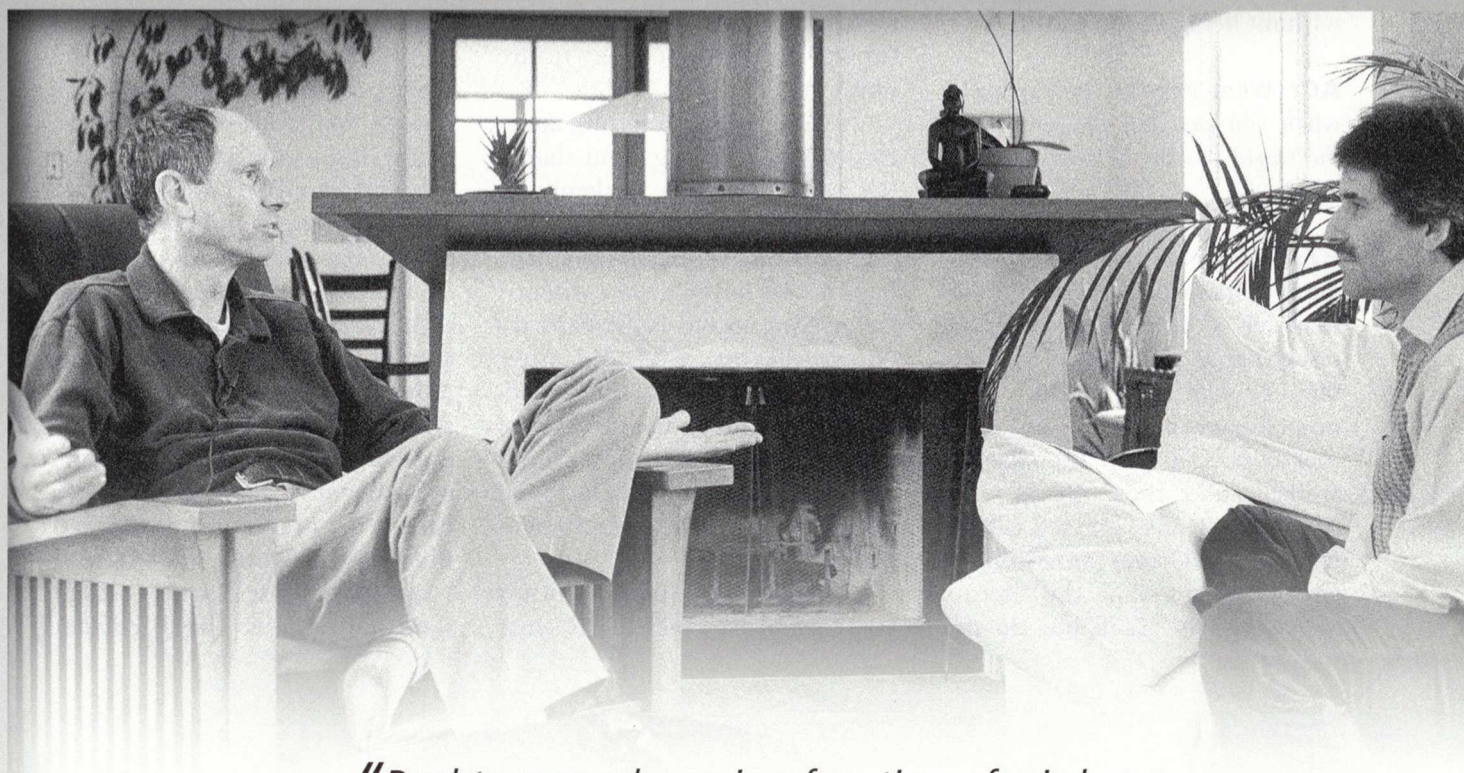
ET: Transcending the world does not mean to withdraw from the world, to no longer take action, or to stop interacting with people. Transcendence of the world is to act and to interact without any self-seeking. In other words, it means to act without seeking to enhance one's sense of self through one's actions or one's interactions with people. Ultimately, it means not needing the future anymore for one's fulfillment or for one's sense of self or being. There is no seeking through doing, seeking an enhanced, more fulfilled, or greater sense of self in the world. When that seeking isn't there anymore, then you can be in the world but not be of the world. You are no longer seeking for anything to identify with out there.

AC: *Do you mean that one has given up an egotistical, materialistic relationship to the world?*

ET: Yes, it means no longer seeking to gain a sense of self, a deeper or enhanced sense of self. Because in the normal state of consciousness, what people are looking for through their activity is to be more completely themselves. The bank robber is looking for that in some way. The person who is striving for enlightenment is also looking for it because he or she is seeking to attain a state of perfection, a state of completion, a state of fullness at some point in the future. There is a seeking to gain something through one's activities. They are seeking happiness, but ultimately they are seeking themselves or you could say God; it comes down to the same thing. They are seeking themselves, and they are seeking where it can never be found, in the normal, unenlightened state of consciousness, because the unenlightened state of consciousness is always in the seeking mode. That means they are *of* the world—*in* the world and *of* the world.

AC: *You mean that they are looking forward in time?*

ET: Yes, the world and time are intrinsically connected. When all self-seeking in time ceases, then you can be in the world



"Real transcendence is a function of wisdom,
not a function of some altered state or
getting to some other realm."

Joseph Goldstein

householder. She had a daughter and a grandson and was living the household life, but she did it in an amazing way.

AC: *Do you agree with Kornfield's statement, "The sacrifices of a family are like those of any demanding monastery, offering exactly the same training in renunciation, patience, steadiness, and generosity"?*

JG: Family life has the potential to develop those qualities, but I don't think it *necessarily* does. Obviously, being a parent requires tremendous sacrifice and gives the opportunity to develop love, understanding, and patience—many of the *paramis*. But I'm not sure whether it actually develops deep, transforming wisdom into the empty, selfless nature of things—it doesn't necessarily lead *there*. Otherwise, most of the world would be fully enlightened!

AC: *Do you think that if someone had those aspirations for enlightenment, it would be unlikely that they would choose to lead a family life?*

JG: If the central aspiration of our life is liberation, different people will play it out in different ways. And that will depend both on the strength of the aspiration for liberation and on our karmic conditioning—our individual tendencies or propensities. I could imagine getting into a relationship with the *hope* of not creating attachment. But again, I think it takes a lot of honesty to cut through the inertia of our patterns, to really see what our motives are, because both on the dharma level and on the worldly level, we're carried along by different energies and it's easy to miss what's really going on.

AC: *So when your teacher said, "Well, even the Buddha had to renounce the world!" what did he mean by that?*

JG: Well, to go to the other side of this argument, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking, as I said before, "Oh yes, my life is my practice," but not to really do it because of the difficulty and so

without being of the world.

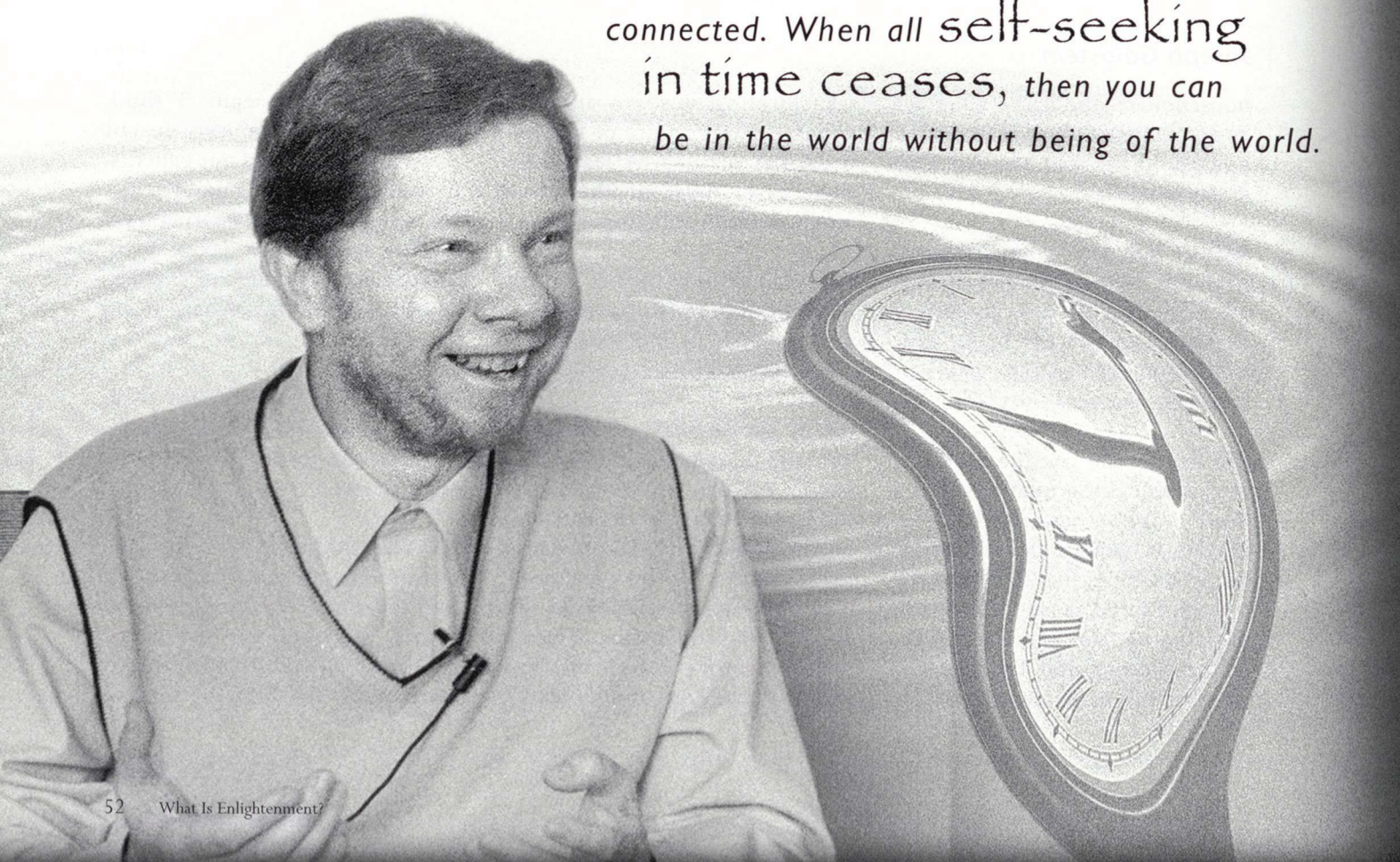
AC: *What exactly do you mean when you say that the purpose of the world lies in the transcendence of it?*

ET: The world promises fulfillment somewhere in time, and there is a continuous striving toward that fulfillment in time. Many times people feel, "Yes, now I have arrived," and then they realize that, no, they haven't arrived, and then the striving continues. It is expressed beautifully in *A Course in Miracles,* where it says that the dictum of the ego is "Seek but do not find." People look to the future for salvation, but the future never arrives.

So ultimately, suffering arises through not finding. And that is the beginning of an awakening—when the realization dawns that "Perhaps this is not the way. Perhaps I will never get to where I am striving to reach; perhaps it's not in the future at all." After having been lost in the world, suddenly, through the pressure of suffering, the realization comes that the answers may not be found out there in worldly attainment and in the future.

That's an important point for many people to reach. That sense of deep crisis—when the world as they have known it, and the sense of self that they have known that is identified with the world, become meaningless. That happened to me. I was just that close to suicide and then something else happened—a death of the sense of self that lived through identifications, identifications with my story, things around me, the world. Something arose at that moment that was a sense of deep and intense stillness and aliveness, beingness. I later called it "presence." I realized that beyond words, *that* is who I am. But this realization wasn't a mental process. I realized that

The world and time are intrinsically connected. When all self-seeking *in time ceases, then you can be in the world without being of the world.*



end up undervaluing the importance of—if not becoming a lifelong monk or nun—*really* taking significant periods in one's life when one does step back. There's a tremendous momentum to *not* do it, so one could miss the power and strength and clarity that come from that kind of renunciation. That's one of the things that people value about retreats. It's a time of stepping back, and that's very rare in our culture. I think we do need to do that, and the higher our aspiration, perhaps the more frequently we need to do it.

This is the great experiment in dharma in the West. And I'm interested to see whether we can create a form where people who have liberation as the central aspiration in their lives can actualize that aspiration without necessarily becoming a monk or a nun. We're in a beginning stage of answering that question—maybe it is possible and maybe it's not.

AC: *My next question carries right on from this. There is no doubt that the majority of Westerners who become Buddhists or who practice the Buddha's teachings on meditation and mindfulness are laypeople who, while being fully immersed in the life of the world with its myriad cares and concerns, express sincere interest in deepening their own understanding about the nature and meaning of the human experience in light of the Buddha's teachings. And yet, the Buddha himself was a renunciate who said, "The household life is a dusty path full of hindrances, while the ascetic life is like the open sky. It is not easy for a man who lives at home to practice the holy life in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection." He also said, "The blue-necked peacock which flies through the air never approaches the speed of the swan. Similarly, the householder can never resemble the monk who is endowed with the qualities of the sage, who meditates, aloof, in the jungle."*

JG: I'll ordain! I'll ordain! Where are the robes?

AC: *(laughs) It's obviously true that we live in "more enlightened" times, and in many ways it is difficult to compare the cultural and historical circumstances of ancient India with the modern West, and yet at the same time, attachment is attachment and freedom is freedom, and the pitfalls and dangers of the spiritual path have not changed one iota in the last 2,500 years. So, what I wanted to ask you was: Have the Buddha's teachings, in their migration to and assimilation by the modern, materialistic, narcissistic West, been watered down in order to be palatable to those who would never dare to consider the Buddha's teachings on renunciation seriously? Or was the Buddha misguided and too extreme in his views for* any *time?*

JG: We're in a very interesting situation in our culture now as the teachings become more accessible to people who are not familiar with them at all. It's a process. And unlike in Asian cultures, where even if they don't practice renunciation, it's valued, here it's hardly valued at all, so there's a spiritual learning curve. And over the last twenty to twenty-five years of teaching, I've seen an increasing number of people who would like to take it to the next step—to a deeper, fuller level of renunciation. I think people are maturing into an understanding of what renunciation means.

AC: *So you're saying that we have to evolve to a place where we can recognize that need and then begin to respond to it?*

JG: Yes, and it could take different forms, whether it's as laypeople taking times of renunciation, or I could also imagine the growth of a monastic *sangha*. But I think that's where the depth is going to be.

AC: *The depth is going to come when people have given their entire lives for the pursuit of liberation—is that what you mean?*

JG: Yes, and then finding the appropriate form for them to express it. I think a significant element will always be at least periods of time when renunciation is practiced. But there's also the question of what renunciation really means. There's a famous example from the Buddhist texts comparing a hermit living in a cave, who has renounced the world but who is filled with desire, with somebody who is living in very luxurious surroundings whose mind is free of desire. The outward form of renunciation has to be in support of the inner. Without that, the outer doesn't mean anything. We have to see what supports the renunciation of greed, hatred, and delusion. What supports the renunciation of taking things to be self? That, for me, is the crucial question and the crucial renunciation. And that can be practiced in all circumstances. In recent years, my practice has gotten simpler and simpler. It basically comes down to one thing that the Buddha said: "Nothing whatsoever is to be clung to as I or mine." That's it. That's the practice. That's where the freedom is.

AC: *I'd like to ask you about the relationship between meditation and*

that vibrantly alive, deep stillness is who I am.

Years later, I called that stillness "pure consciousness," whereas everything else is the conditioned consciousness. The human mind is the conditioned consciousness that has taken form as thought. The conditioned consciousness is the whole world that is created by the conditioned mind. Everything is our conditioned consciousness; even objects are. Conditioned consciousness has taken birth as form and then that becomes the world. So to be lost in the conditioned seems to be necessary for humans. It seems to be part of their path to be lost in the world, to be lost in the mind, which is the conditioned consciousness.

Then, due to the suffering that arises out of being lost, one finds the unconditioned as oneself. And that is why we need the world to transcend the world. So I'm infinitely grateful for having been lost.

The purpose of the world is for you to be lost in it, ultimately. The purpose of the world is for you to suffer, to create the suffering that seems to be what is needed for the awakening to happen. And then once the awakening happens, with it comes the realization that suffering is unnecessary now. You have reached the end of suffering because you have transcended the world. It is the place that is free of suffering.

This seems to be everybody's path. Perhaps it is not everybody's path in this lifetime, but it seems to be a universal path. Even without a spiritual teaching or a spiritual teacher, I believe that everybody would get there eventually. But that could take time.

AC: *A long time.*

ET: Much longer. A spiritual teaching is there to save time. The basic message of the teaching is that you don't need any more time, you don't need any more suffering. I tell this to people who come to me: "You are ready to hear this because you are listening to it. There are still millions of people out there who are not listening to it. They still need time. But I am not talking to them. You are hearing that you don't need time anymore and you don't need to suffer anymore. You've been seeking in time and you've been seeking further suffering." And to suddenly hear that "You don't need that anymore"—for some, that can be the moment of transformation.

So the beauty of the spiritual teaching is that it saves lifetimes of—

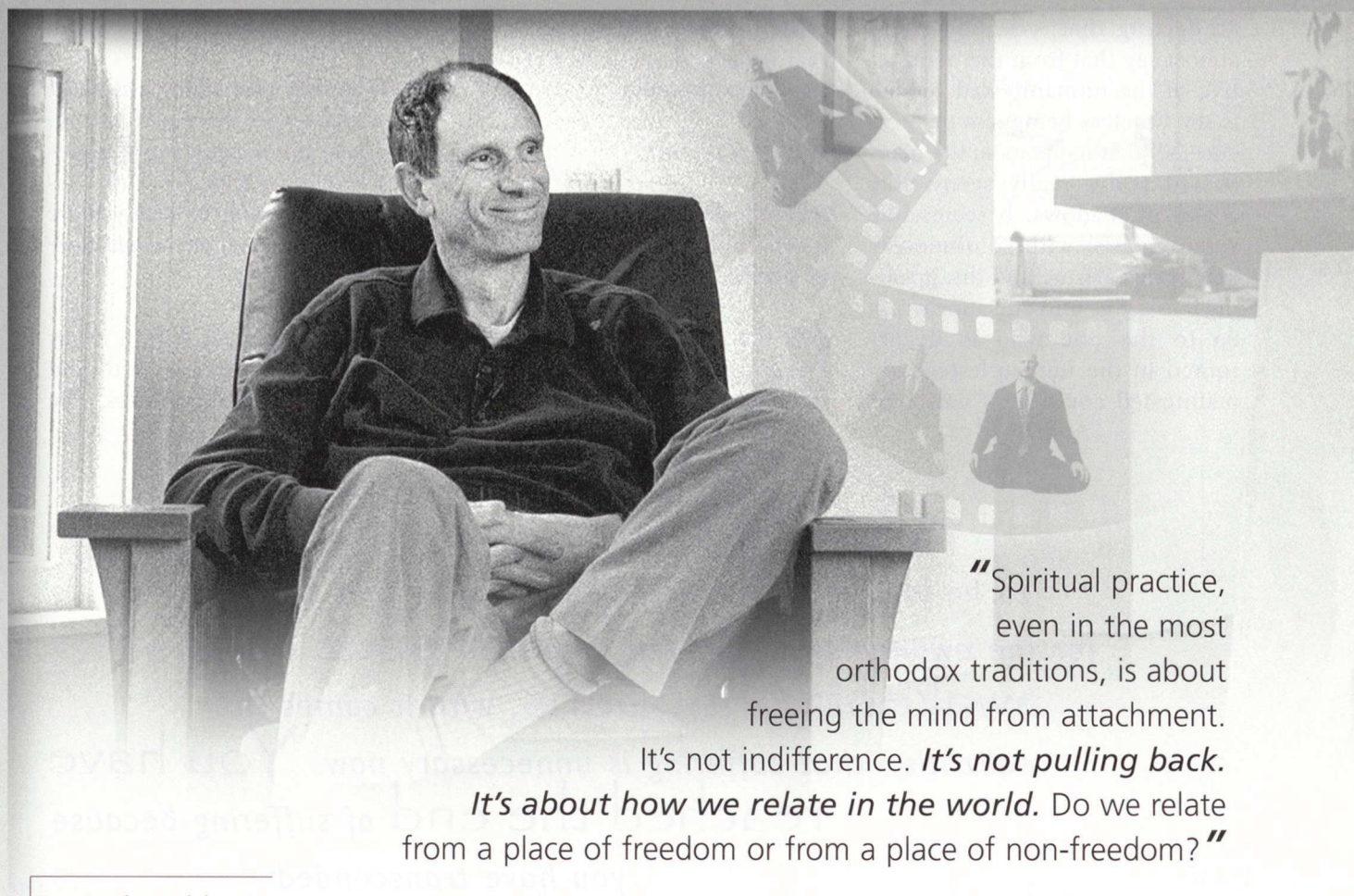
AC: *Unnecessary suffering.*

ET: Yes, so it's good that people are lost in the world. I enjoy traveling to New York and Los Angeles, where it seems that people are *totally* involved. I was looking out of the window in New York. We were next to the Empire State Building, doing a group. And everybody was rushing around, almost running. Everybody seemed to be in a state of intense nervous tension, anxiety. It's suffering, really, but it's not recognized as suffering. And I thought, where are they all running to? And of course, they are all running to the future. They are needing to get somewhere, which is not here. It is a point in time: not now—*then*. They are running to a *then*. They are suffering, but they don't even know it. But to me, even watching that was joyful. I didn't feel, "Oh, they should know better." They are on their spiritual path. At the moment, *that* is their spiritual path, and it works beautifully.

AC: *Often the word enlightenment is interpreted to mean the end of division within the self and the simultaneous discovery of a perspective or way of seeing that is whole, complete, or free from duality. Some who have experienced this perspective claim that the ultimate realization is that there is no difference between the world and God or the Absolute, between* samsara *and* nirvana, *between the manifest and the unmanifest. But there are others who claim that, in fact, the ultimate realization is that the world doesn't actually exist at all—that the world is only an illusion, completely empty of meaning, significance, or reality. So in your own experience, is the world real? Is the world unreal? Both?*

ET: Even when I'm interacting with people or walking in a city, doing ordinary things, the way I perceive the world is like ripples on the surface of being. Underneath the world of sense perceptions and the world of mind activity, there is the vastness of being. There's a vast spaciousness. There's a vast stillness and there's a little ripple activity on the surface, which isn't separate, just like the ripples are not separate from the ocean.

So there is no separation in the way I perceive it. There is no separation between being and the manifested world, between the manifested and the unmanifested. But the unmanifested is so much vaster, deeper, and greater than what happens in the manifested. Every phenomenon in the manifested is so short-lived and



"Spiritual practice, even in the most orthodox traditions, is about freeing the mind from attachment. It's not indifference. ***It's not pulling back. It's about how we relate in the world.*** Do we relate from a place of freedom or from a place of non-freedom?"

Joseph Goldstein

the transcendence of the world—the "world" here being defined as attachment *and* becoming. *Can the practice of meditation ever yield real depth and have the power to liberate if one has not* already *given up the world of attachment and becoming* at least to some degree? *In other words, if the practice of meditation is not already grounded in the renunciation of the world, how could that practice ever have the power to liberate us or enable us to transcend the world?*

JG: I think one can approach freedom from two sides—freedom being the mind that is not grasping at anything as being "I" or "mine." One approach is focusing the mind on the objects of experience and penetrating the illusion of solidity, and that effects the letting go. We begin to see the insubstantiality of it all. Out of the seeing of that, the mind begins to let go of grasping because it sees there's nothing solid there to grasp at. Another approach is actually getting a glimpse of the empty, open nature of mind that doesn't cling, and having an immediate opening to that experience. I think, traditionally, the two schools fight with each other: "This way is better or quicker or higher." But at least my experience has been that both are true and that there is a continual interweaving of the two. There are very few people who can have a glimpse of this open, empty, absolute nature and be done, be totally free, because the habit patterns are very strong.

AC: *It seems that in Buddhism in general, and especially in the Theravada school, which is considered to be the school most closely aligned with the Buddha's original teachings, the transcendence of the world is a foundational theme of the teaching. Yet, we live in a time when many influential voices in the spiritual world are passionately pointing out what they consider to be the dangers of this kind of view, saying that it's patriarchal, hierarchical, anti-earth, anti-body, anti-sexuality and inherently anti-feminine. Noted biologist and philosopher Rupert Sheldrake said in an interview with* What Is Enlightenment?:

> One can view the whole of creation as a terrible mistake, as nothing but a series of endless, futile cycles of becoming and birth and death

so fleeting that, yes, one could almost say that from the perspective of the unmanifested, which is the timeless beingness or presence, all that happens in the manifested realm really seems like a play of shadows. It seems like vapor or mist with continuously new forms arising and disappearing, arising and disappearing. So to the one who is deeply rooted in the unmanifested, the manifested could very easily be called unreal. I don't call it unreal because I see it as not separate from anything.

AC: *So it is real?*

ET: All that is real is beingness itself. Consciousness is all there is, pure consciousness.

AC: *You're saying that the definition of "real" would be that which is free from birth and death?*

ET: That's right.

AC: *So only that which was never born and cannot die would be real. And since the manifest world is ultimately not separate from the unmanifest, according to what you are saying, in the end, one would have to say it's real.*

ET: Yes, and even within every form that is subject to birth and death, there is the deathless. The

The purpose of the world is for you to be lost in it, to create the suffering that is needed for the awakening to happen. And then once the awakening happens, *with it comes the realization that suffering is unnecessary now.* You have reached the end *of suffering because you have transcended the world.*

> and rebirth and redeath and so on, going on and on forever. Then the only answer is a kind of vertical takeoff into a realm of timeless being where you just forget all this and leave it behind you. When I was living in India I found that . . . some of the Theravada Buddhists take that view. Their whole aim is to detach themselves entirely from this world of becoming and undergo a vertical takeoff of individual salvation.

And influential spiritual writer and self-described "gay mystic" Andrew Harvey states in his book The Return of the Mother:

> The life-denying, body-denying, and anti-feminine tendencies of both traditional Theravada, and to a lesser extent, traditional Mahayana Buddhism, are disturbing. Many schools of Buddhism teach that one cannot attain enlightenment in a woman's body; the best a woman can do, if she's very lucky, is to serve the monks. Very early on in the development of Buddhism, male monks separated from society and were seen as superior to it. The entire purpose of incarnation was seen as liberation from *samsara.* There is an extremism, a fear of nature, and a repressed hysteria in this which Mahayana Buddhism, especially in its vision of divine service and the ideal of the bodhisattva, tried to correct. But even in the Mahayana, women are still drastically undervalued; the Tibetan word for woman literally means "lesser birth." Heroic emphasis on enlightenment can lead to a separation from this life and its active responsibilities and a radical undervaluing of the sacred wisdom of ordinary human life. . . . We can no longer afford this flight into transcendence because it is part of the reason why no one has intervened to stop the ruin and devastation of nature.

So Joseph, do you agree with Sheldrake and Harvey? Is it true that the Buddha's emphasis on transcending the world is inadvertently destructive, divisive, and life-denying?

JG: I've had experiences on retreat of being in a place of tremendous peace and calm and connectedness, and yet from the outside it may look withdrawn, indifferent, or uncaring. There's a *huge* danger of projection about individual practitioners and about whole traditions. And so I think it's *very* important not to be caught in these kinds of sweeping generalizations, disconnected from the actual experience of people practicing in these traditions, because their experience practicing may be *completely* different from what it looks like to somebody on the outside. It's so easy to get caught up in judgments about other people, about other traditions, from the filter of our own bias and projection and viewpoint. That having been said, I think this question really revolves around what transcendence means. People use that word in many different ways, and from my perspective a lot of what was contained in your question comes from—I'll be bold and say—a limited idea of transcendence or a different idea than I have of it. One meaning of transcendence is having consciousness abide in some other realm, disconnected from the earth, where one is just kind of blissed out. But I think that's not what the Buddha's talking about at all, and it's not what the practice of Theravada Buddhism is about or any other Buddhist tradition that I know of. The real transcendence, to my way of understanding, is much simpler. It's the transcendence of the sense of self, which is created through identification with various aspects of our experience, taking them to be self. It's the realization of emptiness of self. I think that real transcendence is a function of wisdom, not a function of some altered state or getting to some other realm. The expression of that can then take many forms. It can take the form of tremendous engagement with the world. It could take the form of living in a cave in the Himalayas. I don't believe there's a hierarchy of compassionate action. When the Buddha in his many past lives was off in a cave someplace practicing, from the context of any one lifetime, that could have looked world-denying. From the context of that being part of his path to Buddhahood and all the compassionate activity that flowed out of that Buddhahood, in terms of the enlightenment of us all, you can't say his time in the cave is world-denying. But when we take just a snapshot picture of a person's experience or path, you get a very distorted view of the larger picture.

AC: *I think these quotes are pointing to the belief that the world is identical to* samsara, *the endless rounds of birth, death, and rebirth, and how in Buddhist philosophy and specifically in Theravada Buddhism, the whole idea is to "lift-off," to free oneself from this endless cycle of becoming.*

JG: Would one say that the Buddha, after his enlightenment, was dwelling in *samsara?*

AC: *Well, he definitely didn't live in the world.*

JG: No, he did live in the world—he walked on the earth.

AC: *He was walking on the earth, but the world that he lived in was a world of his own creation, surrounded*

essence of every form is the deathless. Even the essence of a blade of grass is the deathless. And that's why the world of form is sacred. It's not that the realm of the sacred is exclusively being or the unmanifested. Even the world of form I see as sacred.

AC: *If someone simply asks you, "Is the world real or unreal?" would you say it was real or would you have to qualify the statement?*

ET: I would probably qualify the statement.

AC: *Saying what?*

ET: It's a temporary manifestation of the real.

AC: *So if the world is a temporary manifestation of the real, what is the* enlightened *relationship to the world?*

ET: To the unenlightened, the world is all there is. There is nothing else. This time-bound mode of consciousness clings to the past for its identity and desperately needs the world for its happiness and fulfillment. Therefore, the world holds enormous promise but poses a great threat at the same time. That is the dilemma of the unenlightened consciousness: it is torn between seeking fulfillment in and through the world and being threatened by it continuously. A person hopes that they will find themselves in it, and at the same time they fear that the world is going to kill them, as it will. That is the state of continuous conflict that the unenlightened consciousness is condemned to—being torn continuously between desire and fear. It's a dreadful fate.

The enlightened consciousness is rooted in the unmanifested, and ultimately is one with it. It knows itself to be that. One could almost say it is the unmanifested looking out. Even with a simple thing like visually perceiving a form—a flower or a tree—if you are perceiving it in a state of great alertness and deep stillness, free of past and future, then at that moment already it is the unmanifested. You are not a person anymore at that moment. The unmanifested is perceiving itself in form. And there is always a sense of goodness in that perception.

So then all action arises out of that, and has a completely different quality from action that arises out of the unenlightened consciousness, which *needs* something and seeks to protect itself. That is really where those intangible and precious qualities come in that we call love, joy, and peace. They are all one with the unmanifested. They arise out of that. A human being who lives in connectedness with that and then acts and interacts becomes a blessing on the planet, whereas the unenlightened human is very heavy on the planet. There is a heaviness to the unenlightened. And the planet is suffering from millions of unenlightened humans. The burden on the planet is almost too much to bear. I can sometimes feel it as the planet saying, "Oh, no more, please."

AC: *You encourage people to meditate, to as you describe it, "rest in the Presence of the Now" as much as possible. Do you think that spiritual practice can ever become truly deep and have the power to liberate if one has not already given up the world and what the world represents, at least to some degree?*

ET: I wouldn't say that the practice itself has the power to liberate. It's only when there is complete surrender to the now, to *what is*, that liberation is possible. I do not believe that a practice will take you into complete surrender. Complete surrender usually happens through living. Your very life is the ground where that happens. There may be a partial surrender and then there may be an opening, and then you may engage in spiritual practice. But whether the spiritual practice is taken up after a certain degree of insight or the spiritual practice is just done in and of itself, the practice alone won't do it.

AC: *Something that I've found in my own teaching work is that unless the world has been seen through to a certain degree, and unless there is a willingness based on that seeing to let go of it, then spiritual experience, no matter how powerful it is, is not going to lead to any kind of liberation.*

ET: That's right, and the willingness to let go *is* surrender. That remains the key. Without that, no amount of practice or even spiritual experiences will do it.

AC: *Yes, many people say they want to meditate or do spiritual practice, but their spiritual aspirations are not based on a willingness to let go of anything substantial.*

ET: No, in fact it may be the opposite. Spiritual practice may be a way to try to find something new to identify with.

AC: *Ultimately, would you say that real spiritual practice or real spiritual experience is meant to lead one to the letting go of the world, the transcendence of the*

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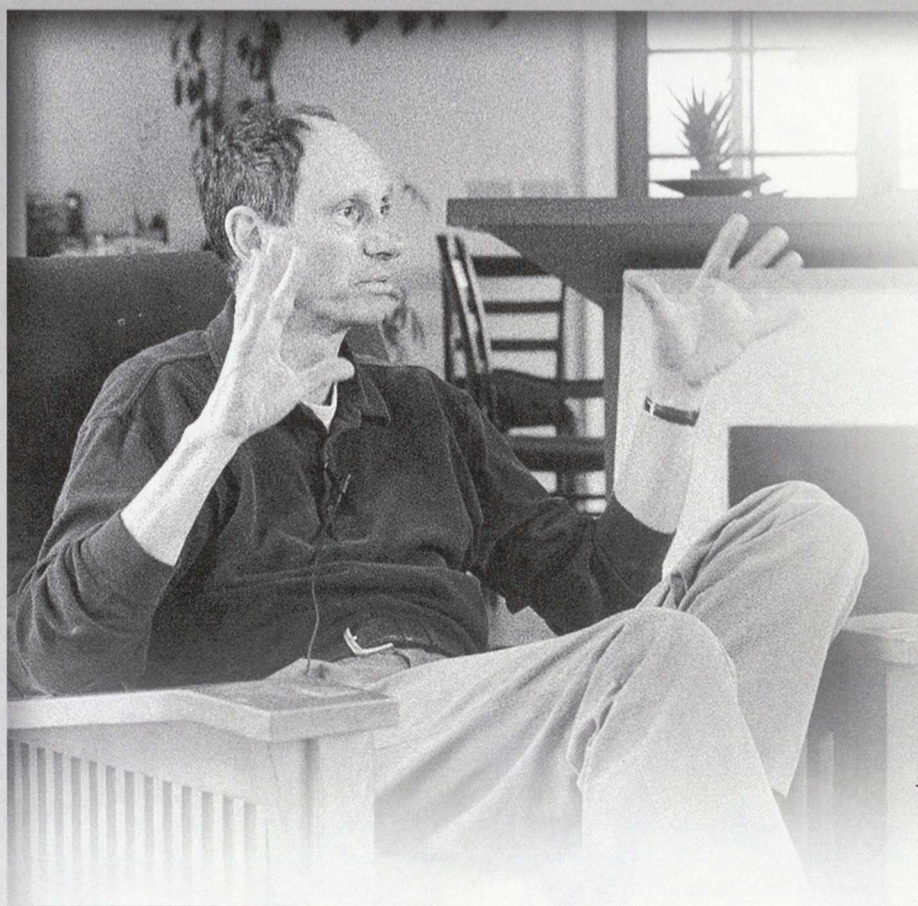

"When the Buddha was off in a cave someplace practicing, from the context of any one lifetime, that could have looked world-denying. From the context of that being part of his path to Buddhahood and all the compassionate activity that flowed out of that Buddhahood, ***you can't say his time in the cave was world-denying.***"

Joseph Goldstein

by his own monks. He wasn't living a worldly life.

JG: But *that* distinction to me is not the salient point. One could live as a monk, as a renunciate, and be *totally* engaged in alleviating the suffering of the world, as the Buddha was. He was not withdrawn. He wasn't off by himself, disengaged from the world. He was totally engaged within a certain form, and the fact that he could do that from a place of freedom rather than from a place of bondage is the key point. Spiritual practice, even in the most orthodox traditions, is about freeing the mind from attachment. It's not indifference. It's not pulling back. It's how we relate in the world. Do we relate from a place of freedom or from a place of non-freedom?

AC: *So do you disagree with Harvey's criticism?*

JG: Completely. Historically, there are a lot of cultural overlays, and a lot of the gender issues are, I believe, more about the culture than about the dharma, because clearly in the Buddha's time and up to the present there have been many fully enlightened women.

AC: *So you're saying that you completely disagree with this interpretation of Theravada Buddhism, which holds that the goal of liberation is to "get out" of the world. Is this a wrong understanding of the Buddha's teaching?*

JG: Again, it depends. What does it mean when the term "world" is used? Do you mean the world of American consumer society? Do you mean the world of living as a human being, walking on the planet? I don't think there's ever an escape from the world as long as we are alive. The goal is freedom from attachment. It's being free from the thirst of desire—it's *not* nonexistence. In fact, the Buddha said that craving for nonexistence is just another form of craving predicated on the notion of self.

AC: *But some people would interpret that as meaning the destruction of the world from a certain point of view. Because if we took the "thirst of desire" away, it could mean such an absolute disengagement that the whole world would fall to pieces.*

JG: I don't see it as disengagement.

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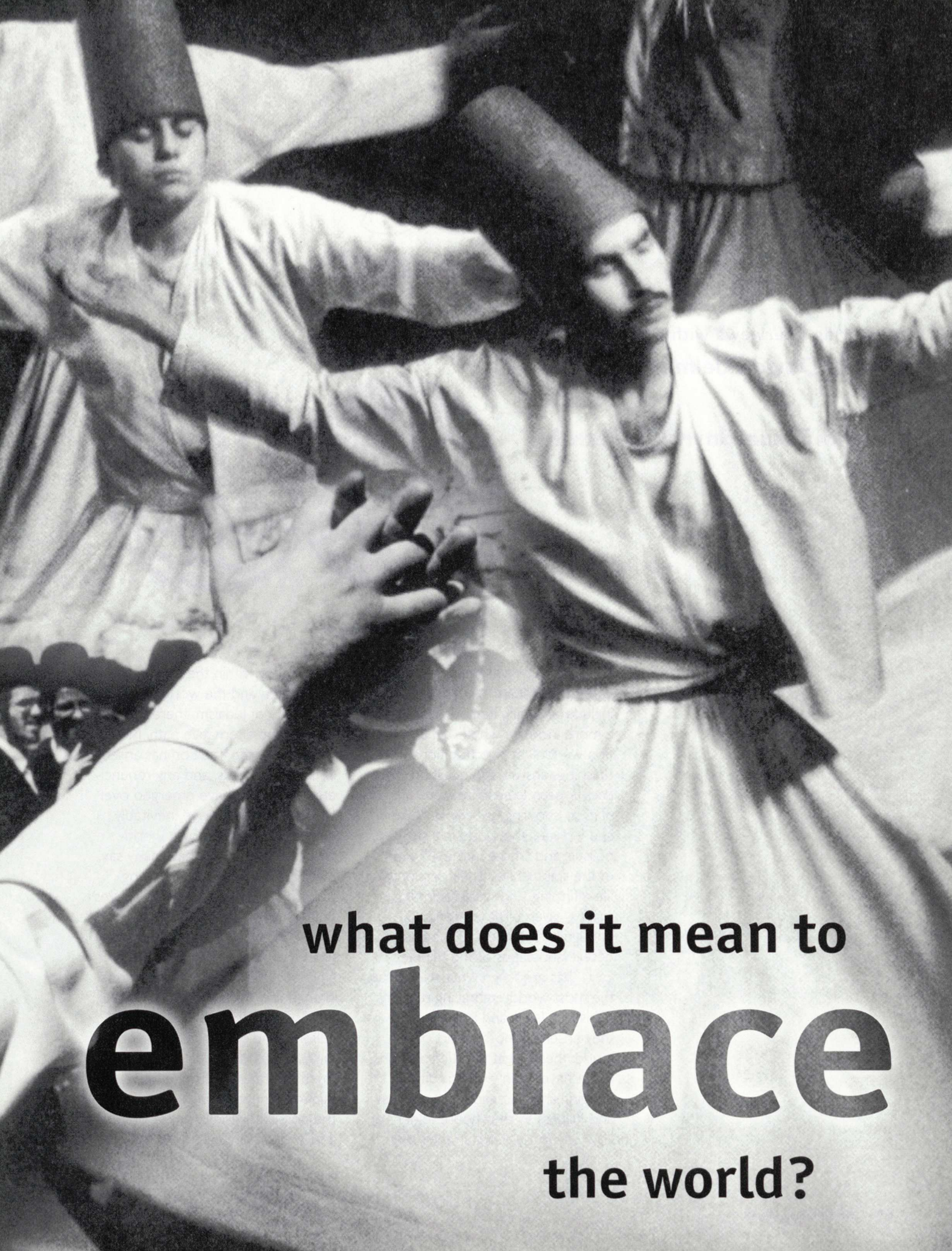

what does it mean to
embrace
the world?

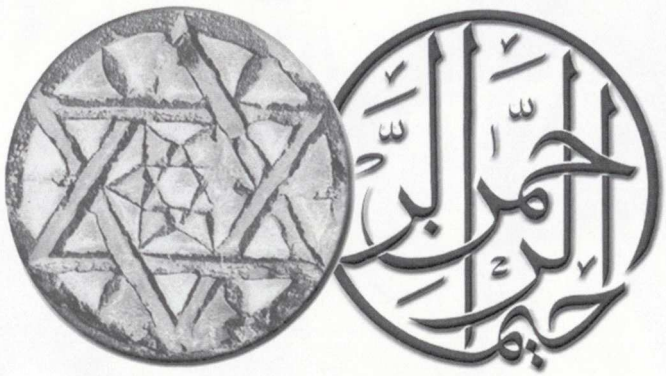
what does it mean to embrace the world?

featuring interviews with

Rabbi David Edelman

and

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi



TECHNICALLY DEFINED, THE WORD EMBRACE MEANS "TO TAKE IN OR include as a part, item, or element of a more inclusive whole." In this section we look at two traditions whose teachings answer the question, *What does it mean to be in the world but not of it?* by showing us how to "take in and include" the world in a positive, holistic, and "more inclusive" view of the spiritual life. Their passionate, life-affirming, and world-affirming vision—given birth to, ironically enough, in the midst of the barren desert landscapes of the Middle East—has produced what are perhaps the most world-embracing religions in history: Islam and Judaism. Had they arisen in another part of the world, these great theistic traditions might have been given credit for bringing an unprecedented richness and fullness to the "householder" or "lay" life. But not within their own culture. For within the God-centered life of Islam and the world-sanctifying spirituality of Judaism, there was and is simply no alternative path. No major monastic tradition has arisen within their ranks, and any renunciate voices that have emerged over their long history have inevitably been overwhelmed by a world-positive view of life that, many say, must always be the final resting point of any religion which believes that a benevolent God created this world. While they differ widely in form and content, and while they have each undergone tremendous change and transformation in their exposure over time to diverse cultures and circumstances, both Judaism and Islam, including Islam's mystical branch Sufism, have retained an unwavering conviction in the possibility and promise of living a fully spiritual life *in this world.*

Judaism

What initially attracted us to the Jewish teachings for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* was their firm conviction that every aspect of our lives *in the world* can become truly sanctified by the fullness of a divine presence. Indeed, for over five millennia the Jewish faith has endured and prospered around the core institutions of family and community—institutions that have been infused at every level, to a degree perhaps unmatched by any other tradition, with an observance of the sacred and a devotion to the one God who created this world and said, according to the Torah, "Behold, it is good." Through its ceremonies, prayers, and *mitzvot* [commandments], Judaism is, as one rabbi describes it, "a way of life that endeavors to transform virtually every human action into a means of communion with God." Each daily activity—from business and work to study and worship, from leisure and recreation to diet and health, from child-rearing to sexual relations—is an opportunity to elevate the mundane, and to renew our connection with the divine spark of creation. And while from the outside the sheer comprehensiveness of the Jewish teachings on how to live rightly in the world may seem an imposition on the personal freedom so valued in our postmodern Western society, its practitioners beg to differ. In his book *The Essence of Judaism,* Jewish scholar Leo Baeck writes about "the joy in fulfilling a commandment" and says that the commandments of Judaism bind us to God. "With ever fresh symbols they seek to keep man above all that is low and common, to indicate to him the divine will, and to awaken in him that earnest and yet joyful consciousness that he always stands before God. These statutes do not seek to lead man away from his own environment; they leave him to his work and his home where they connect him with God. They demand the inner presence of the soul during the action of each hour. Each morning, noon, and evening, each beginning and each ending has its prayers and worship. The atmosphere of the house of God, the halo of religious devotion, is spread over the whole of existence; each day has its lesson and consecration."

Although it is true that in the Jewish scriptures and their commentaries one might occasionally find a warning about the temptations and attachments of worldly life, such protestations are for the most part drowned out by the chorus of devout voices expressing the joy and beauty of a life lived within the consecrated bosom of family and community and obedient to the sacred words of the Torah. Indeed, to read the words of the great Jewish scholars and rabbis is to be enveloped in and embraced by a worldview that seems so overflowing with richness and wholeness and so inherently positive and affirming, that one can't help but feel the powerful attraction of a life in which every part has its place and purpose in a transcendent order. To embrace the world in Judaism is to be embraced, in turn, by God.

Yet despite its deep reverence for God's creation in all its forms, Judaism has always been a religion poised delicately between two ways of understanding this world. On the one hand is its doubtless conviction in the inherent beauty, glory, and perfection of what the Torah calls the "wondrous works of the Lord." And on the other is its acute sensitivity to the often agonizing imperfections of this world—the harsh inequalities, pervasive injustices, and widespread suffering within his creation that would seem to indicate a very incomplete undertaking. Our task, therefore, is not to be free *of* this world, nor even just to be free *in* this world, but to literally rectify the world—to bring the perfection of God into our lives, to bring heaven to earth, and in so doing, as Jewish scholar David Ariel writes, to help God "finish the work of creation." As Abraham Heschel, one of this century's most eloquent witnesses of the Jewish faith, says, "The meaning of man's life lies in his perfecting the universe. He has to distinguish, gather and redeem the sparks of holiness scattered throughout the darkness of the world. This service is the motive of all precepts and good deeds. Man holds the keys that can unlock the chains fettering the redeemer."

One of the most revealing passages in the Torah is the account in Genesis of Jacob's dream, in which he beholds a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven with a host of angels ascending and descending its steps. The Lord, standing nearby, makes a series of promises to Jacob, who upon waking says, in a moment of direct revelation, "The Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!" And he continues, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God." Exploring Judaism's world-embracing path, one cannot help but taste, at least briefly, Jacob's powerful recognition that this world is truly none other than the abode of God.

Sufism

The greatest things sometimes have the humblest beginnings. And perhaps nowhere is this more true than where the word "Sufi" is concerned. It is a term that in the Persian, Arabic, and Turkish languages denotes the highest mystics of the Islamic faith, and yet its derivation is the Arabic word *suf,* meaning simply "wool." In the early days of Islam, when the Sufi mystics had not yet blossomed into the devotional and ecstatic, God-intoxicated dervishes they would become, extreme asceticism was the order of the day and the *fakirs,* or holy men, of the time imitated the Christian monks, wearing only simple woolen robes as a sign of their renunciation of the world. Thus was born the term by which they would become known: *Sufi.* And while it is said that the early renunciates of Islam rivaled their Christian brothers in their ascetic piety, self-denial, and disgust for the things of the world, it wasn't long before the zeal for asceticism waned—overcome in the first centuries of Islam by the rise of the mystical love and devotion to God that Sufism is now so well known for, and the deep respect for work and family life that has always been a hallmark of the Islamic faith. Muhammad did, after all, condemn celibacy, strongly encourage marriage, and have four wives himself. But unlike the Jewish path, whose embrace of community and family life has remained steadfast since its inception, the Sufis' world-positive view of the spiritual life, we discovered, has always contained within it a strain of temperance, of hesitancy, and wariness, a recognition of the world's potential dangers and snares. And it maintains an unwavering conviction that God, or Allah, must always be set above the concerns of the world. As one Sufi author claims, "Do not blame the world, blame yourself, if you do not use it in the right way. The world is God's property. If property falls into the hands of a dishonest man, it will be the cause of his downfall. If the property falls into the hands of a trustworthy man, it will become a means of honor and success. . . . Everything depends on how you use it. . . . Obedience to God makes the world good." So although early exposure to Christianity influenced Sufism a great deal, as did its later exposure to Buddhism in the cities of Persia, neither monastic tradition could restrain the passionate holy men of Islam, who were determined to find a path to God *in the world* and their own way to be *"not of it."*

Thriving as it does in a great number of diverse cultures, Sufism naturally varies quite widely among its many strands, and some still contain the echoes of its early flirtation with a renunciate worldview. But by the eighth century, it had fully established itself as the "marketplace" spiritual path we now know, and, for the most part, would remain that way. So while Sufi mystics may warn of the difficulties of family life, the truth is that almost all have been married (some to several wives). While they may speak of the dangers of relations with worldly people, very few have practiced the radical solitude of hermits or monks. And while they may fast or deny themselves worldly pleasures, it is usually temporary, balanced by times of feasting, celebration, and enjoyment. Indeed, it has been said that the early Sufis possessed three outstanding qualities—a love of food, sweets, and women. Originally intended as a criticism, it is also a reminder that in addition to the lightness of being and depth of devotion so famous in the Sufi character, there is also an endearing humanity.

Of course, when it does come to criticizing the attachments of a worldly life, the Sufis take no prisoners. Their fierce declarations rival those of even the most austere ascetics. "The world is cunning like an old witch and her tricks are limitless," the Sultan Valad writes. "She has trapped us in her nets. Very few ever escape." But for all their world-negative sentiments, taken as a whole the passion of the Sufis does not inspire a yearning to renounce the world so much as it betrays a deep love of Allah and his creation and a desire that our lives in the world be truly worthy of the perfection and beauty that is his gift to us. In fact, the more we looked into it, the more it seemed that Sufism represented possibly the most "in the world but not of it" spiritual view we had encountered, making us more than a little curious to find out what this great mystical tradition would have to say about what it means to fully embrace life in the world without losing one's own balance in the swoon.

by Carter Phipps

Rabbi David Edelman has been the leader of the Orthodox Jewish community in Western Massachusetts and Connecticut for over fifty years. Born in 1925 to a Polish shoemaker in Baltimore, Maryland, and raised in a traditional orthodox household, Edelman moved to Brooklyn, New York, while still in his teens to enter a *yeshivah* [Jewish religious school] and study for the rabbinate. The young Edelman was profoundly inspired by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, whom he first met in 1941, just days after the revered master arrived in America. Schneerson, considered to be a *tzaddik*, one of Judaism's rare mystical prophets, was the seventh leader in the dynastic lineage of the Chabad Lubavitch movement, a sect of Hassidism founded some 200 years ago. Although when he first arrived in Brooklyn, Schneerson was little known beyond his small circle of followers in Eastern Europe, he went on to become one of this century's best-loved Jewish leaders, with thousands of devoted disciples, and tens of thousands who would come from all countries and faiths to see him in person and receive his blessing. Following the footsteps of this great master and of the Baal Shem Tov, the mystic who fathered the entire Hassidic movement in the 1700s, Rabbi Edelman emphasizes serving God by serving the world. For followers of the Lubavitch tradition, like Edelman, finding the sign of God even in the most mundane events and helping one's fellow man are the essence and fulfillment of the spiritual life. Founder and dean of the Yeshivah Academy and spiritual director for over 350 congregants, Edelman is also the father of eight children, and grandfather to more than sixty grandchildren. Joining him in this interview was his son Rabbi Yisroel Edelman, of the Keter Israel Synagogue in Massachusetts.

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi was born in Turkey in 1926. Attending universities in Istanbul, Paris, and California, he studied various subjects, such as art, architecture, and Indian culture, eventually going on to receive a fine arts degree in London. In 1949, he moved to Casablanca, where he became a successful businessman and an influential political power-broker, all the while maintaining a strong interest in art and painting. A few years later, political circumstances forced him to leave Morocco for America, and he began to pursue his interest in art full-time, becoming head of a university art department and establishing an international reputation for his own work. He met his wife, also a well-known artist, during this period. In 1968 a friend introduced him to Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak of the Halveti-Jerrahi order of Sufis, a popular teacher with a large following both in Turkey and the United States. This meeting completely changed his life, and he became a devoted student of Sheikh Muzaffer, eventually abandoning his art career entirely to pursue the spiritual life. Today Sheikh Tosun Bayrak is the head of the Halveti-Jerrahi Sufi order in America.

We visited their mosque outside New York City last May and posed our questions to Sheikh Tosun on the evening of the weekly Sufi *dhikr*, a traditional Sufi ceremony attended by the Sheikh's Eastern and Western dervishes as well as by local supporters. ■

Quotations from: Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *Judaism*, George Braziller, New York, 1962, p. 73; Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1976, p. 226; David S. Ariel, Ph.D., *Spiritual Judaism: Restoring Heart and Soul to Jewish Life*, Hyperion, New York, 1998, p. 9; The Torah, Genesis 28.13, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1962, p. 50; Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut, *Perfume of the Desert*, "The Old Witch" by Sultan Valad, Quest Books, Wheaton, IL, 1999, p. 17; Anonymous, quoted by Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987, pp. 69-70.

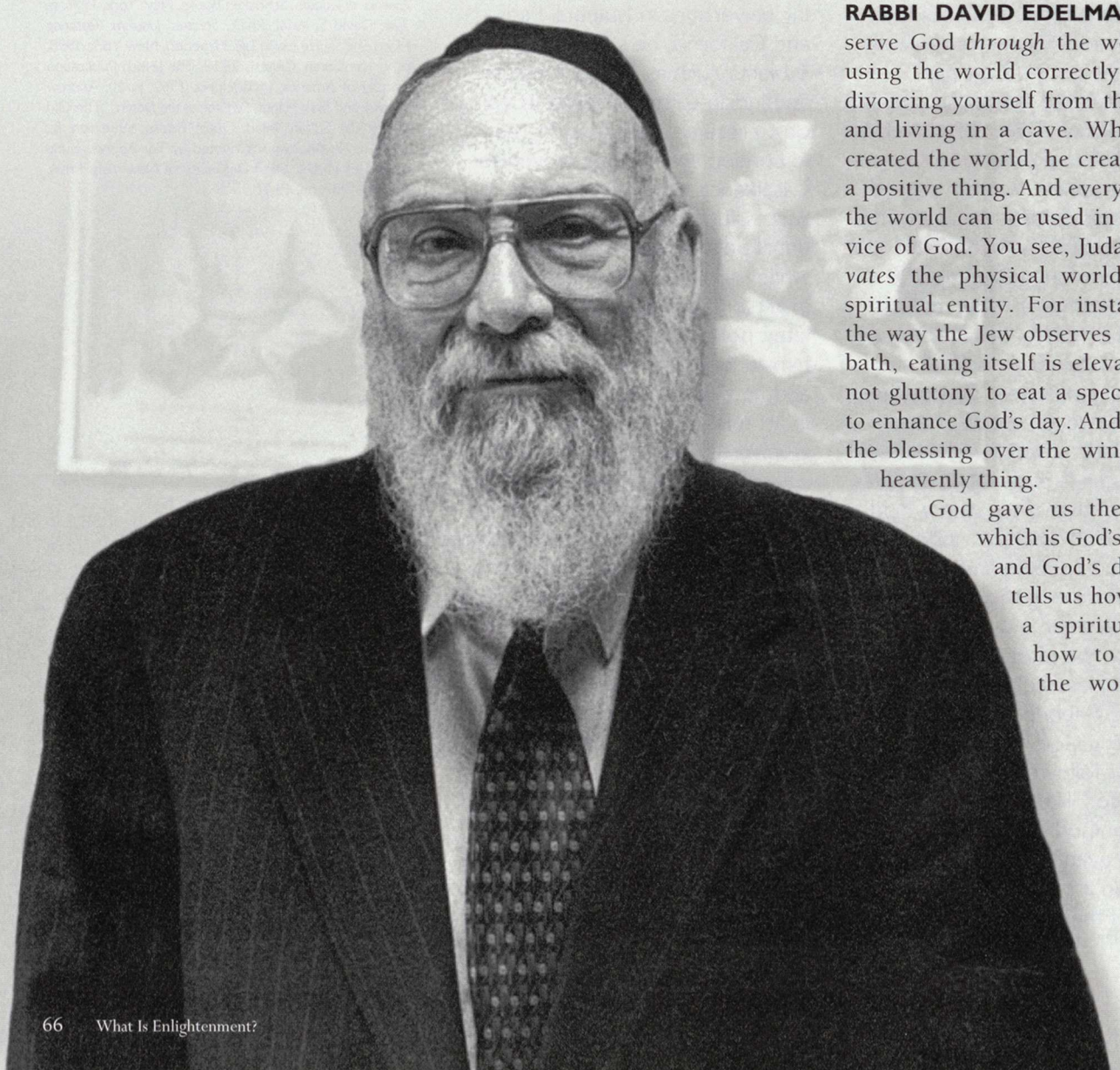
And God said, "The world is good"

an interview with
Rabbi David Edelman
by Amy Edelstein

WIE: *In Judaism, as opposed to many of the Eastern traditions, we are encouraged to fully engage with the world as part and parcel of our spiritual path. Why is embracing life in the world seen as such a cornerstone of Jewish worship?*

RABBI DAVID EDELMAN: You serve God *through* the world, by using the world correctly, not by divorcing yourself from the world and living in a cave. When God created the world, he created it as a positive thing. And everything in the world can be used in the service of God. You see, Judaism *elevates* the physical world into a spiritual entity. For instance, in the way the Jew observes the Sabbath, eating itself is elevated; it's not gluttony to eat a special meal to enhance God's day. And making the blessing over the wine—it's a heavenly thing.

God gave us the Torah, which is God's wisdom and God's desire. It tells us how to live a spiritual life, how to live in the world and



the world is Beautiful

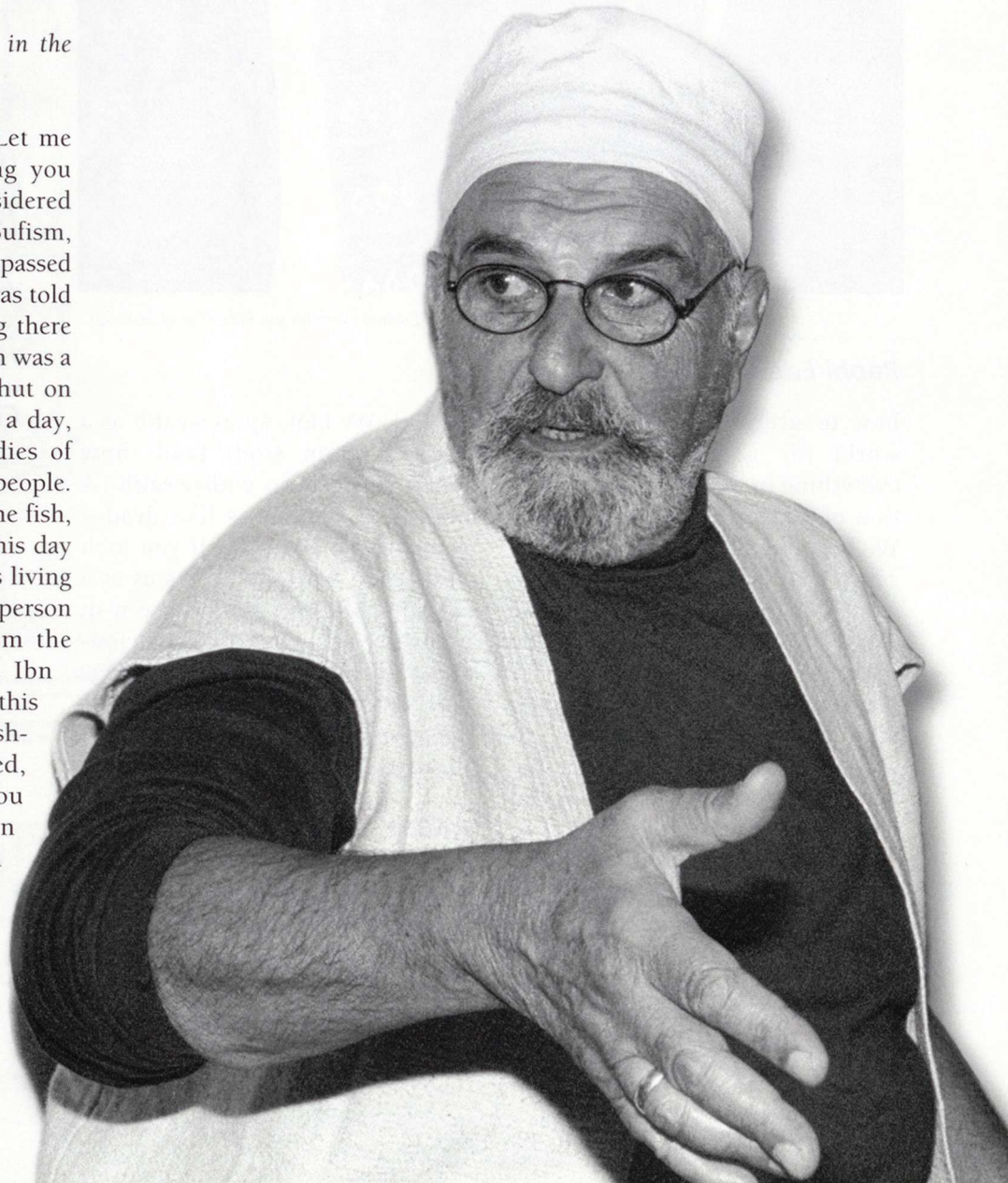
an interview with

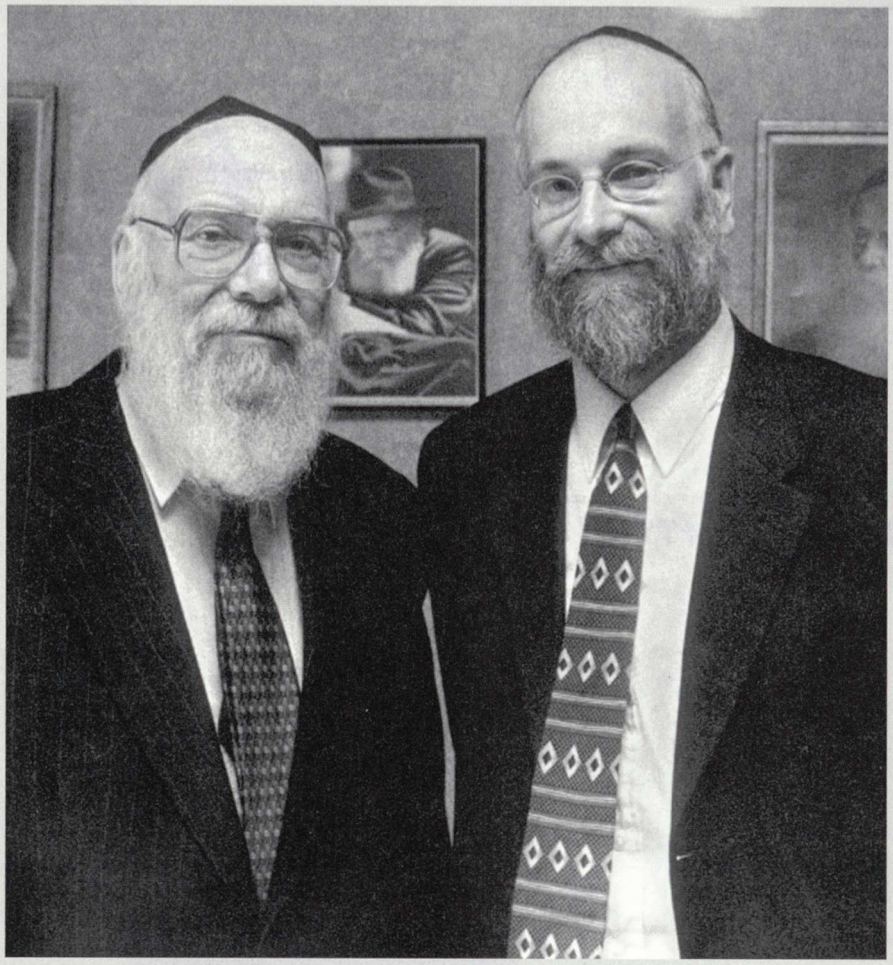
Sheikh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi

by Carter Phipps

WIE: *What does it mean to be in the world but not of it?*

SHEIKH TOSUN BAYRAK: Let me answer that question by telling you a story. Ibn Arabi, who is considered to be the greatest sheikh in Sufism, was traveling to Mecca, and he passed through Tunisia. In Tunisia he was told that there was a holy man living there who he must visit. This holy man was a fisherman who lived in a mud hut on the beach and caught three fish a day, no more, and he gave the bodies of these fish to poor and hungry people. He himself boiled the heads of the fish, and just ate the heads. He did this day after day, year after year. He was living the life of a monastic person, a person who has divorced himself from the world totally, and, of course, Ibn Arabi was very impressed with this discipline. So he talked to the fisherman and the fisherman asked, "Where are you going? Are you going to pass through Cairo?" Ibn Arabi nodded and the fisherman said, "My sheikh lives there. Will you please visit him and ask him for advice for me, because all these years that I have been praying and living humbly like this, I haven't received any





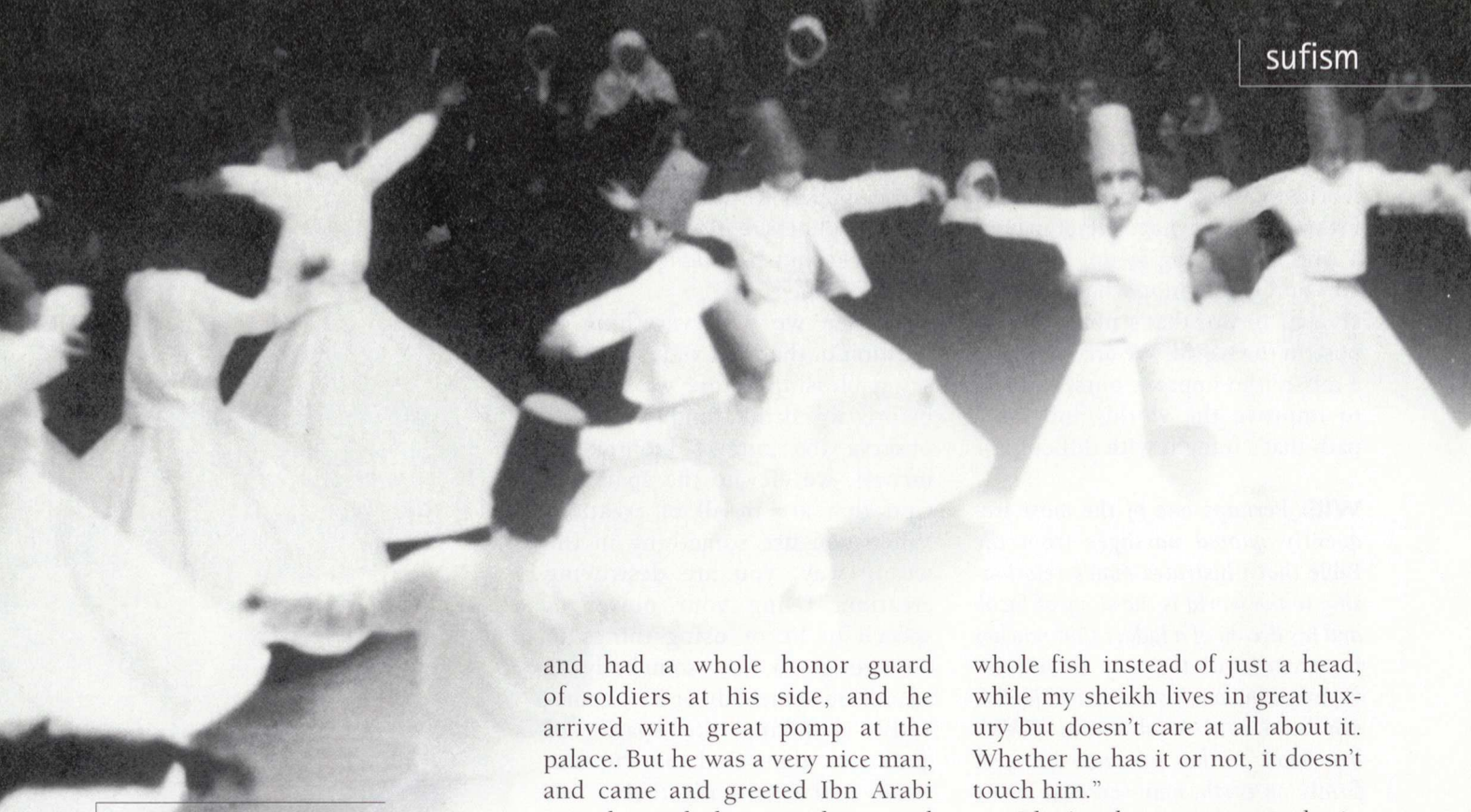
Rabbi David Edelman with his son Rabbi Yisroel Edelman

Rabbi Edelman

how to utilize everything in the world for goodness. They say everything in this world is a reflection of what's in the world above. We love our children so much because God loves his children. We want the best for our children—God wants the best for us. The question is asked, "How can we become close to God?" The Talmud answers, "Mimic God, do what God does." God feeds the world; he has the sun rise in the morning and he puts down rain. So, we also give to others. The world was created in *chessed,* in kindness. So, be kind to others. God was involved in the burial of Moses; we also take care of the dead. Like this, we follow the ways of God. We look upon wealth as a blessing from God. Look how much you can do with wealth! A person in poverty is like dead—you can't do anything. If you look upon everything God gives us as a blessing, you will *always* use it in a positive way. And all the vicissitudes of life and the evil things will just fall away because you're occupied all the time with doing positive, godly things.

RABBI YISROEL EDELMAN: This world is not a world for angels; it's a world for human beings. And our mission is to bring heaven down to earth. The first Lubavitch Rebbe said that if someone goes and separates themselves from the

This world is not a world for angels; it's a world for human beings. And our mission is to bring heaven down to earth.



Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

advancement in my spiritual life. Please ask him to give me advice."

Ibn Arabi promised him that he would, and so when he arrived in Cairo, he asked the people in the city where this sheikh lived and they said, "Do you see the huge palace on the top of the hill? He lives there." So he went to this beautiful palace on the top of the hill, knocked on the door, and was received very well. They brought him into a large, luxurious waiting room, gave him food to eat, and made him comfortable. But the sheikh had gone to visit the king. And Sufis don't normally visit kings or people in high positions. It's forbidden because they can become an additional curtain between us and God, an additional attachment to the world.

While Ibn Arabi was in this luxurious room waiting for the sheikh, he looked out the window and saw a procession coming. The sheikh was riding a beautiful Arabian horse and was wearing a big turban, diamond rings, a fur coat, and had a whole honor guard of soldiers at his side, and he arrived with great pomp at the palace. But he was a very nice man, and came and greeted Ibn Arabi warmly, and they sat down and started talking. At some point in the conversation, Ibn Arabi said, "You have a student in Tunisia." And the sheikh replied, "Yes, I know." And Ibn Arabi said, "He asked for your spiritual advice." "Tell my student," the sheikh said, "If he's so attached to this world, he's never going to get anywhere."

So this was confusing to Ibn Arabi, but on his trip back, he stopped in Tunisia. He went to the fisherman there, who immediately asked, "Did you see my sheikh?" "Yes, I saw your sheikh," he replied. "What did he say?" asked the fisherman. And Ibn Arabi, looking uncomfortable, said, "Well, your sheikh, you know, he lives in great pomp and great luxury." The fisherman replied, "Yes, I know. What did he say?" So Ibn Arabi told him: "He said as long as you're so attached to this world, you are never going to get anywhere." And the fisherman cried and cried. "He's right," he said, "each day, when I give those three fish bodies to the people, my heart goes with them. Each day, I wish I could have a whole fish instead of just a head, while my sheikh lives in great luxury but doesn't care at all about it. Whether he has it or not, it doesn't touch him."

That's what it means to be in the world but not of the world. It means that, as Sufis, we are supposed to be out in the world participating in the world, but not falling in love with the world. There is a *hadith* [a saying of the Prophet Muhammad] that tells us: The world is your friend if it reminds you of God, and it is your enemy if it makes you forget God.

WIE: *One Sufi mystic is quoted as saying, "To leave the world is not to abstain from property, wife, and children, but to act in obedience to God and to set the things of God above those of the world."*

TB: Exactly. Another *hadith* tells us that when Allah ordered the world, he spoke to the world, saying, "World, the one who becomes your servant, treat him as the worst of slaves. Beat him. Make him work hard and when he dies, crush him. But if he becomes *my* servant, care for him well and when he dies, hug him like a mother would hug her child."

That means that if you are the

world to study for the whole day locked up in a synagogue, it may be a wonderful thing to do, but it's a cop-out. That's not what we were created to do; that's not our purpose in the world. We are here with a mission to improve ourselves and to improve the world, and it's a path that's fraught with difficulty.

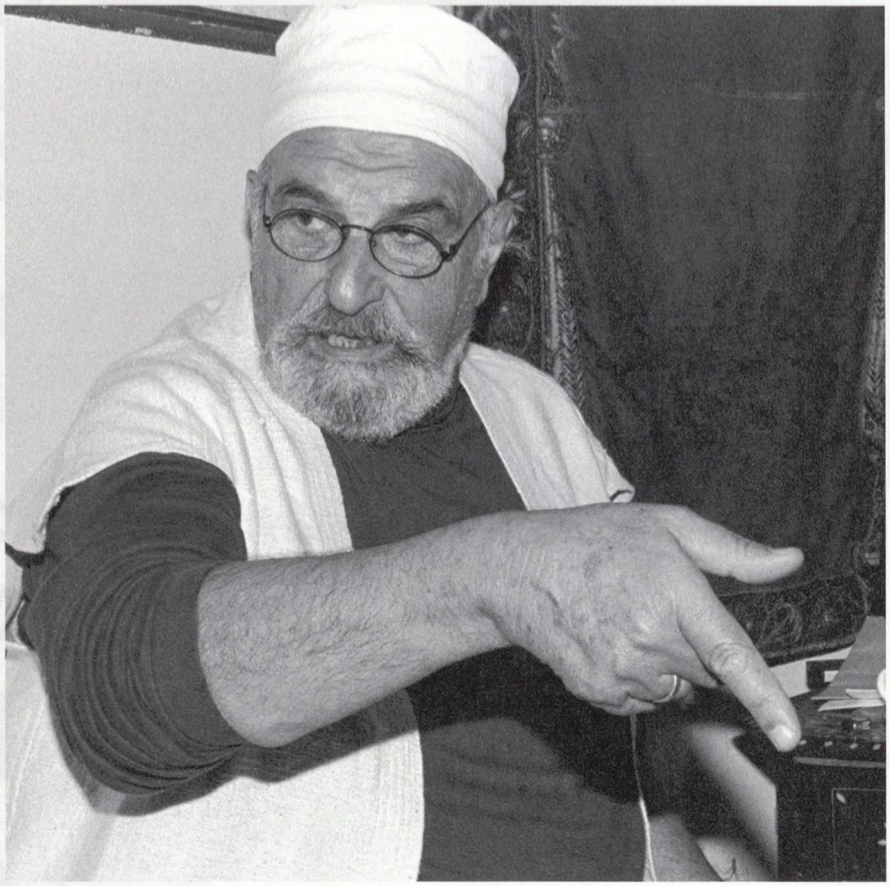
WIE: *Perhaps one of the most frequently quoted passages from the Bible that illustrates man's relationship to the world is the story of Jacob and his dream of a ladder that reaches from earth all the way to heaven. Commenting on this metaphor, Jewish scholar David Ariel writes: "With his head in heaven and his feet firmly on earth, man serves to bring the sparks of the Divine down into the world.... When we help another person to ascend the ladder, we finish the work of creation.... God stands in need of us because only we can perfect the world." What does it mean to bring the sparks of God into the world?*

DE: You see, the Almighty put sparks of God in each of us and in every single thing of creation. And when a person uses the things of the world correctly, it elevates those sparks. We usually don't see much godliness in inanimate objects like rocks, but *everything* has in it a spark of life.

When we use everything in creation in the right way, when we say a blessing before we eat and before we drink, and when we observe the *mitzvot* [commandments], we elevate the sparks of God that are in all of creation. When you use something in the wrong way, you are destroying creation. Using your power of speech to lie or using things to do wrong—to hurt somebody or steal from somebody or hate somebody—is taking the sparks of godliness that God put in the world and destroying them. You don't want to do that; you are destroying the sparks of creation.

WIE: *How exactly is it that God's holiness becomes manifest in the world?*

DE: By action. Every person is



Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

If you are the servant of Allah, then the world is going to be your servant and obey you and make you rich and everything else. When you die, it will hug you gently like a mother caressing you. But if you forget Allah and become the servant of the world, then the world is going to whip you, kick you, and make you work like hell. And when you die, it's going to crush you.

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

servant of Allah, then the world is going to be your servant and obey you and make you rich and everything else. And when you die, it will hug you gently like a mother caressing you. But if you forget Allah and become the servant of the world, then the world is going to whip you, kick you, and make you work like hell. And when you die, it's going to crush you.

WIE: *What exactly do you mean by "the world"?*

TB: Your wife, your children, your home, your work, your money in the bank, your position in the company, your political aspirations or affiliations, your bed at night, your shower in the morning, your breakfast—everything!

WIE: *There's a word in Arabic,* dunya, *which also means "the world" or "worldly life." It seems that it's often spoken about as something negative or as something that tempts us away from the path.*

TB: You're right. Many people think in those terms, but let me make a correction, it's important to understand this distinction. If *dunya* makes you forget your Lord, if it makes you forget where you came from, what your function is, and where you are going, if it makes you a fool, then it is your enemy. But if it *reminds* you that this is just a passage, this is just a place for tests, this is just a place to prove that you are doing what you were created for, then it is a good place, a good thing, and a wonderful friend.

WIE: *Would it be accurate to say that for most of us, the world tends to be the former, tends to be that which draws us away from God?*

TB: It is not the world's fault. It is *your* fault. It's not the devil's fault. It is *your* attachment to the world. The world is beautiful. Allah has made it beautiful. Every spot of it is a reflection of him. He has never created anything ugly.

You see, the Sufis believe that creation is simply a mirror. When there is nothing in front of the mirror, it reflects nothing. But Allah is in front of it, so all of creation is a reflection of him. We see his attributes, the attributes of God, reflected in the mirror of creation. And that's what we are. Everything in creation is Allah's attributes. It's

Rabbi Edelman with Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

If you look upon everything God gives us *as a blessing, you will always use it in a positive way.*

Rabbi Edelman

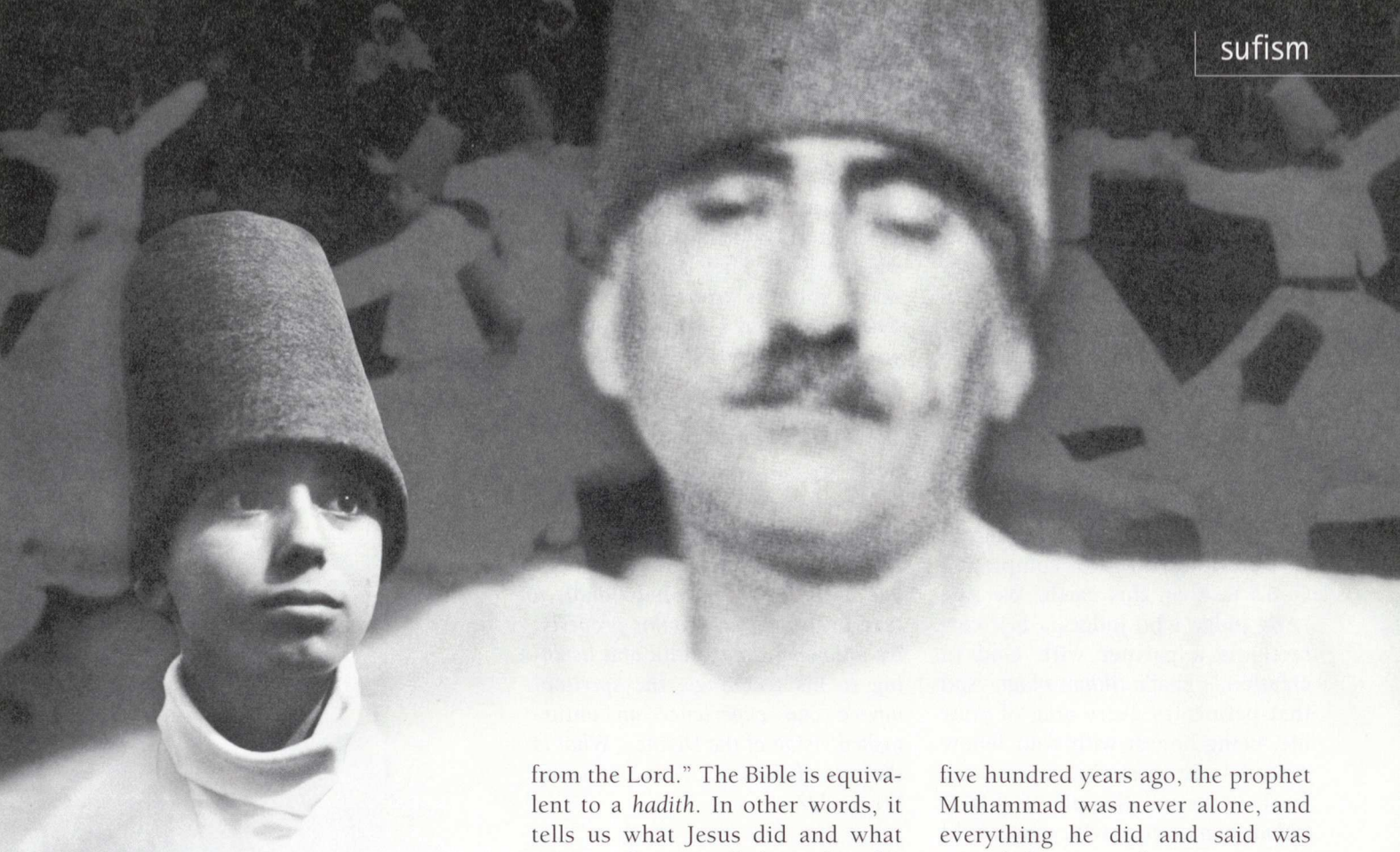
motivated in three ways. We call these our three garments: action, speech, and thought. When it says in the Torah, "Thou shalt not steal," it means you can't steal on any of the three levels. Not in your hands, not in your mouth, and not in your mind. And thought—that's the worst, because it's a higher level. You have to work to perfect the higher levels, you have to study and contemplate, you don't just get it all overnight.

WIE: *According to the teachings in Judaism, it is incumbent upon all Jews to do everything they can to rectify injustice and so bring God into the world. This obligation is known as* tikkun olam, *the reparation of the world, and it addresses virtually every aspect of our daily lives—our relationship to family, money, work, social justice, and even childrearing. Can you explain what is meant by "the reparation of the world" and how this sacred commandment is fulfilled?*

DE: The concept of *tikkun olam,* perfecting the world, comes from the very first chapter in the Bible. At the end of the six days of creation, it says, "God has created everything 'to do.'" And it looks like the sentence doesn't end—"to do" what? Now, the great Rashi* explained that God meant that with everything in this world, we must now "do," or "repair," or "make full." You see, God left us a little part in the world that he wants *us* to do. And that's repairing the world, that's *tikkun olam.*

For example, God created the Sabbath, and by sanctifying the day, we fulfill that part of the creation of the world. You make *kiddush* [blessing] Friday night, you pray Saturday morning, you take out the Torah, you refrain from work—you sanctify the day

*Biblical and Talmudic commentator (1040–1105)



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not Allah, but it is from Allah. So there is nothing wrong with the world. It is your fault that you make a god of it. It's not the world's fault.

WIE: *Many Sufi sheikhs have had wives and families, owned businesses, and some are even said to have been great sultans. What is it that enables a sheikh or a dervish or any spiritual seeker to live amidst all the complexities and temptations of the world and still do the right thing? How can we act in the world in a way that expresses nonattachment to the world?*

TB: The answer to that question is very simple. A young German lady asked that question to my sheikh, Sheikh Muzaffer [Ozak] Efendi, and he said, "My daughter, we are very fortunate, because we have got a book in our hands, the Qu'ran, which we believe is from Allah, from the Lord." The Bible is equivalent to a *hadith*. In other words, it tells us what Jesus did and what Jesus said. But we believe that the Qu'ran was revealed by Allah and brought word by word, letter by letter, dot by dot, to the prophet Muhammad. Through his blessed lips it came out, and not a dot of it has changed for the last one thousand five hundred years.

We actually have three touchstones to find out whether our actions are right or wrong. But you must act! You cannot sit on your behind, because then you're dead. Now if the action corresponds to what Allah tells you to do in the Qu'ran, it's definitely the right action. It is said that in the Qu'ran there are a thousand things to do and a thousand things not to do. I certainly don't know all of them. I know perhaps a hundred things, and even those often depend on interpretation. So this touchstone, this test to see whether your action is real gold or fake, is a difficult one.

The next touchstone is the imitation of the prophet Muhammad. Although he lived one thousand five hundred years ago, the prophet Muhammad was never alone, and everything he did and said was recorded. None of it was inconsequential—the way he drank his water, the way he made love to his wives, the way he went to the bathroom. There are hundreds of thousands of *hadiths* of things which he said and did, and these are easier to understand, because no interpretation is necessary.

The third touchstone is your conscience. You have to ask your conscience, "This action that I'm about to do, is the result going to be beneficial for the world—for him, for her, for me, for the grass, for the cat, for the turtle? Or is it going to be the opposite, is it going to cause pain and hurt?" If it is beneficial, it's right; if it is not beneficial, it's wrong.

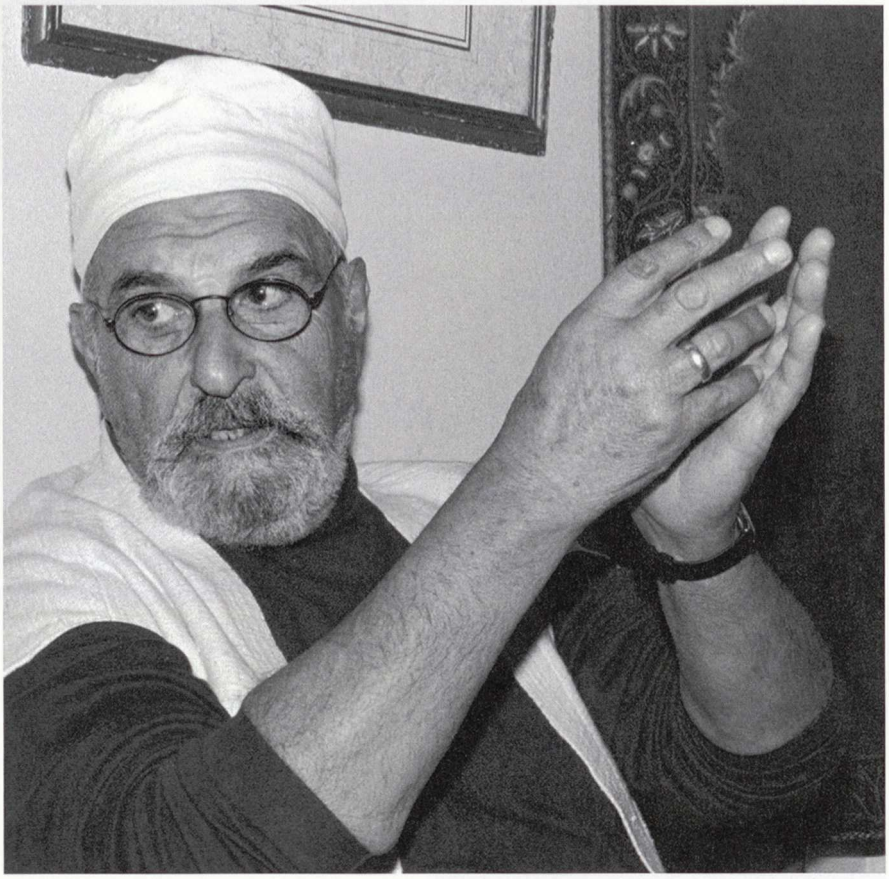
What all of this boils down to is that we are here to ceaselessly do right action. I just returned from a trip to Iraq to help with some of the suffering there. I visited orphanages and hospitals and was able to donate money to help a great many people who are suffering, especially

by your actions. And in that way, you help God in the creation of the world. *Tikkun olam* brings a sense of perfection into the world. By our doing good deeds—by charity, a kind word, helping another person in need, teaching someone—we make the world a better place, a more whole place. That's *tikkun olam;* you're helping people. And that's the kind of life we have to live.

You see, by doing just things in the world, you are completing God's task on this earth. We say, "Any judge who judges a law correctly is a partner with God in creation." That's *tikkun olam.* And that permeates every area of your life. Being honest with your fellow person—you can't cheat, you can't steal, you can't lie—all of that is *tikkun olam.* Otherwise, the world goes awry, it goes crazy; people take advantage of other people, trying to be better than everybody else, it's a dog-eat-dog world. That's the opposite of *tikkun olam;* that destroys the world. Why were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah completely destroyed? What did they do that was so bad? They said, "Mine is mine, yours is yours. Don't come over to me and I won't go over to you." They were extremely selfish. That was it. And that's the opposite of *tikkun olam.*

WIE: *The great mystic and founder of the Hassidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov, said, "Man is the channel that brings godliness to the world, but only the perfect individual, a* tzaddik *[sage], can do this properly. By following the* tzaddik *and listening to his teachings, the spiritual novice can experience an untarnished vision of the Divine." What is the role of the* tzaddik *in perfecting the world?*

DE: Every person has a responsibility to yourself, to your family, and to your community. But the *tzaddik's* responsibility *is* the world. They give direction to the world.



Renunciation is a sin. *Renunciation means that I am thirsty and he, Allah, is offering me a glass of water and I say, "No thank you." That's a sin! Because Allah offers you a gift and you say, "No, keep your gift." That's arrogance in the extreme.*

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

children. And while I almost never talk about my personal experiences, my experience there still lingers with me, because a strange thing happened. During my few days in Iraq, I was not there. Action was there, things were happening, but it was as if I was not there. And I felt that that was my great, great reward which I received. And for me that suffices.

WIE: *Maybe that's the best kind of action in the world.*

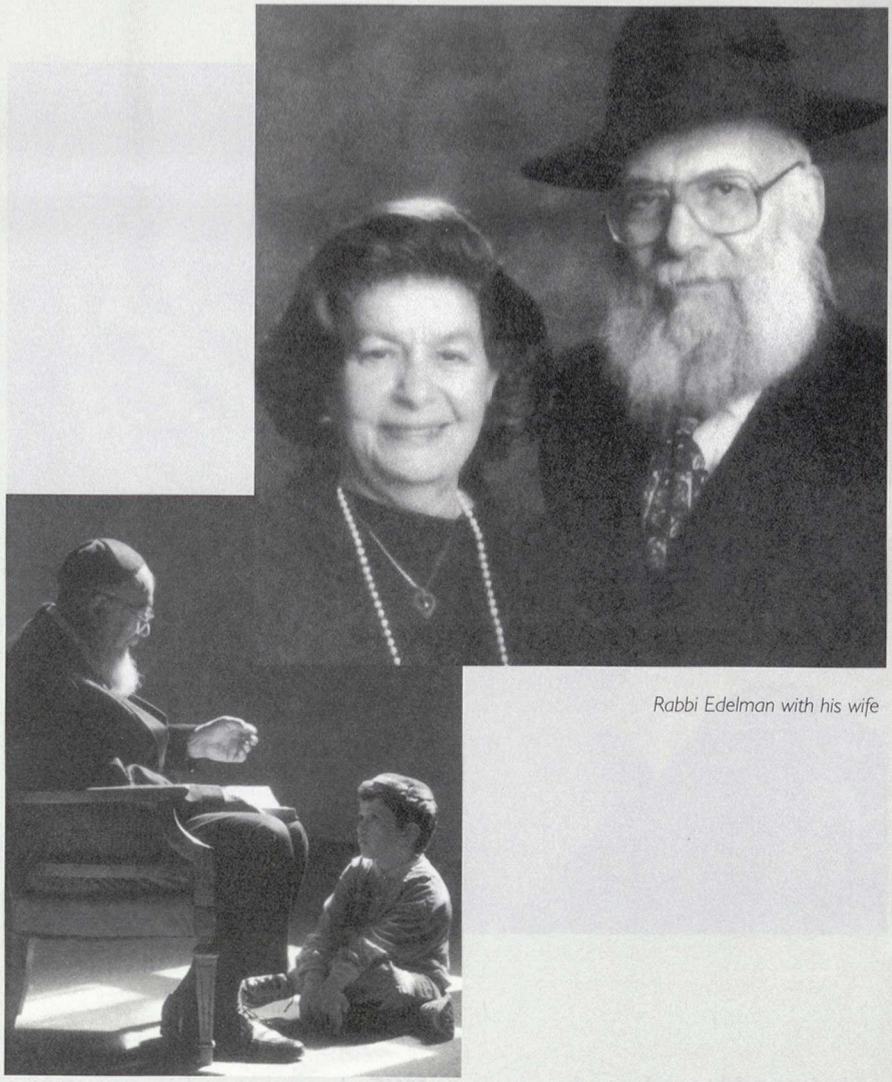
TB: I hope so. Action without being there. We have a saying in Turkish. It is *hiç*, which means "nothing." And that's the goal.

WIE: *Is it ever necessary to retreat or to step back from our involvement with the world in order to deepen our own spiritual contemplation?*

TB: There are beautiful stories about the prophet Muhammad where he would be so lost and immersed in these intense spiritual states that he wouldn't even recognize his own wife Aisha. He would say, "Who are you?" and she would say, "Aisha," and he would reply, "Who is Aisha?" You see, he wasn't there. He was so far away that he didn't even know his own wife. But then there were other times when he would rest his blessed head on the thigh of his wife and say, "Aisha, caress my head." So even *he* needed a little comfort. You have to come back to the world. We are in this body, you see, and it needs things. You have to come back.

WIE: *In your own life, you were a very successful artist, but you gave up your career, gave up fame and fortune to devote yourself to the spiritual life. What was it that compelled you to leave your own life behind and take that step?*

TB: Actually, both my wife and I were artists, and we felt very strongly that it was feeding our egos. Art, art exhibitions, and the consequences of being accepted and successful are incredible food for your ego, which is the Sufi's enemy. The final straw was when we went to Rome to visit a friend, a sculptor, and there was a very pretty young girl there whom my friend introduced me to. And she was so adoring to me. She said, "Ohhh, I know you. I *love* your art."



Rabbi Edelman with his wife

In the time of the Temple in Jerusalem, the holiest man in the world was the High Priest. And to be the High Priest, he had to be married. Why? Because
if you have a wife and children, then you really know what to pray for.

Rabbi Edelman

God sends down thirty-six righteous people at any point in time to keep the world in existence. Many of them are women. Many of them are hidden. And if you're lucky enough to be under the guidance of a *tzaddik*, boy, it's so much easier.

YE: There are many smart people in the world, but a *tzaddik* is one who is sensitive to the soul of another. The most dominant aspect of the *tzaddik's* persona is his soul, and when he sees another person, he sees their soul. A *tzaddik* looks in your eyes and he'll see what the source of the problem is, and he'll be able to direct you in the right way.

WIE: *In mystical Judaism, it is said that man's ultimate goal is* d'vekut, *literally "gluing" oneself to God. The great Baal Shem Tov taught that we must always seek to come closer and closer to God until there is no distance at all. The Hassidic mystics who lived their lives according to this principle seemed to leave behind their emotional involvement with the things of the world, performing their worldly duties in a spirit of detachment. As opposed to*

Prayers at the Halveti-Jerrahi mosque in Spring Valley, NY

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

She was completely praising me, and I saw the ego suddenly rise up and say, "Aha! This beautiful, spiritual girl is telling you that you are a great artist." So I said, "Oh, my God! That's it. It's over." I hit the ego on the head and decided I was finished with it all.

WIE: *In the Sufi tradition, what is the ideal relationship to the world for those who have gone very deep into the spiritual life?*

TB: I'll just say that what I myself do and what I ask my students to do is to find their place in the world, or I should say their duty, their function in this world. And when they find it, they should do it as best they can. And they should ask for Allah's help in finding it and doing it. For example, when a person wants to go to college and study certain things, they often take aptitude tests. So in a much larger and more complete sense, we have to pass ourselves through aptitude tests and find out what we have been brought into this world to do, and then we must do it as best we can. I think that's how one's relationship should be to the world.

Thirty years ago, if somebody would have told me that I was going to be a Sufi and a sheikh, I would have laughed and said, "What are they talking about?" Therefore, you cannot say that I did it. Finally, Allah has to do it for you. That is why when we pray, we open our hands. If your hands are open and something drops into them, you can catch it. But if they're not open, you can't. It falls away. So you have to be open, and that's all that you can do. I don't even say open your heart. You have to open *yourself*, everything—your body, your mind, your potential. You have to keep everything open and somehow hope to receive direction and indication as to what your function is. And once you find your function, I think then you will also find yourself through your function.

WIE: *As you've said, Sufism isn't generally known as a spiritual tradition that emphasizes renunciation of the world. But, in the Sufi tradition, does renunciation play some role in the quest for spiritual union? I've read many stories by Sufi mystics that detail the dangers of the "deceiving" world with its "limitless tricks" and that encourage the seeker to fly away from it on the "wings of prayer." That seems to suggest that renunciation or removal from the world offers the surest and safest path to the realization of spiritual freedom and communion with God.*

TB: In our discipline, we don't agree with this. On the contrary, I would go so far as to say that renunciation

the more familiar Jewish teaching on embracing the world, this principle of d'vekut *seems to advise us to* transcend *the world, to "be in the world but not of it." Can you explain the goal of* d'vekut *and the right relationship to the world from this perspective?*

DE: *D'vekut* is what we study all our lives in Hassidism. We live with that day and night; it's not abstract. Just in order to pray, you have to study five, six years to know what to think about. Real *d'vekut* is the seriousness with which you take prayer. *D'vekut* comes from studying about God, studying the Torah, doing *mitzvot,* helping your fellow man, giving charity. Gluing yourself to God is with your mind and your heart together. You feel a great desire to be closer to your Creator, who gives you life. If you were ever so lucky to see the Lubavitch Rebbe, Rabbi Schneerson, *daven* [pray] on Rosh Hashanah, he'd pray six, seven hours in a row. Then you'd see the real *d'vekut,* the cleavage of a soul to his Creator—such devotion! Coming closer to God, that's the greatest blessing there could ever be for any creation in this world.

WIE: *In recent times a new spiritual movement has arisen, known by some as the "new American spirituality." Like Judaism, it emphasizes the importance of embracing all aspects of our lives in the world. One of the foremost proponents of this view, Elizabeth Lesser, stresses in her book* The New American Spirituality *that we must not deny the holiness of any aspect of life. But unlike Judaism, whose commandments teach us how to sanctify our activities in the world, Lesser asserts that there is nothing additional we need to do to spiritualize our activities, and sees obedience or surrender to a divine authority as repressive and life-denying. She believes that following a prescribed spiritual path like Judaism could potentially lead to a denial of one's own authentic spirituality, and writes, "It no longer makes sense for an authority to describe to you the sacred truth and the path to discover it. Now* you *map the journey." What do you think of this new paradigm of spiritual life and its advocacy of self-authority?*

DE: If you break a leg, don't go to a foot doctor to set that bone. Set it yourself!

YE: What would she tell the cop if she's caught speeding? "This is what I like—it fits me. My car is made for that. It says right here on the dash—120 miles per hour!"?

DE: To say that Judaism stifles you, that the *mitzvot* are negative—it's one hundred percent the opposite! The *mitzvot* open up your mind *and* your heart.

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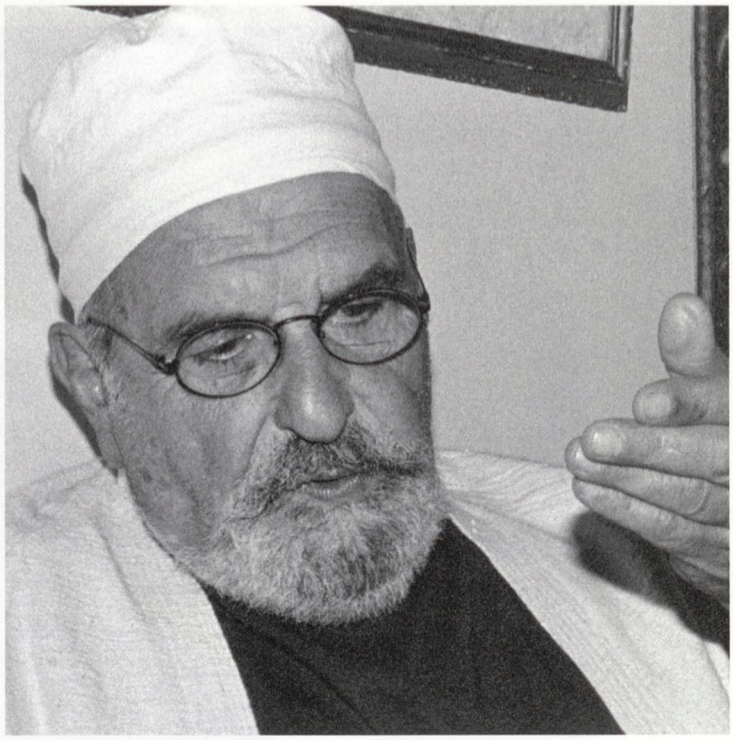

There were times when Muhammad would rest his blessed head *on the thigh of his wife and say, "Aisha, caress my head." So even he needed a little comfort. You have to come back to the world. We are in this body, you see, and it needs things. You have to come back.*

Sheikh Tosun Bayrak

is a sin. Renunciation means that I am thirsty and he, Allah, is offering me a glass of water and I say, "No thank you." That's a sin! For instance, Allah offers to reduce our prayers when we are traveling. And some idiots say, "No. I will continue making my prayers as if I'm not traveling." That's an insult. It's a sin. Because Allah offers you a gift and you say, "No, keep your gift." It's arrogance in the extreme, this renunciation business. This isn't just my opinion; this is the opinion of the Sufis. You should take whatever it is you receive, and you should put it to good use. If you don't want it, give it to somebody who needs it! I have, praise to Allah, enough money. But if he gave me a million dollars today, I'm not going to refuse it. I'm going to take it and I'm going to give it to the ones who need it and keep some for myself too. I'll buy myself a new car instead of an old one, and maybe a $150 pair of shoes. That would be the day!

So there is no going to the monasteries, no climbing up the Himalayas, no pouring ashes on your head and sitting cross-legged on nails. You have to go out into the world and participate. For example, my own teacher, Sheikh Muzaffer, loved to eat, loved good food. And he had a young wife, whom he loved very much. He used to say, "Money—there should be a lot in your pocket, but none in your heart."

WIE: *What about the example of Jesus? He is considered to be a Sufi prophet and yet he encouraged people to leave the world behind and follow him.*

TB: In Arabic, we call Jesus "Ruhullah," the spirit of God—or more accurately "Ruhu min Allah," which means not the spirit *of* Allah, but the spirit *from* Allah. Jesus was pure spirit, you see, and a human being cannot be pure spirit. His method of teaching was not by example. In fact, whoever tried to imitate him got eaten by the lions, or lost in the dark chambers of monasteries or convents which were not good for anybody. His message was not through imitation, but through what he said. So I don't agree with you that the teaching of Christ was to abandon the world. It is just that some people tried to follow his example, which is absolutely impossible to follow. But his *teaching* is possible to follow.

WIE: *Today there is a growing spiritual movement in America that has been very critical of traditional spiritual paths and teachings, specifically those that emphasize a separation between the world and a transcendent God. This new philosophy claims that even the most mundane aspects of our worldly lives are inherently sacred and can potentially become the vehicles for spiritual awakening. Books on such subjects as sacred sexuality, sacred sports, and spirituality in the workplace are becoming more*

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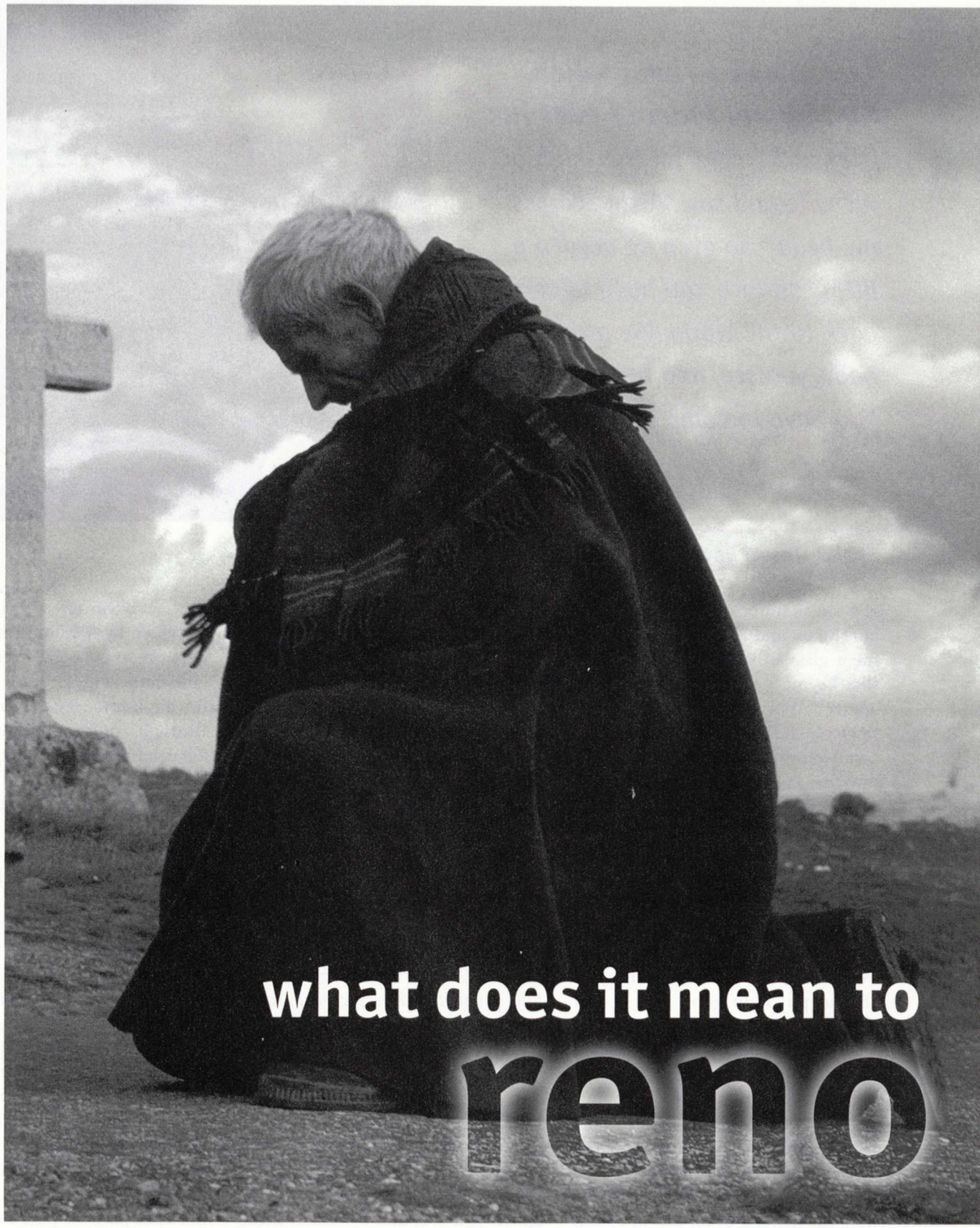
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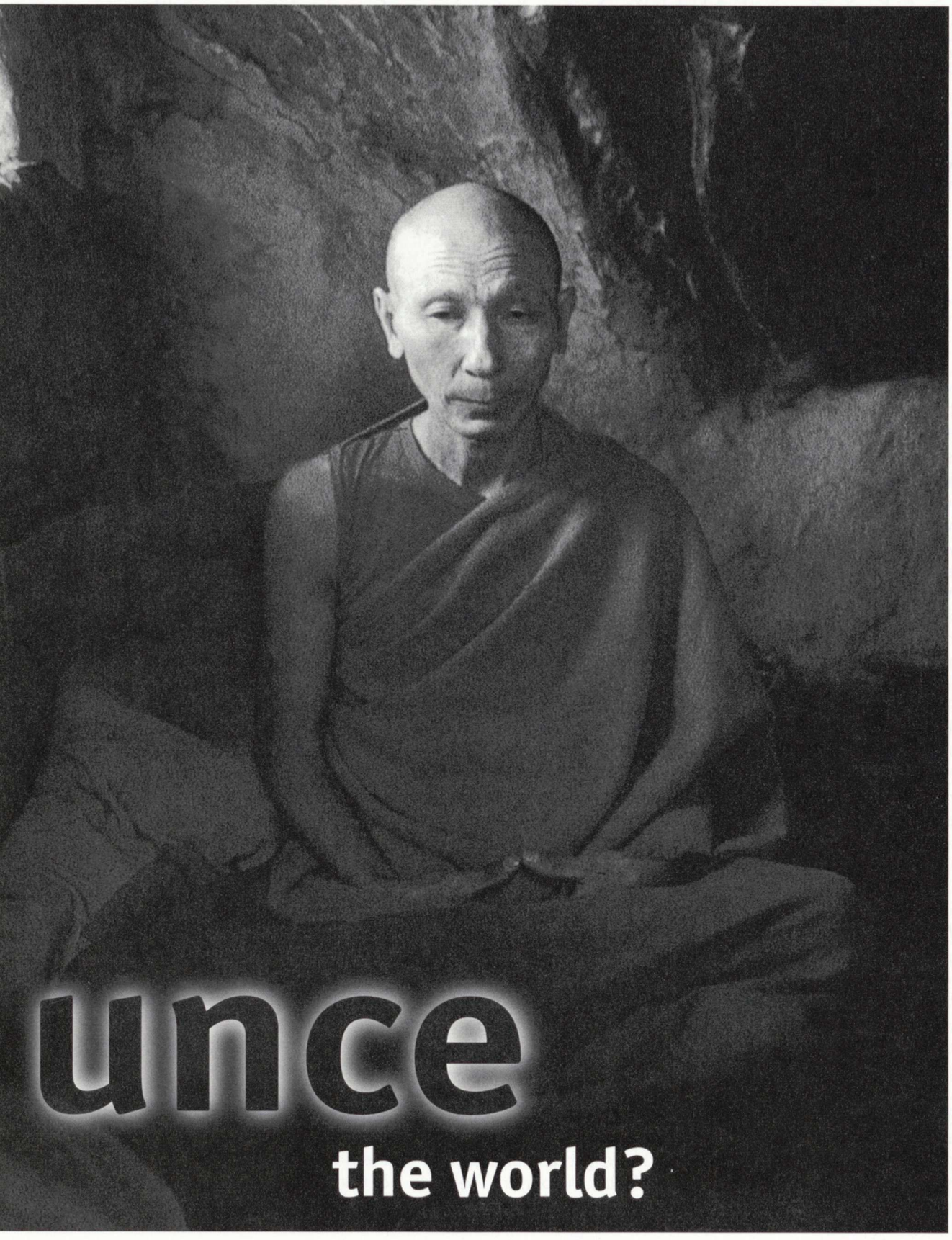
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the world?

what does it mean to renounce the world?

featuring interviews with
Father William McNamara
and
H.H. Penor Rinpoche

THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY THERE HAVE BEEN INDIVIDUALS who have heard in their own hearts and minds a call to give up the world, felt a yearning, an inner demand to cast off the roles and concerns of secular society and leave behind the dictates and expectations of a worldly life. Those individuals have taken one of the most radical steps a human being can take—they have renounced the world completely and walked away in search of an unknown possibility. Whether they have been yogis, monks, *fakirs*, hermits, shamans, or *sadhus;* whether they have gone to the mountains, the desert, the forest, the cave, or the monastery; and whether they have gone alone or, like Jesus and the Buddha, created a revolution in their wake; these individuals left the concerns of the everyday far behind for a way of life that they considered to be more real, more authentic, closer to the heart of what it means to be a human being. Indeed, as we began to look into the question "What does it mean to be in the world but not of it?" for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* we knew that we would have to come to terms with the inspiring yet austere example of the world-renouncers and the great traditions of monasticism that have prospered and endured for so much of human history. Although in our modern Western culture the ideal of renunciation is often derided as a dispensable remnant of a less enlightened past, and the popularity of the monastic life has dramatically waned as a result, for most of recorded history monastic institutions have been at the forefront of humanity's spiritual aspirations. Within their hallowed halls, cloistered cells, and solitary sanctuaries, much of our modern spiritual heritage has been shaped and formed, and the great saints and mystics who have emblazoned their names on the pages of our spiritual canon have more often than not been products of these world-renouncing traditions.

What inner compulsion moves these men and women to take such a bold and unconventional step? Indeed, what inspired the young Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha-to-be, to kiss his wife and child goodbye and set out for the homeless life—a momentous decision which eventually sparked a monastic tradition that would spread across the entire Asian subcontinent, transforming lives and reshaping societies throughout half the world? What inspired Jesus to courageously step beyond the boundaries of his own spiritual heritage and passionately call on others to do the same—to leave behind everything and follow him into a life of poverty and simplicity, rejecting the Jewish conventions of the day? What made the young St. Benedict—the man who years later literally wrote the book on how to be a monk, *The Rule of St. Benedict*—look into the grand delights and pleasures of fifth-century Rome and see in them only a descent into spiritual degradation, causing him to abandon it all for the delights and pleasures of solitude, silence, and prayer? Their words, and the words of those who have followed them in succeeding generations, bear unequivocal witness to one deep and profound desire: the desire for simplicity, for purity of heart, for the opportunity to devote oneself wholeheartedly to the spiritual life. "Let us live happily possessing nothing," the Buddha told his monks. "Let us feed on joy like the radiant Gods." Indeed, it was the promise of this simplicity that led the Christian Desert Fathers in the fourth century to see that Christendom, in its newfound acceptance into the mainstream of the Mediterranean world, was growing lax, bourgeois, worldly. En masse, they followed the great St. Anthony into the Egyptian wilderness to strengthen their faith and soften their pride in the rugged desert life. Living as solitary hermits loosely linked in the bond of spiritual brotherhood, they single-handedly initiated the entire tradition of Christian monasticism. Perhaps they were thinking of the words of Jesus, who himself endured many trials beneath the desert sun and later warned his disciples that "No one can serve two masters. . . . You cannot serve both the world and God."

What is "the world," this enemy of the spiritual path which so many religious traditions have vilified in their scriptures? For them the word "world" is merely a metaphor for the unwanted attachments and unwritten rules of society that can too often cater to the lower common denominators of the human condition. It is the world of the material, the world of fear and craving, the world that promises fulfillment and yet inevitably

brings disappointment and suffering. It is that ever-present refrain just beneath the surface of our society that says, "have more, consume more, become more, enjoy the comforts and pleasures of the senses without worrying about the needs of the soul." "Come look at this world glittering like a royal chariot," the Buddha said to his followers. "The foolish are immersed in it but the wise do not touch it." It was no doubt that same glitter that Thomas Merton, the great Catholic contemplative, referred to when he wrote, "We must be saved from immersion in the sea of lies and passions which is called 'the world.' And we must be saved above all from that abyss of confusion and absurdity which is our own worldly self. . . . The free son of God must be rescued from the conformist slave of fantasy, passion and convention."

Of course, few have ever been interested in renouncing the world, and in this day and age there are fewer still. Yet, if we step back for a moment, it is not hard to get in touch with the attractive simplicity and extraordinary depth that is possible in a life lived free from the ever-pressing concerns of modern society. In fact, in today's world, where it can seem a great renunciation just to turn off the cell phone for a few hours, there does seem to be a growing desire for at least a temporary respite from the frenzy of the information age. Spiritual retreats are rapidly growing in popularity, and monasteries report a significant surge in requests from the laity to spend extended time within their sheltered walls. Could it be that the call to renounce the world, in some form or fashion, is simply intrinsic to the spiritual path? Historians tells us that the fires of renunciation have, in fact, been burning in spiritual men and women almost since the dawning of human civilization, beginning at least as early as the second millennium B.C.E. when the solitary Hindu ascetics were called *sramanas,* the Sanskrit name for recluse. Indeed, it does seem that the inner spiritual calling has almost always contained within it some innate seed of renunciation. Perhaps today that impulse is more hidden, perhaps it has been softened by the values of our world-embracing culture, and perhaps it has too long been associated with the most maligned aspects of our religious traditions—the patriarchy, a restrictive rigidity, and the false split between body and spirit. But nonetheless, in these early days of the new millennium, there are still those, like the two monks whom we interviewed for this section, whose lives express a great yearning for the simplicity of purpose and purity of being that inspired humanity's greatest sages and saints to walk away from the world with empty hands and an unburdened heart. History would seem to tell us that there always will be.

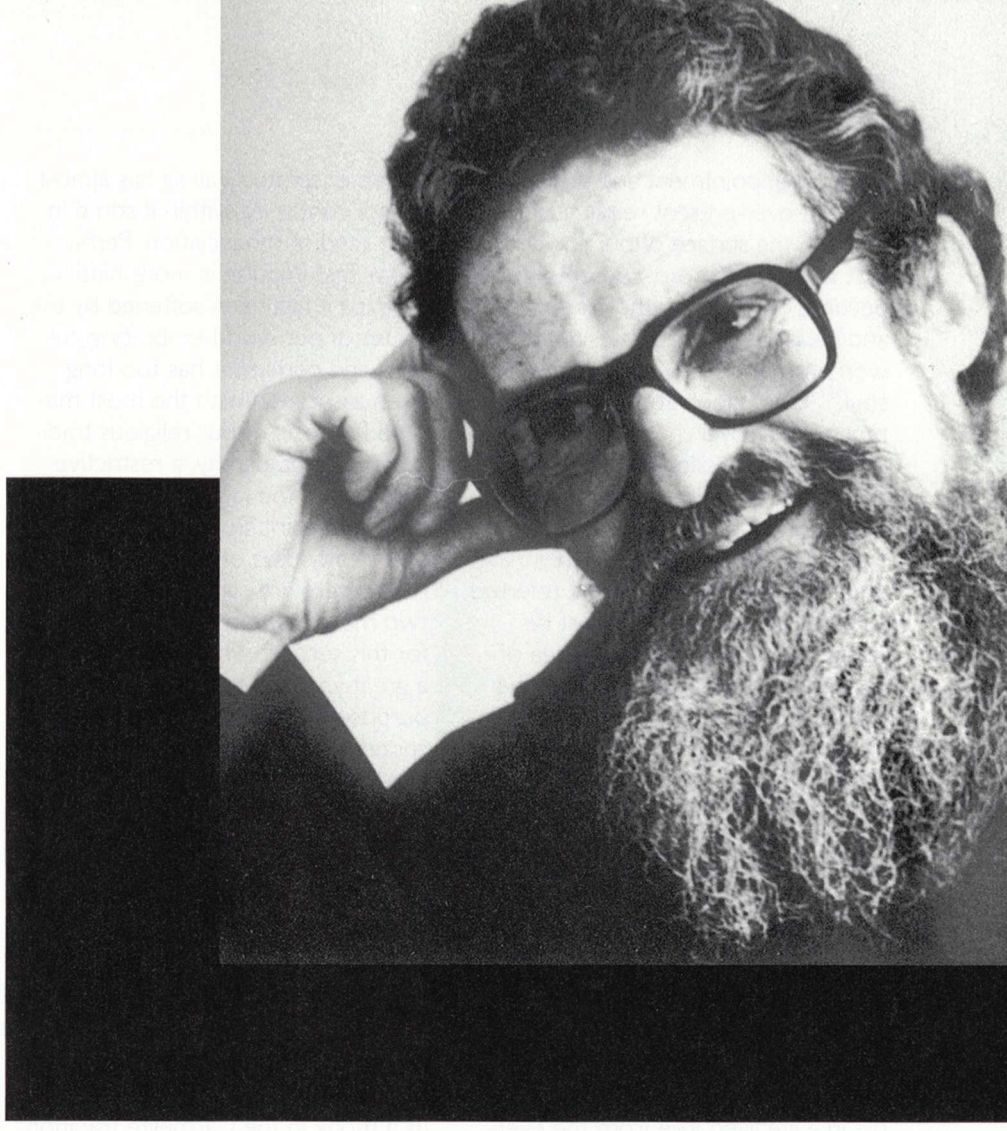
Father William McNamara experienced the calling of the renunciate life at an early age, leaving his family behind to take up monastic training when he was just thirteen. Five years later he officially ordained as a monk in the Carmelite tradition, a monastic order that received its name from the ascetic hermits who lived on the slopes of Mt. Carmel in twelfth-century Palestine, and which has included such revered figures as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. Inspired by the example of the Christian Desert Fathers and St. Anthony in particular, Father McNamara soon headed for the remote reaches of the Arizona desert, where he pursued the contemplative life in solitude. His passion for the eremitical life would not remain a secret for long, however, and men and women soon began to seek him out for inspiration and guidance on the spiritual path. In 1960 he cofounded a new branch of the Carmelite order, the Spiritual Life Institute, with his student Mother Tessa Bielecki, and together they established several hermitages in the U.S., Canada, and Ireland. Author of numerous books on spiritual life and a leader in the movement to renew the mystical and contemplative tradition of Catholicism, Father McNamara is an articulate and passionate modern defender of the monastic and renunciate life.

His Holiness Penor Rinpoche was born in Kham, in the wilds of Eastern Tibet in 1932. Recognized at a very young age to be a *tulku,* the incarnation of a recently deceased enlightened master, he formally took refuge in the Buddhist teachings when he was only four years old. Receiving his training at the famous Palyul monastery, the young Penor Rinpoche was eventually installed as the eleventh throne holder in the Palyul lineage, making him the head of over 400 branch monasteries and directly responsible for thousands of monks. In 1958, at the age of twenty-six, the political circumstances caused by the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced him to flee his homeland for the safe refuge of India. Setting out on a long and perilous journey across the Himalayas, it took him three years to arrive at the northeastern Indian border, and the cost was high. Of the 300 monks and lay students who had begun the trip, only thirty survived.

Since that time Penor Rinpoche has worked tirelessly to preserve and reinvigorate the Palyul tradition, earning an extraordinary reputation as one of the most respected and honored teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. Now sixty-seven, and widely revered as a living Buddha, he is also the Supreme Head of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, the oldest of the four schools in this ancient tradition. He travels around the world giving sacred teachings, empowerments, and retreats to his Tibetan and Western students, including the thousands of monks and nuns in his monasteries whom he guides on the Buddhist path of renunciation.

by Carter Phipps

Quotation from: Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation,* New Directions, New York, 1961, p. 38.



"The e'M'pire is an unreal world. It's a network of Mediocrity, Mendacity, and Manipulation."

THE E'M'PIRE

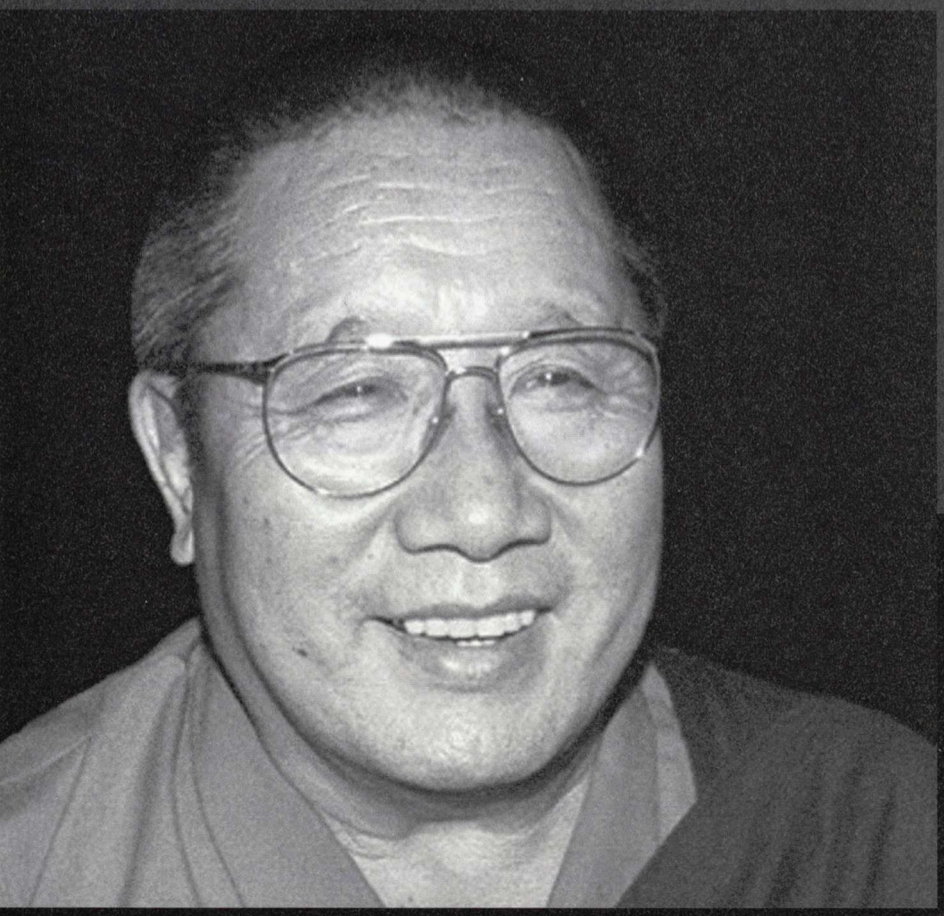
an interview with

Father William McNamara

by Carter Phipps

WIE: *Father McNamara, you are a Carmelite monk, a contemplative in one of the most respected monastic traditions in the world. What inspired you to renounce worldly life and set your feet to the path of asceticism and solitude?*

FR. WILLIAM MCNAMARA: The original motive, affirmed and reconfirmed more passionately and intensely over the years, was and is a desire for the fullness of life. In order to be prepared for and receptive to that onslaught of life and love that the Creator provides for us



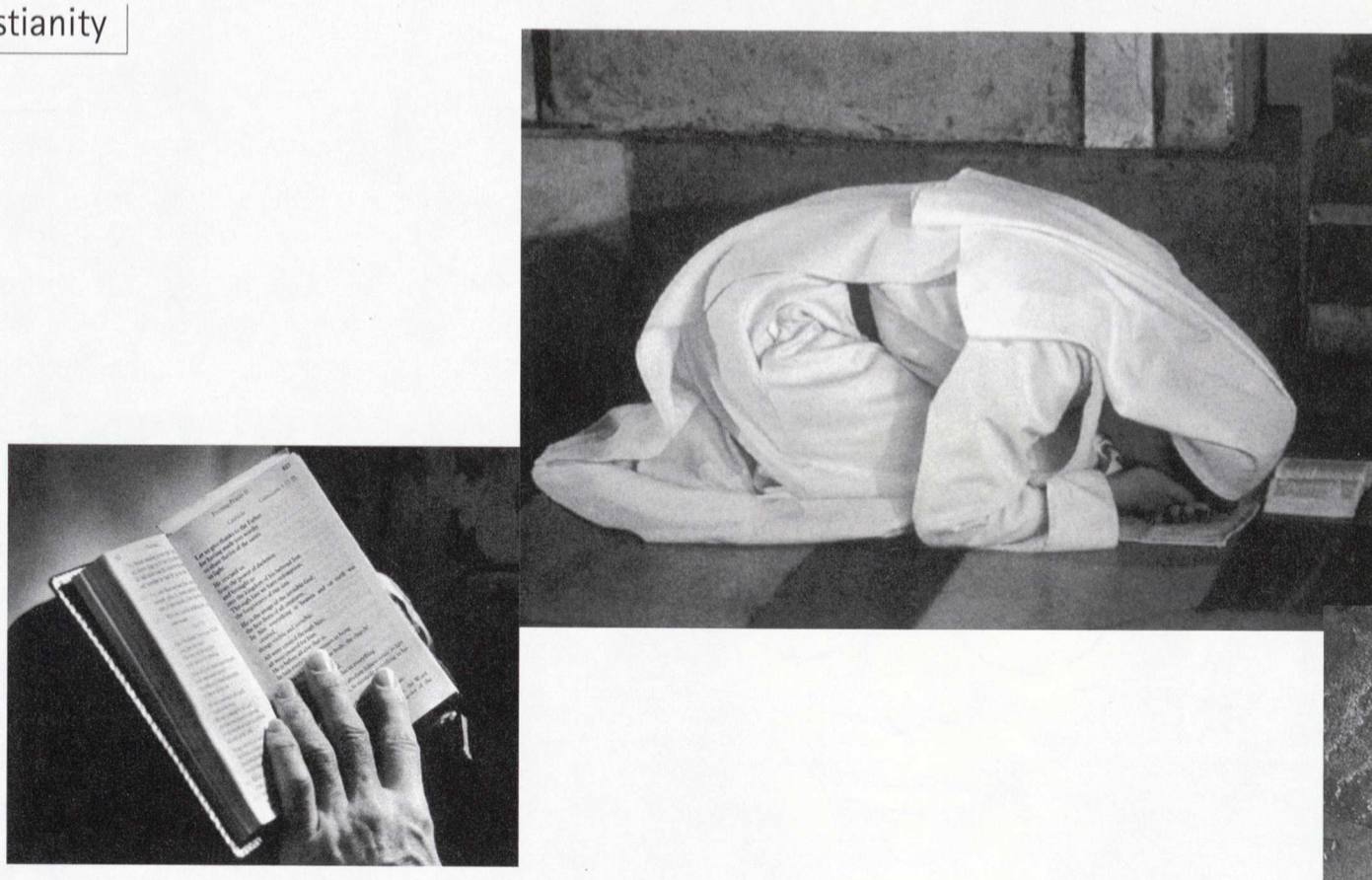
the world is unreliable

an interview with
His Holiness Penor Rinpoche
by Andrew Cohen

ANDREW COHEN: *Rinpoche, many people in the West are becoming interested in the Buddha-dharma. You're a monk. And the Buddha himself was a monk. What are the virtues of monkhood for the spiritual aspirant?*

PENOR RINPOCHE: In *sutra*, the Buddha taught that being a renunciate and becoming a monk will help one follow the spiritual path in a better way. First, one receives ordination and vows, and then one renounces the world and becomes a monk. With that as the basis for one's moral conduct, one will have a deeper and more firm understanding. One will have more power in the practice of the spiritual path. Being a renunciate monk is more powerful than just being a lay practitioner.

AC: *The great nineteenth-century Tibetan Nyingma yogi Shabkar said,*



"In our modern age there is a tendency to dismiss the need for exterior renunciation, saying, 'We're grown up now, so all we need to do is renounce disturbing interior things but not exterior ones.' It doesn't work. If there is no renunciation of inappropriate external things, then the whole interior life weakens."

Fr. McNamara

in himself and through everything that is connected with him (because God is not a separate God, he is distinct and transcendental but not separate) one has to become pure, one has to become empty, one has to become responsive, one has to become alive and alert to all the possibilities of living. I wanted that fullness of life and I didn't want to become halfhearted. I didn't want to get caught in half-truths. I didn't want to be stymied or seduced by mediocrity, by pseudo-events rather than events. I wanted the whole thing. I wanted utter reality. I wanted the ultimate. So I had to renounce whatever seemed to me to be less than real.

WIE: *What did you see as being less than real?*

WM: I found most communication an impediment to communion. We communicate so much—a veritable Vesuvius of verbiage—that we don't hear the Word itself. The truth escapes us. I think that one of the worst pollutions in the world is verbal pollution.

So I didn't want to be choked by verbal pollution, by a shallow, empty, febrile kind of talk. I wanted a life that was dominated by and permeated by silence. And then, out of that matrix of silence, I hoped that the deeper words would come, the primordial words. But the only words that would be worthwhile would be those which are connected with the original

"Whatever we may achieve in this world, whether we acquire all kinds of material objects or rank, still there is nothing we can rely upon. Everything is impermanent; it only lasts for a few moments. Rank or material objects do not really help anybody because when death comes, we cannot carry anything with us."

Penor Rinpoche

when speaking about the worldly life,

Meat, liquor, sense pleasures, worldly enjoyments—the best things of *samsara* are temporarily beguiling. Young brides in the full bloom of youth and beauty are expert at leading one astray. Therefore, even if you have as your companion a young daughter of the gods, have no attachment, have no desire. Why? Speaking generally, because all things of this world are without essence, impermanent, unreliable, and by their very nature lead to suffering. In particular, because domestic life is like a pit of fire, a cannibal island, a nest of poisonous snakes. Enjoying the entire array of *samsaric* perfections, wealth, and pleasures is like eating food mixed with poison, like licking honey on a razor blade, like the jewel on a snake's head: a single touch destroys.

Rinpoche, could you speak a little bit about the dangers of the worldly life and its pitfalls for the spiritual aspirant?

PR: It is said that if someone is attached to a minor pleasure or happiness, there is no way that person can attain a greater spiritual happi-

Word, the Word of God, the Word that became flesh.

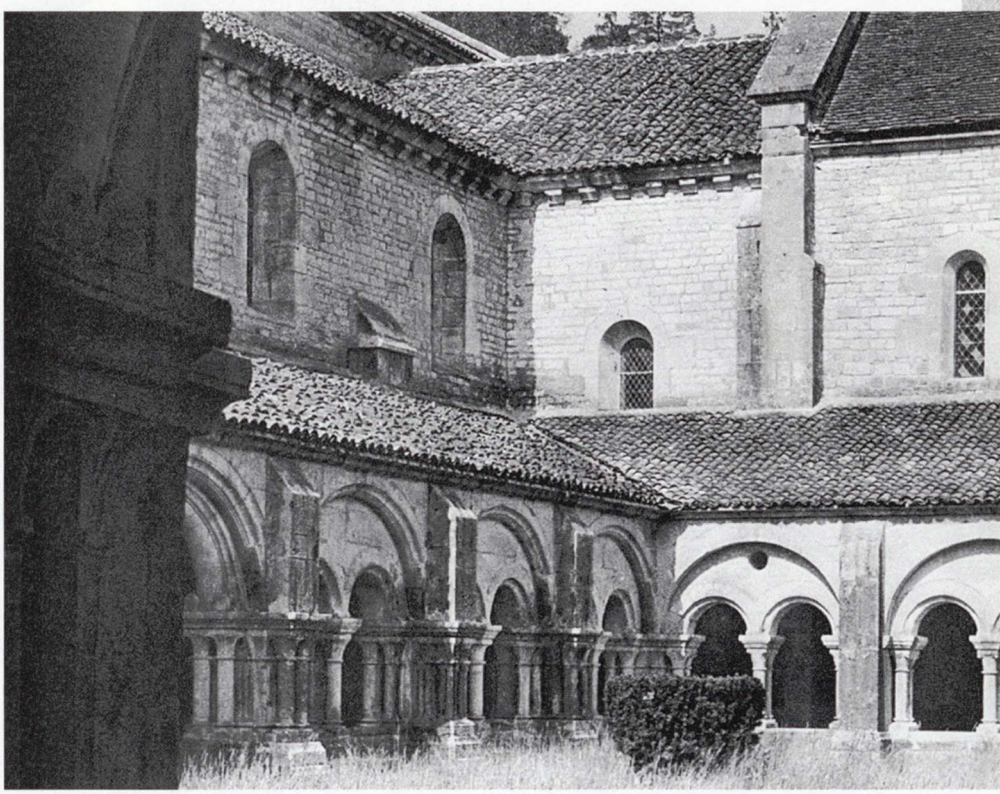
Another thing would be the way reality escapes us, precisely because we are in such a hurry. We are in a stampede almost constantly. There's no time to think, there's no time to love, there's no time to *be*. We're driven to do, do, do at a rather shallow, superficial level, and that prevents us from *being*, which is most important. As Lao Tzu said, "The most important thing to do is to be."

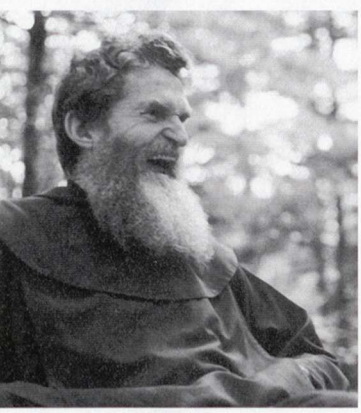
So that would be another aspect of the search for truth, the search for the Ultimate. Again, it's *communion* rather than communication. If communication sets the stage for communion, that's wonderful communication. If it doesn't, it's useless. The big thing that every human being is striving for is communion. And if that is not experienced on all levels—communion with God, communion with human beings, communion with animals, vegetables, minerals, the earth—then we experience the terrible affliction of loneliness and isolation. That's what is dominating this modern society. Everyone's lonely, everyone's isolated. So we need time to *be*, we need enough silence to be, we need enough solitude to be, we need enough *good* communion with others to be.

WIE: *Could you explain exactly how you define "the world" on the spiritual path?*

WM: I find it necessary to distinguish between the world and what I call the "Mpire"—the world of the three M's: mediocrity, mendacity, and manipulation. The world that is the earth, the gift God has given us—I would never renounce that. All I want to do is embrace that and love it and become more and more a part of it—that objective, wonderful world.

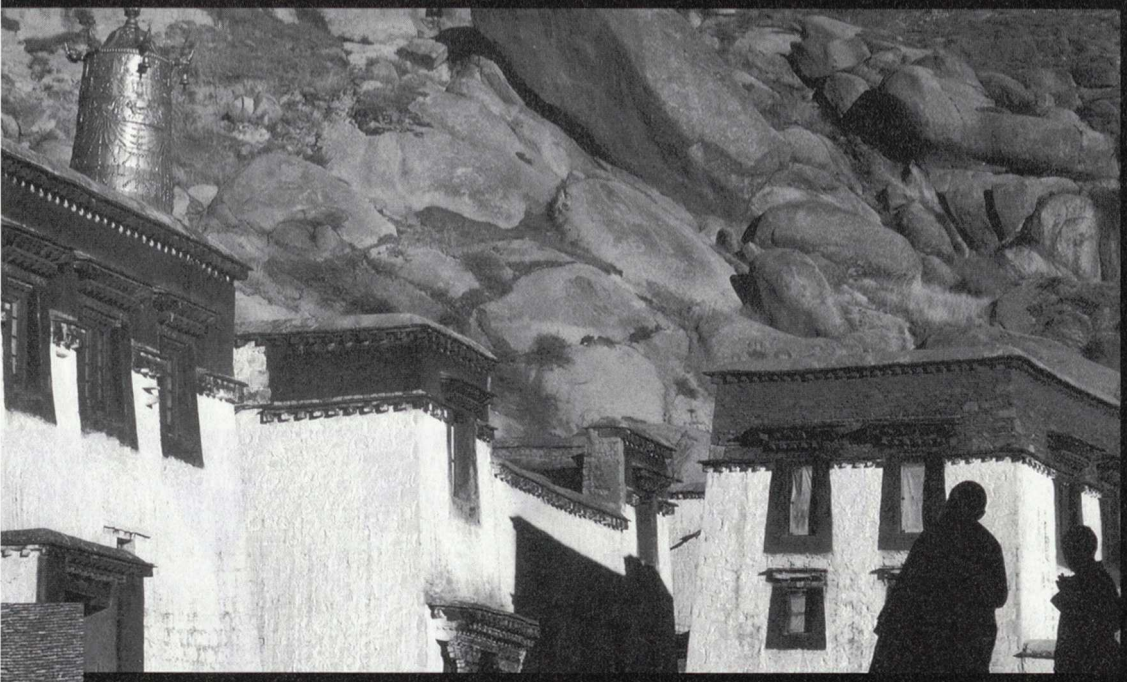
But the Mpire is that aspect of the world that has been used and twisted out of shape in order to provide the power, pleasure, and prestige of human beings.





Fr. William McNamara

"The basic reward of becoming a monk, becoming a god-man, possessed by God, overwhelmed by God, is human freedom. It obliterates all of those forms of imprisonment that prevent freedom. It's a wonderful, free life. It's sheer joy."



Penor Rinpoche

ness or pleasure. In *samsaric* life, one is mainly influenced by the five afflicted minds of desire, hatred, anger, jealousy, and pride. And wherever there is affliction, whoever is influenced by those afflictions will naturally take rebirth in *samsara* endlessly. You see, there is no limit to *samsara,* even though there is also no essence to it.

AC: *You said in an interview you recently gave in Toronto, "There is such a hunger [for the dharma] in the West. The way to receive the dharma is to find the teachings and absorb them. . . . You shouldn't just be thinking of this world. You have to think about transcendence—something other than just material life." Could you please explain what you mean by that? What is it that needs to be renounced in order to transcend the world?*

PR: Many Westerners are interested in studying Buddhism and also want to follow a spiritual practice. However, we like *samsara,* we like this world, and we work for it and try to accomplish something within it. But there is no limit and no end to what we could try to achieve. Whatever we may achieve in this world, whether we acquire all kinds of material objects or rank, still there is nothing we can really rely upon. Everything is impermanent; it only lasts for a few moments. Things like rank or material objects do not really benefit or help anybody because when death comes, we cannot carry anything with us.

But there is a way that we can become liberated from the suffering of *samsara.* If we follow the Buddha's teaching as a spiritual path, then we can transcend this world from a place of real depth. We can achieve ultimate peace and happiness, enlightenment, only through the spiritual path. And that depends upon receiving teachings from a lama. It also depends upon ourselves, how much we really understand through the practice and mainly, how much we *do* the practice. Depending upon these things, we could experience fruition.

The vows, which are for moral conduct, are the basic ground for

The net result of that, down through the centuries, has been an unreal world. The Mpire is an unreal world. It's made up of a network of mediocrity, manipulation, and mendacity.

The whole sociopolitical world we live in is dominated by *mendacity*—the big lie. The big lie is coming through television, through magazines (not enlightenment magazines but through many magazines) through propaganda, ideologies. There is some truth in it, but it's the big lie because it doesn't reveal the ultimate. And it doesn't evaluate contemporary situations in terms of the ultimate. Therefore it goes askew.

Then there's *mediocrity*. Everything is worked out into a system so that there are no surprises. And God *is* surprise. God is beyond our conceptions, our images, our big to-dos. If we are not being surprised constantly, it means we are out of touch with the real, and we've worked things out simply to be manageable, to provide us with more power, more convenience, more comfort.

The third aspect is *manipulation*. I think the biggest problem of society today is that we let too many things happen to us. We've allowed ourselves to become usable items for government, for church, for whatever the big power structures may be. That's manipulation. It happens in respectable, subtle ways. First we allow television into the home. Then we allow computers, and then because there is pornography on the Internet, we get used to pornography in the home. It just becomes absurd, but we've gotten used to it. We are shrinking humanly. We're not being divinized; we're not being transformed. It happens little by little as we let too many dehumanizing things happen to us, so that we can no longer take a stand against it.

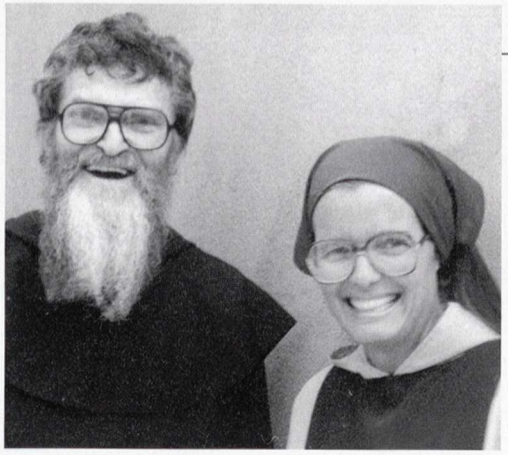
The term I like to use to describe that whole phenomenon is "pretty poison." It's not a spectacular kind of evil. Pretty poison is the kind of evil that killed Christ. It was not the bad men of that age, not the state, not the church. It wasn't the notoriously evil men but the pretty poison that seeped into the best institutions and the best people. Pretty poison is that kind of evil that seeps unnoticeably, imperceptibly into our nicest people and our best institutions and just disorients them, derails them. It's a respectable kind of evil.

the spiritual path. They are like the foundation of a house. Without that basic ground, we cannot build a house. So one has to give up all the afflicted minds—desire, hatred, anger, jealousy, and pride—that which manifests from your mind and afflicts your mind and distracts you in the world. But even though we have to give up the afflicted minds, it is not very easy to abandon them immediately. That is why we have to study and then apply what we have studied to our practice. Then eventually we can completely abandon all these afflictions. So if one uses one's highest faculty or intellectual mind with much diligence, one can carry through the practice. You see, it *is* possible within one lifetime to get liberated, but it might take many lifetimes.

AC: *The great Chatrul Rinpoche and I became friends in the early 1990s. In one of our meetings he said to me,*

> The most important thing is to have renunciation. If you have renunciation, it means you realize that there's actually no essence to the world. I mean, there's nothing of it. The world has no real essence; it's meaningless, the whole of *samsara* is just meaningless. In fact, if you have complete realization of the faults of *samsara,* that *is* realization. That means you have gone beyond *samsara* to

"With ordination as the basis for one's moral conduct, one will have a deeper understanding of the spiritual path. Being a renunciate monk is more powerful on the spiritual path than just being a lay practitioner."



Mother Tessa Bielecki

Mother Tessa Bielecki cofounded the Spiritual Life Institute with Father McNamara, and is the director of its hermitages in Colorado and Ireland. She has been a nun in the Carmelite order since 1967.

WIE: *One of the most challenging aspects of the path of renunciation is the renunciation of sexuality. In contemporary America, most people are completely intimidated by the idea of celibacy, and many view the prospect of lifelong sexual abstinence as abhorrent, convinced that it can only lead to unhealthy ends—to neurosis, physical ailments, or even sexual perversions. You have been a celibate nun for over thirty years. What have you discovered to be the value and importance of celibacy on the spiritual path?*

TESSA BIELECKI: Celibacy makes no sense at all unless it issues from love. Sex makes no sense at all unless it issues from love. Both sex and celibacy are about love, and I have learned how to be a better lover, a universal lover, as a result of celibacy. I have learned to count on God totally, unequivocally, and unconditionally as a result of celibacy. Whereas if I were not celibate (and even as a celibate) I could be tempted to rely on someone less than God for ultimate fulfillment. I would not trade celibacy for anything. It's really the heart of my life. I believe that there is a qualitative difference in my relationship with God as a result of being celibate—because I have to count on Him alone. When my spiritual director suggested to me that I might be called to celibacy, I literally screamed and ran away. I was absolutely horrified. It was the last thing in the world I wanted. And now I'd be horrified if somebody said, "You have to get married." I couldn't bear it, because of the joy that I know from living a life of celibacy.

This brings me to the question of being in the world but not of it. I live in the world, I see the movies, I see the sexual advertisements. But I'm not of that because it's a big lie. That's part of the mendacity. Sex is overrated, and people don't understand that it's overrated. They usually come to that after they have been burned by it. One of the things that I especially appreciate about celibacy is that there is no static. The channels are clear. My boundaries are so clear. In my relationships with men, I know where things can go and where they cannot go, and that's a tremendous freedom. I feel so sorry for young people today because there is always the question, "Am I going to go to bed with this one or am I not? Am I going to have sex this night or am I not?" I don't have to worry about that, because it's very clear. I'm not. And all kinds of other things can happen because there is not that kind of static. I feel so sorry for young people these days because that static is starting younger and younger. Kids at twelve and thirteen are dressing and talking and behaving in ways that shouldn't come until later in life. There is so much pressure in sex. It's heavy-duty. It's not carefree. You have to perform well; you have to look good. It's sad. It's a sex-crazed culture. I think one of the most radical countercultural stances that can be taken is celibacy—not to mention the fact that it's a healthy form of population control. I feel like I'm doing my part! ■

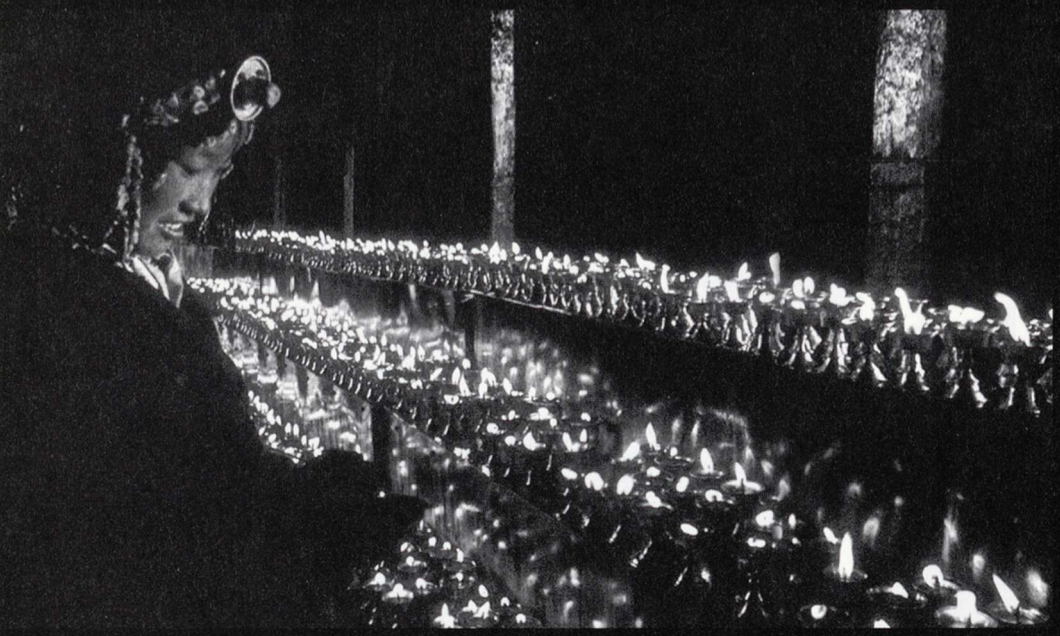
Fr. McNamara

WIE: *How have the very specific external changes that you made—for example, stepping away from the world completely and becoming a monk—helped you to remove yourself from what you call the "Mpire" and go deeper into the spiritual dimension?*

WM: When I entered the Carmelite order at eighteen, I took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. When I started a new branch of the Carmelite order in 1960, I added another vow, and that is the vow of holy leisure—refusing to be driven into stampedes of work, busyness, and fuss.

Poverty means no fuss. We fuss about so many things that we have no energy left to be focused and concentrated on the one thing necessary: God, union with God, enlightenment, purity of heart. So we take the vow of poverty, and that means that nothing short of ultimate union is worth fussing about. It's not worth it unless it's connected to that. So poverty really means getting rid of all of the excess baggage. We don't need watches, radios, and hi-fi sets—we need God. We need a good earth, we need good relationships, and we need a rich kind of life where there is a variety and balance of human activities that lead to the one thing necessary, the pure act, which is the act of enlightened love.

Chastity means no lust. It means not lusting after anything, not only human beings but anything. It means getting rid of all forms of craving. All of the great religions have said that—get rid of craving and you're free. So we take the vow of chastity to get rid of craving, and then we focus on *real* intimacy—with God, with human beings, animals, vegetables, minerals. One responds to people as they are, with no designs on



Penor Rinpoche

understanding that this world has no ultimate meaning.

He went on to say, "Renunciation is the whole basis of the spiritual path. If you don't have renunciation, you don't have realization. . . . In the end, if you want to be free, you have to cultivate a disgust for samsara."

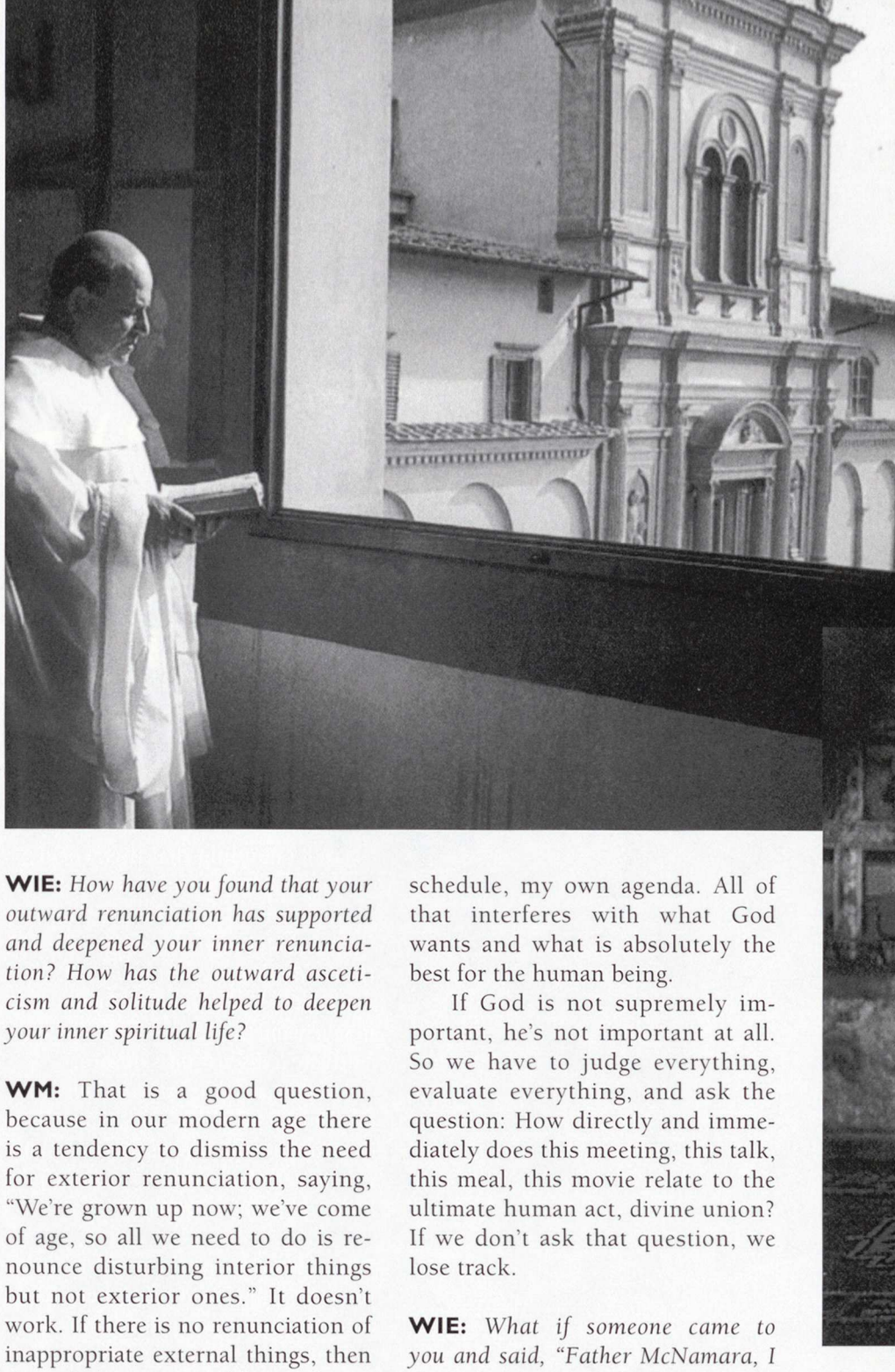
So I wanted to ask you Rinpoche, do you agree? What does it mean to cultivate a disgust for samsara? *Why is renunciation said to be the whole basis of the spiritual path?*

PR: Chatrul Rinpoche is a very great realized lama. And what he said is true. We have to *see* the suffering of *samsara,* that which makes you feel disgusted. However much effort we may put into *samsaric* activity, eventually we will have to see that we cannot achieve ultimate happiness that way. We have to see that *samsara* is impermanent and actually taste that there is no essence to it and *feel* that disgust. But not only that, on the other side, we have to intend to attain enlightenment, which is the opposite of *samsara.*

In reality, there is no real essence to *samsara* because everything is so temporary. It is not reliable, even for one moment. If we want to achieve enlightenment or ultimate happiness, then we have to see it in that way until we are liberated.

It is said that there is no essence in *samsara.* But in fact, one could also say there *is* an essence because all of us are bound in *samsara* for millions and billions of lifetimes! And even if we think that we want to do some dharma practice, we don't do it—*because we are completely bound up in samsara.* Just getting through spiritual practice—even one or two hours—is so difficult and we so easily get bored. But we spend our whole lifetime working in *samsara,* and still we do not get bored with it. That itself is the essence of *samsara* and the power of *samsara.*

Renunciation means to renounce all worldly things. If one wants to



Fr. McNamara

them, with no greed, with no lust. Then one becomes full of awe, wonder, and radical amazement, because as this brand-new kind of beauty emerges before us, we don't want to use it, we want to celebrate it, and offer it to God and thank God for it. So that's chastity. It also means renouncing some good things, like the good aspects of the sexual life with one's beloved. We renounce that, not because it's bad but because we want the quickest, shortest route into the ultimate. Therefore we store up those sexual energies and, by the help of God, subsume them within eros itself. Eros is that deep, profound desire in every human being to be united with everyone and everything.

And then obedience means no rust, that is, not allowing our mind to become rusty. So, no fuss, no lust, and no rust. Obedience comes from the Latin *oboedire* and it means "to listen." How many people really listen? To be obedient means that we are so free of self-will, self-interest, and self-importance that we really listen to all those messengers that God sends to tell us the truth. In obedience we renounce a lot of the self-preoccupation and look to the other, listen to the other. It's other-centered rather than self-centered.

WIE: *How have you found that your outward renunciation has supported and deepened your inner renunciation? How has the outward asceticism and solitude helped to deepen your inner spiritual life?*

WM: That is a good question, because in our modern age there is a tendency to dismiss the need for exterior renunciation, saying, "We're grown up now; we've come of age, so all we need to do is renounce disturbing interior things but not exterior ones." It doesn't work. If there is no renunciation of inappropriate external things, then the whole interior life weakens. You can't separate the exterior from the interior. If we're not mortifying and renouncing a lot of external things, then we grow soft inside, we grow limp. There is no interior alertness, aliveness, because we're still too inordinately attached to external things: food, clothing, conveniences, comfort, my own schedule, my own agenda. All of that interferes with what God wants and what is absolutely the best for the human being.

If God is not supremely important, he's not important at all. So we have to judge everything, evaluate everything, and ask the question: How directly and immediately does this meeting, this talk, this meal, this movie relate to the ultimate human act, divine union? If we don't ask that question, we lose track.

WIE: *What if someone came to you and said, "Father McNamara, I think that I want to become a monk, but is it worth it? From your own experience, tell me why it's worth it to take that step." What would you say to them?*

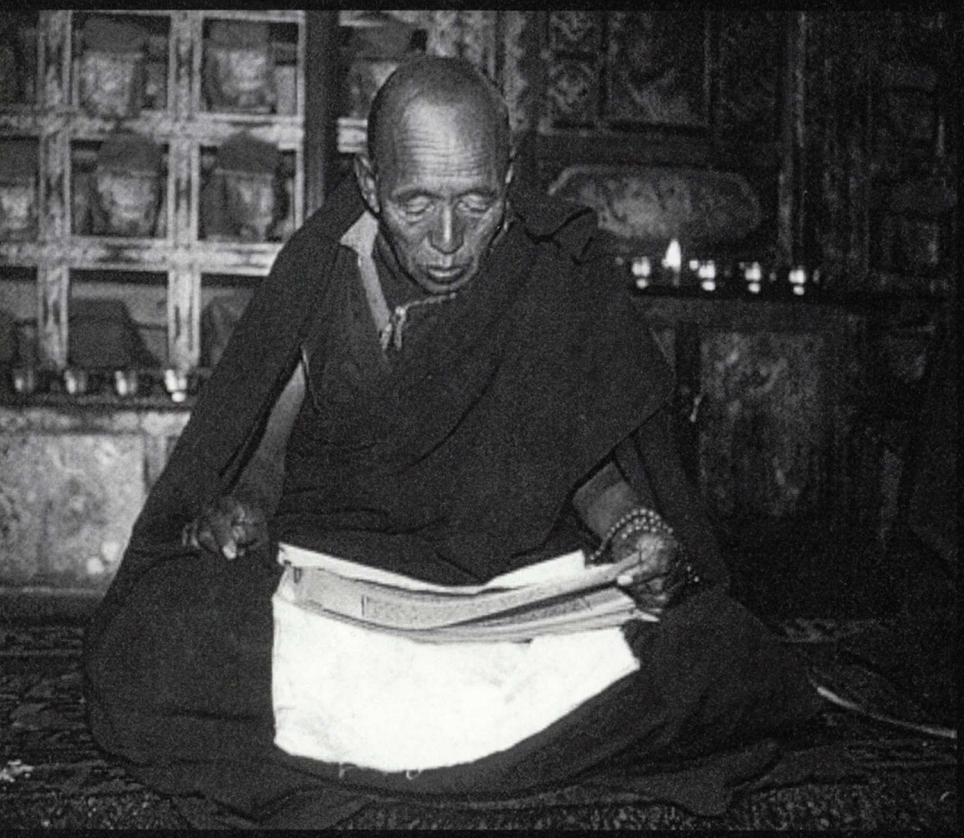
WM: A monk is convinced that God is the all, and that short of union with him, life is a fallacy and we do more harm than good. So I

be liberated, one needs to have one's mind turned away from worldly things. Until and unless we have the intention to do that, we will not be able to apply ourselves to the practice for enlightenment.

AC: *The Buddha said, "The blue-necked peacock which flies through the air never approaches the speed of the swan. Similarly, the householder can never resemble the monk who is endowed with the qualities of the sage, who meditates aloof in the jungle." Yet, an influential American Buddhist meditation teacher, Jack Kornfield, says in his new best-selling book, "The sacrifices of family are like those of any demanding monastery, offering exactly the same training in renunciation, patience, steadiness, and generosity." Could that really be true?*

PR: It is not true. When you are in a household, in the worldly life, even if you have spiritual training, there is always more attachment. Being a householder and wanting to have liberation from the afflictions of mind is good. But that is very difficult within those kinds of conditions. Yet even if you are in a monastery, you still need all the training so that you can get rid of those defilements. But of course it still does not mean that only by entering a monastery you can be liberated.

AC: *There is a new spiritual movement being born in America at this time. It's called the "new American spirituality." One of its leading proponents, Elizabeth Lesser, says,*



"Until and unless we have the intention to renounce all worldly things, we will not be able to apply ourselves to the practice for enlightenment."

would say that the basic reward of taking that leap and becoming a monk, becoming a god-man, possessed by God, overwhelmed by God, is human freedom. It just obliterates all of those shackles, all of those forms of imprisonment that prevent freedom. We're not only free for delightful, passionate, intimate union with God, but we're free to enjoy all that pertains to him and belongs to him with no designs on any of it. We're not grabbing, clutching, using. We just see God's gifts and thank him. It's a wonderful, free life. It's sheer joy.

WIE: *That's inspiring, because so many people see it as the opposite.*

WM: I know. That's the popular opinion. Spooky, sour monks. I think of monks as the fish that jump out of the water. They're the live ones. That's what monks do—they jump out of the ordinary, everyday environment in order to taste God.

WIE: *Jesus said, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Like other great religious figures of history, Jesus inspired a very strong spirit of renunciation in his disciples, many of whom walked away from family, friends, and work forever to follow him into a homeless life of poverty and simplicity. As a contemplative monk in the Christian tradition, what do you think of that kind of radical step, of dropping everything, walking away, and leaving the world completely behind to pursue the spiritual life?*

WM: That radical kind of leaving the world behind in order to do the one thing necessary, in order to follow Christ into the abyss, into the ultimate communion with his Father and his Father's world, is the most dramatic kind of gesture. Although everyone can't do that, it's absolutely indispensable that some do it. By doing that, by leaving the whole world behind and going

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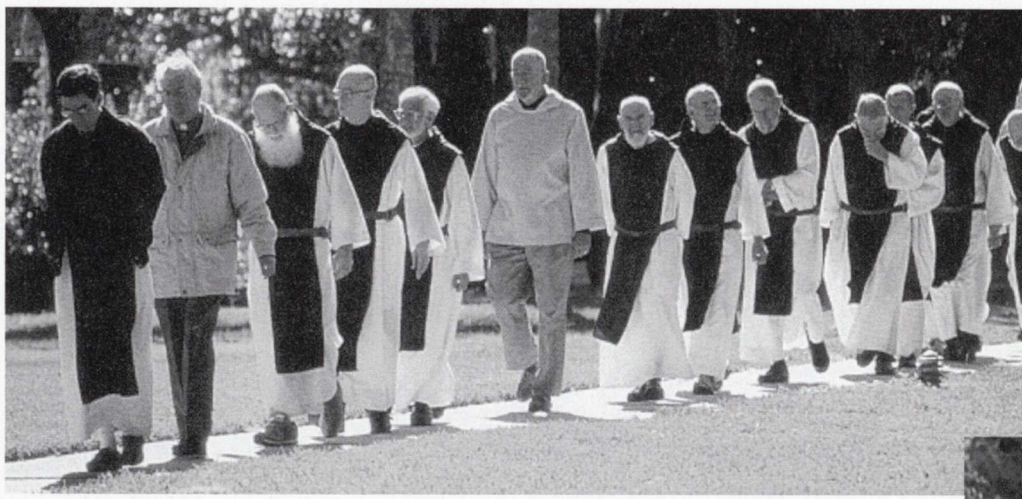

"I've given retreats to a lot of people who are totally dissatisfied with their way of life, but they don't have the courage to change it. They know it's killing them. They feel like robots, automatons, but it would mean stepping out of that rat race, taking a stand against that whole current, and that's a lonely, heroic thing to ask of anyone."

Penor Rinpoche

"The unique and most positive aspect of the new American spirituality is its emphasis on self-authority." Indeed, she says, "With democratic spirituality it no longer makes sense for an [external] authority to describe to you the sacred truth and the path to discover it. In [new American spirituality], you map the journey."

Rinpoche, you come from a great tradition where success on the spiritual journey is entirely dependent upon the seeker taking refuge in the Triple Gem of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The great Nyingma Master Patrul Rinpoche said,

"No *sutra*, tantra, or *shastra* speaks of any being attaining perfect Buddhahood without having followed a spiritual teacher. We can see for ourselves that nobody has ever developed the accomplishments belonging to the stages and paths by means of their own ingenuity and prowess. Indeed, all beings, ourselves included, show particular talent in discovering the wrong paths to take—while when it comes to following the path leading to liberation and omniscience we are as confused as a blind person wandering alone in the middle of a desert plain. No one can bring back jewels from a treasure island without relying on an experienced navigator. Likewise, a spiritual teacher or companion is our true guide to liberation and omniscience, and we must follow him with respect. This is accomplished in three phases: firstly, by examining the teacher, then by following him, and finally by emulating his realization and his actions."

So how do you, Rinpoche, as head of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, feel about the dharma of the new American spirituality? What is your response to the notion of self-authority on the spiritual path?

PR: What Patrul Rinpoche said is true. Even the Buddha taught in that way. All the past, present and

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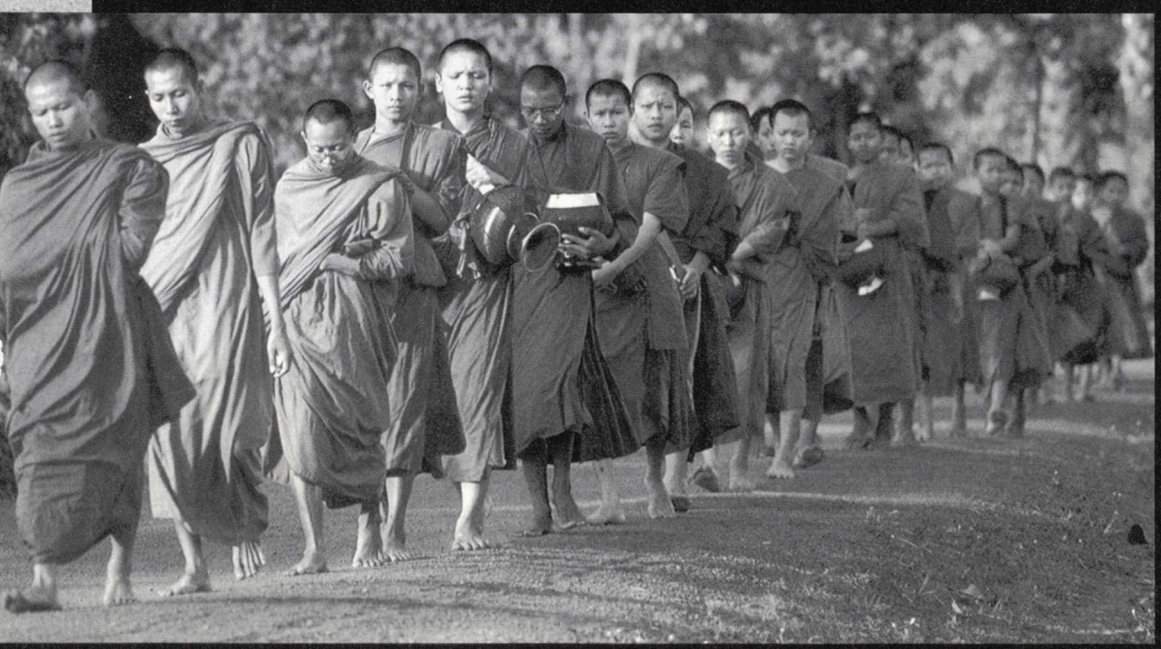
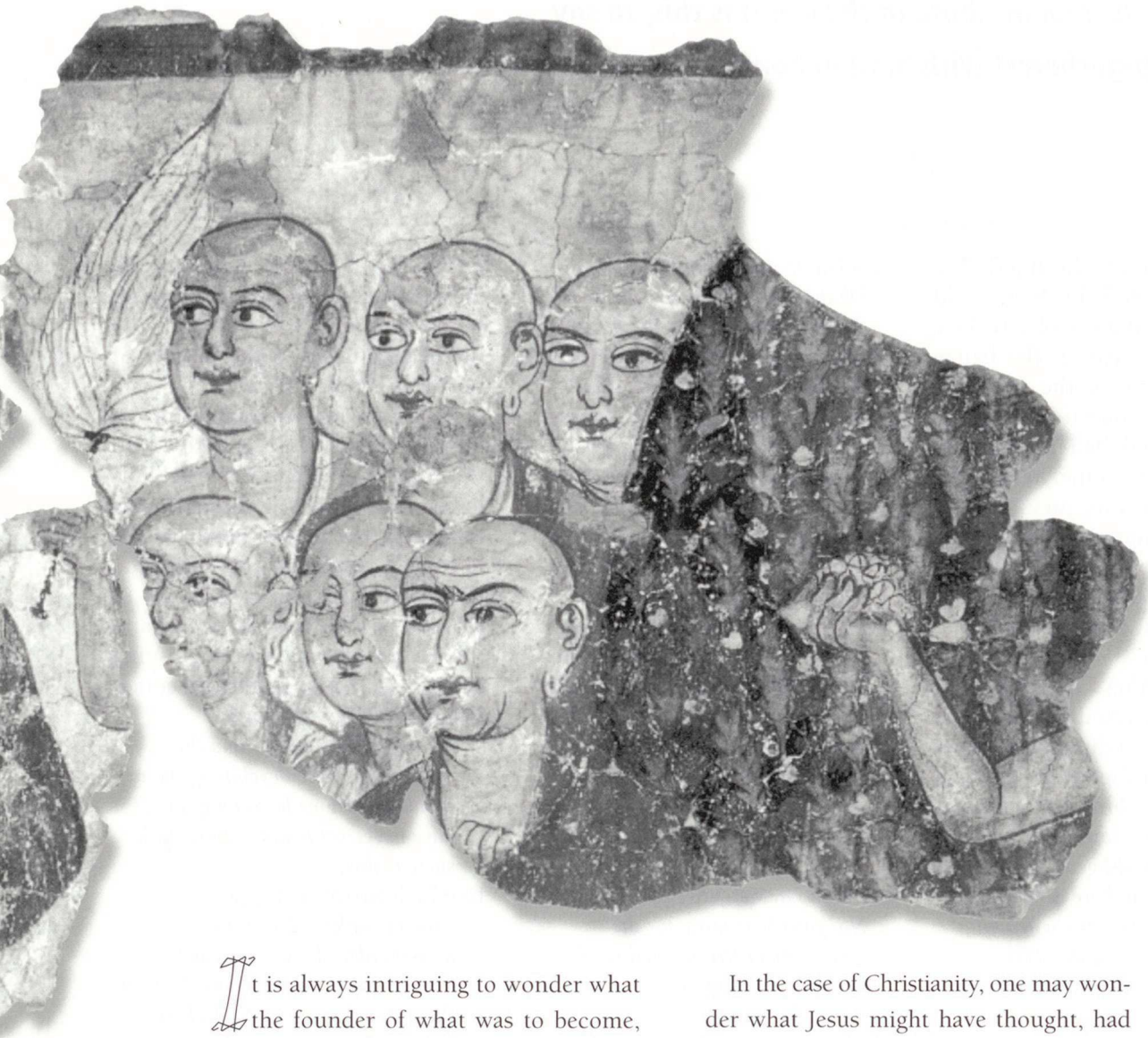


the Price of Liberation

An eminent Buddhist scholar asks: How "middle" was the Buddha's Middle Way?

by Peter Masefield



The Buddha expounding the law, accompanied by six disciples. A fragment of a third or fourth-century Central Asian wall painting.

It is always intriguing to wonder what the founder of what was to become, sometime after his death, a major world religion, might think were he to witness the way in which his original teachings had come to be understood, and practiced, by much later generations with different cultural backgrounds in other parts of the globe.

In the case of Christianity, one may wonder what Jesus might have thought, had his second coming, so eagerly anticipated by the early Church, actually materialized. What would the man who upturned the tables of the moneylenders in the temple make of the opulence of the Vatican, or Muhammad of the present-day ayatollahs in Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan?

"Monks, this is the meanest of callings, this of an almsman. A term of abuse in the world is this, to say 'You scrap-gatherer! With bowl in hand you roam about.'"

Or what might the Buddha, a man who rejected the household life in favor of the life of a recluse living in the jungle on the fringe of society, make of the fact that the essentially monastic movement that he founded had become, at least as practiced in the West in the late twentieth century, an essentially lay movement amongst those whose domestic responsibilities ensured that their adherence to the path could be at best a halfhearted, and part-time, affair?

In the Buddha's own day, for instance, when asked by Sariputta, the Buddha's chief disciple, whether he had been diligent in matters spiritual, his lay *brahmin** follower Dhananjani complained:

> *How could I be diligent, good Sariputta, when there are my parents to support, my wife and children to support, my slaves, servants, and work people to support, when there are services to perform for friends and acquaintances, services to perform for kith and kin, services to perform for guests, rites to perform for the ancestors, rites to perform for the gods, duties to perform for the king—and this body too must be satisfied and looked after!*

to which Sariputta replies:

> *What do you think about this, Dhananjani? Suppose someone failed to live the holy life because of a need to support his parents, his wife and children, his slaves, servants and work people, because there were services to perform for friends and acquaintances, services to perform for kith and kin, services to perform for guests, rites to perform for the ancestors, rites to perform for the gods, duties to perform for the king, as well as having a body that had to be looked after. Because of this failure, the guardians of Niraya Hell might drag him off to their hell. Would he gain anything by saying: "I failed to live the holy life because of a need to support my parents and so forth"?*

to which Dhananjani finally responds:

> *No, good Sariputta, for the guardians of Niraya Hell would hurl him wailing into Niraya Hell itself. (M II 186f)*

This is not to say that lay-followers of the Buddha were unknown in his day, nor to say that there were not certain persons who, though attaining liberation, opted to remain householders to no apparent detriment, but it has to be conceded that the practices advocated by the Buddha were those intended almost exclusively for those who had removed themselves from the household circle in favor of a nomadic life of asceticism in the jungles of northern India. Indeed, on one occasion, when Anathapindika, a lay-supporter whose generosity to the Buddha and his monastic followers had known no bounds, was informed, on his deathbed, by the Buddha's chief disciple Sariputta, that he should train himself not to grasp after objects of the world and the feelings to which such grasping gives rise, Anathapindika, somewhat justifiably, retorted:

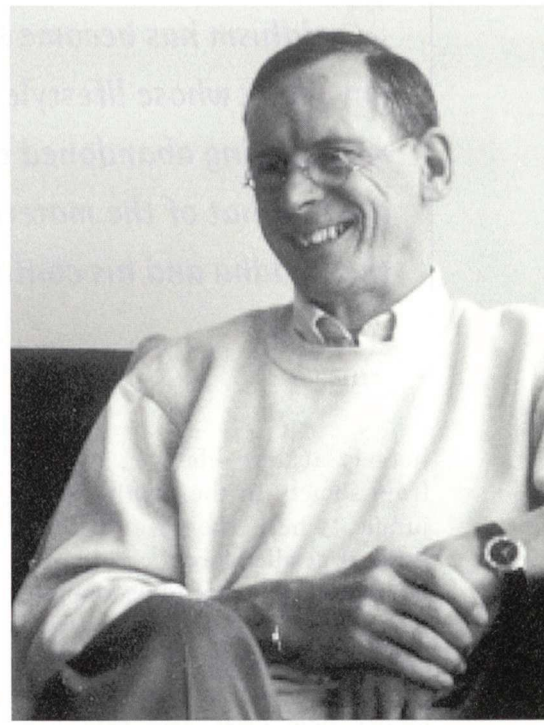
> *Although the Teacher and the monks who were developing their minds visited me for a long time, I have never yet heard esoteric talk such as this,*

to which Sariputta replies:

> *Esoteric talk such as this, householder, does not occur for householders clad in white. It is for those that have gone forth, householder, that esoteric talk such as this occurs. (M III 2600)*

Let us, therefore, without further ado, take a fresh look at what was really going on in the jungles of northern India in the fifth century B.C.E., and to what extent the practices of modern lay Buddhists in the West reflect the original ideals.

*member of the highest caste of Hindu society



As is well known, the Buddha is said to have taught a "middle way"—a middle way between, on the one hand, addiction to sense-pleasures and, on the other, addiction to self-mortification. Why he should have done so begins to make better sense when viewed against the background of his own life experiences before becoming enlightened.

Tradition has it that the Buddha was the son a local chieftain in northern India. When a soothsayer summoned to forecast the child's future predicted that he would become a universal monarch were he to remain a layman, but a Buddha were he to renounce the world and go forth, his father, hoping his son would remain a layman and subsequently succeed him, shielded the child from all life's ills, surrounding him with every possible luxury.

One day, however, the Buddha-to-be managed to sneak out of the palace without the guards noticing, where he encountered four signs: a sick man, an old man, a corpse, and a religious recluse. Quick to realize that he, too, was subject to sickness, old age, and death, he soon after abandoned his wife and first-born for the solitary life of an ascetic in the jungle, where he practiced a life of severe self-mortification for six years, hoping to find a solution to the problem of man's mortality which had so shocked him. At times he went about naked, flouting life's decencies, eating one meal a day, then once every second day, until he was one to eat only once a fortnight. And when he did so, he ate potherbs or millet or wild rice or grass or cowdung. At other times he wore coarse hempen cloths, or rags taken from the dust-heap. He plucked out the hair of his head and beard, lay on a bed of thorns. The dust and dirt that accumulated on his body fell off in lumps, as he sat up all night in the open, both in the times of snowfall and the hot months of summer, and over the years his body became so emaciated that his skin clung to his skeleton, and he almost died before realizing that this was not the way to the goal he was seeking any more than his former life of luxury had been. (M I 77ff)

He was, of course, not alone in opting for such austerities. Rather, it is clear that such practices were common amongst the religious drop-outs of his day, such as the Jains, who had similarly rejected the luxurious, opulent lifestyle of the small religious elite that continually increased its wealth and consolidated its power by officiating at ever more elaborate sacrificial rituals paid for by the laity. The fact is that by the time of the Buddha large numbers of such ascetics were to be found living on the fringe of a society which largely despised them.

That the Buddha finally abandoned these practices in favor of a middle way between the above two extremes did not mean that the middle way that he advocated was not austere—it was just less austere than those earlier practices to which he had once been committed. Indeed, the nomadic lifestyle that the Buddha advocated for his monastic community, once he had become enlightened, was no easy one: with nothing but a ragged robe for protection from biting insects, cold nights, and monsoon rain, and with a diet consisting of—when lucky—mere discarded scraps and leftovers, his fellow monks were obliged to lead a

"Buddhism has become so relaxed that it is today difficult to find any monk whose lifestyle even approximates to the former ideal, most having abandoned the middle way in favor of a lifestyle more akin to that of the materially minded religious elite against whom the Buddha and his contemporaries had been protesting."

fiercely austere lifestyle, isolated from society in the depths of the jungle, where they would sleep little, if at all. Monastic rules dictated every moment of waking life: monks were obliged, except when discussing the Buddha's teachings, to maintain the "*ariyan** silence," whilst they were also told how they should walk, stand, or sit, how they should urinate or defecate, and when and how they should sleep. It was not even open to the monk to decide when he should eat—and when he did so eat, he was obliged to mix up everything he had managed to receive in his almsbowl into an unpalatable mass, and then consume same in small lumps, all the time noting, as he did so, that he was only eating in order to sustain his body until liberation was achieved.

It comes as little surprise that those practicing such an existence were not envied by their contemporaries. Nor were they even admired:

> *Monks, this is the meanest of callings, this of an almsman. A term of abuse in the world is this, to say 'You scrap-gatherer! With bowl in hand you roam about'. (It 89)*

It was held by many in the Buddha's society that those who adopted such a lifestyle had done so through fear of kings or robbers, through debt or having lost their relatives or means of livelihood (M II 66, It 89) and perhaps for this reason alone the Satanic figure of Mara* had no difficulty in causing householders to revile, abuse, vex, and annoy monks by persuading such householders that:

> *These shaveling recluses are menials, black, the offscourings of our kinsman's feet. They say "We are meditatives" . . . and with their shoulders drooping, with their faces cast down, as if drugged, they meditate. (M I 334)*

Nor does it seem that much effort was required for certain religious rivals to put it about that a female wanderer had been slain by the Buddha's disciples following numerous sexual adventures in the depths of the Jeta Grove. Pulling her body out of the ditch in which it had been buried, they paraded it about the streets of Savatthi rousing the people's indignation, saying:

> *Behold, brothers, the deed of the Sakyan sons! Shameless are these recluses! The Sakyan sons are wicked, evildoers, liars, no livers of the holy life. (Ud 431)*

So bad, it seems, was their reputation that in some quarters it was most unwise to tread. Alms were gathered only with the greatest of difficulty in Mathura (A III 256); the men of Sunaparanta were deemed by the Buddha to be hotheaded, fierce, and likely not only to abuse and revile his monks but also even to strike them, beat them, and slay them (S IV 611); whilst the borderlands were so perilous that none of the Buddha's followers, whether monastic or lay, would dare venture there. (D III 263, 287; A IV 225) That these were no mere isolated incidents can be seen from the frequently recurring passages in which the Buddha advises his monks to endure abuse from outsiders. Of himself he says:

> *As an elephant, in battlefield, withstands the arrows shot from a bow, even so shall I endure abuse. (Dhp 320)*

Why anyone in their right mind should have willingly elected to join him in following such a lifestyle, and endure similar hardships, is perhaps difficult to fathom. Indeed, it is well known that the Buddha, immediately following his enlightenment, initially hesitated whether he should bother to share his discovery with anyone at all, reflecting that:

> *This Dhamma, won by me, is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand . . . But this is a generation delighting in sensual pleasure . . . And if I were to teach Dhamma and others were not to understand me, this would be a weariness to me, this would be a vexation to me, (Vin I 3f)*

whereupon Brahma Sahampati (a *deva* [demigod] from the Brahmaloka) intervened, pointing out

*noble

*the personification of evil and temptation

to the Buddha that there were some beings with little dust in their eyes who would profit from him teaching them.

However, it must be stressed that although such beings may have had little dust in their eyes, they were still hemmed in by sense-pleasures, and thus in bondage to the Satanic figure of Mara. Any rescue would require great skillfulness if Mara's devious tactics were to be countered, which skillfulness was precisely the reason why the Buddha had, prior to his enlightenment, spent many hundreds of thousands of rebirths attaining all the various perfections that would eventually qualify him for the task now in hand.

The manner in which the Buddha rescued such beings took the form, in the main, of what is known as the "progressive talk," which started with the Buddha descending to the then-current spiritual level of his hearer, and then gradually steering him into a state of consciousness in which he too could now experience what the Buddha had himself discovered on the night of his enlightenment. As the texts have it:

> *Then the Lord talked a progressive talk, commencing with talk on almsgiving, talk on [mundane] morality, talk on [rebirth in] heaven. He made visible the peril, the vanity, the defilement of the pleasures of the senses and the advantage in renouncing them. And when the Lord knew that the heart of the individual concerned was ready . . . and uplifted [out of the sensual sphere], then did he make visible to him that teaching that the Buddhas have themselves discovered, viz. suffering, its uprising, its cessation and the path,*

whereupon the convert would proclaim:

> *It is wonderful, Lord! It is wonderful, Lord! It is as if, Lord, one might set upright what had been upturned, or might reveal what was hidden, or might point out the path to one who had gone astray, or might bring an oil-lamp into the darkness so that those with eyes might see material shapes. (Ud 48)*

This newly acquired vision had a number of profound effects. With his brain now washed of attachment to sense-pleasures, he may be considered to have undergone a spiritual rebirth, subsequent to which he is no longer slave to Mara and his bait in the form of sense-pleasures. A good many of such converts, though not all, elected at this point to take refuge in the Buddha and to go forth into the homeless life of a monk.

With this rebirth, old values, once dearly held in common with the world, are now rejected in favor of a completely new set. Former attachment to the pleasures of the senses in all their various forms is now renounced in favor of the cessation of phenomenal existence altogether:

> *Sights, sounds, tastes, odors, things touched, and objects of the mind are, without exception, pleasing, delightful and charming—(at least) so long as they continue to exist;*
>
> *These are considered a source of happiness by the world with its gods—and when they cease this is by them considered suffering.*
>
> *The cessation of phenomenal existence is seen as a source of happiness by [us]* ariyans*—this [insight] of those who can see is the reverse of that of the whole world:*
>
> *What others say is a source of happiness, that [we]* ariyans *say is suffering, what others say is suffering, that [we]* ariyans *know as a source of happiness. Behold this doctrine, hard to understand, wherein the ignorant are bewildered. (S IV 127)*

It is clear that things could not go on as they had hitherto for those who had undergone such a radical and profound change in their personality, identity, and outlook. It was now incumbent upon them to take the Buddha's advice and renounce their former way of life, his

"The Kalama Sutta has been seized upon, almost as a godsend, by modern lay Buddhists in the West, who have seen in it a charter for rejecting whatever aspects of the Buddha's teaching they do not personally approve of."

converts invariably reflecting that:

> *The household life is confined and dusty, going forth is in the open; it is not easy for one who lives in a house to live the holy life wholly fulfilled, wholly pure, polished like a conch-shell. Suppose now that I, having cut off hair and beard, having put on saffron robes, should go forth from home into homelessness? (M I 179)*

whereupon they would then cut off hair and beard and go forth into homelessness, as soon as they had disposed of their wealth and relatives:

> *Now, sir, I had four wives, young girls, and I went and spoke to them thus: "Sisters, I have embraced the five rules of training in the holy life. Who wishes may enjoy the wealth of this place, or may do deeds of merit, or may go to her own relations and family; or is there some man you desire to whom I may give you?" And when I stopped speaking, the eldest wife said to me: "Sir, give me to such and such a man!" Then I had that man sent for, and, taking my wife by the left hand and holding the waterpot in my right, I cleansed that man [by an act of dedication]. Yet I was not a whit discomfited at parting with my wife. (A IV 210)*

That is to say, the radical change in personality induced by the Buddha's progressive talk inevitably led to broken homes and the abandonment of family responsibilities. The domestic problems caused by householders opting out of their social responsibilities must surely have been immense, and not all wives who were disposed of in the above way took matters so placidly. Indeed, we are told that on one occasion some former wife is reported as having sought out her ex-husband monk, placed their young son on the ground before him and demanded that he support her and his child. The monk, however, completely ignored them both, and following her departure, the Buddha, who had "beheld her rudeness from afar," uttered a verse in praise of the monk's steadfast detachment. (Ud 5f)

As the Buddha's following increased, the fear of the social upheaval to which this was giving rise quickly spread:

> *Now at that time very distinguished young men belonging to respectable families in Magadha were living the holy life under the Lord. People looked down upon, criticized, spread it about, saying: "The recluse Gautama gets along by making [us] childless, the recluse Gautama gets along by making [us] widows, the recluse Gautama gets along by breaking up families . . . Who now will be led away by him?" (Vin I 43)*

Parental opposition to their sons becoming followers was equally intense and we shall have occasion later to consider one such instance. Moreover, it is stated on several occasions that:

> *Although his parents were unwilling and tears poured down their cheeks, [so and so], having cut off hair and beard and donned saffron robes, went forth from home into homelessness. (D I 115; M I 163; II 166)*

For those who did go forth, however, beside the real—or at least envisaged—soteriological dangers that were thought to stem from the failure to embark on the spiritual quest, such petty social consideration paled into insignificance.

Spiritual success is therefore not without its price—and one may feel that the price demanded by the Buddha far exceeds the so-called austerities that some maintain is demanded of the followers of present-day modern cults. As we have seen, it is sense-pleasures and attachment to them that presents the major stumbling-block to liberation. They are likened to a pit of glowing embers and an impaling stake (M I 132) and:

> *Indeed, that Prince Jayasena, living as he does in the midst of sense-pleasures, enjoying sense-pleasures, being consumed by thoughts of sense-pleasures, burning with the fever of sense-pleasures, eager in the search for sense-pleasures, should know, see, attain or realize that which can be known . . . realized by*

renunciation—such a situation does not exist. (M III 131)

This is, as already stated, because sense-pleasures are the sphere of Mara:

The man who lives contemplating pleasure, with senses unrestrained, in food immoderate, lazy, inert—him, verily, Mara overthrows as a wind a weak tree. (Dhp 7)

There is, then, the need, as some more contemporary religious movements might put it, to "smash out Mara"—and the principal way in which this can be accomplished is by regulating, and minimizing, sensory experiences. Delight in worldly activity, chatter and gossip, sleep, in keeping company with others, being with the senses unguarded, and lack of moderation in eating all lead to the downfall of a monk. (A III 116, 173, 292f, 309f; IV 22; It 71) Such failure can be prevented only through the adoption of a lifestyle of excessive sensory deprivation. One must, as we have seen, sever all connections with family and friends, dispose of all possessions, and embark upon a solitary and nomadic existence in the jungle, living at the feet of trees and clad only in robes made up from rags gathered from rubbish-heaps, and sustaining oneself on whatever scraps are to be gained by begging on the streets. Monks are expected, except when discussing matters of doctrine, to observe the "*ariyan* silence" (Ud 11); they must practice strict chastity and sleep as little as possible. (It 41) They are, in addition, required to frequent funerary grounds, meditating on the rotten, bloated, and stinking corpses in an attempt at freeing themselves from all lust and attachment for the human body—a practice which, on occasion, apparently had disastrous consequences:

So those monks, saying: "The Lord has in diverse ways spoken on the subject of the foul . . . has spoken in praise of meditation on the foul," spent their time given to meditation on the foul in all its varied applications. As to this body, they worried about it, felt shame and loathing for it, and sought for a weapon to slay themselves. Nay, as many as ten monks did so in a single day; even twenty, thirty of them slew themselves in a single day, (S V 320; cp S IV 62)

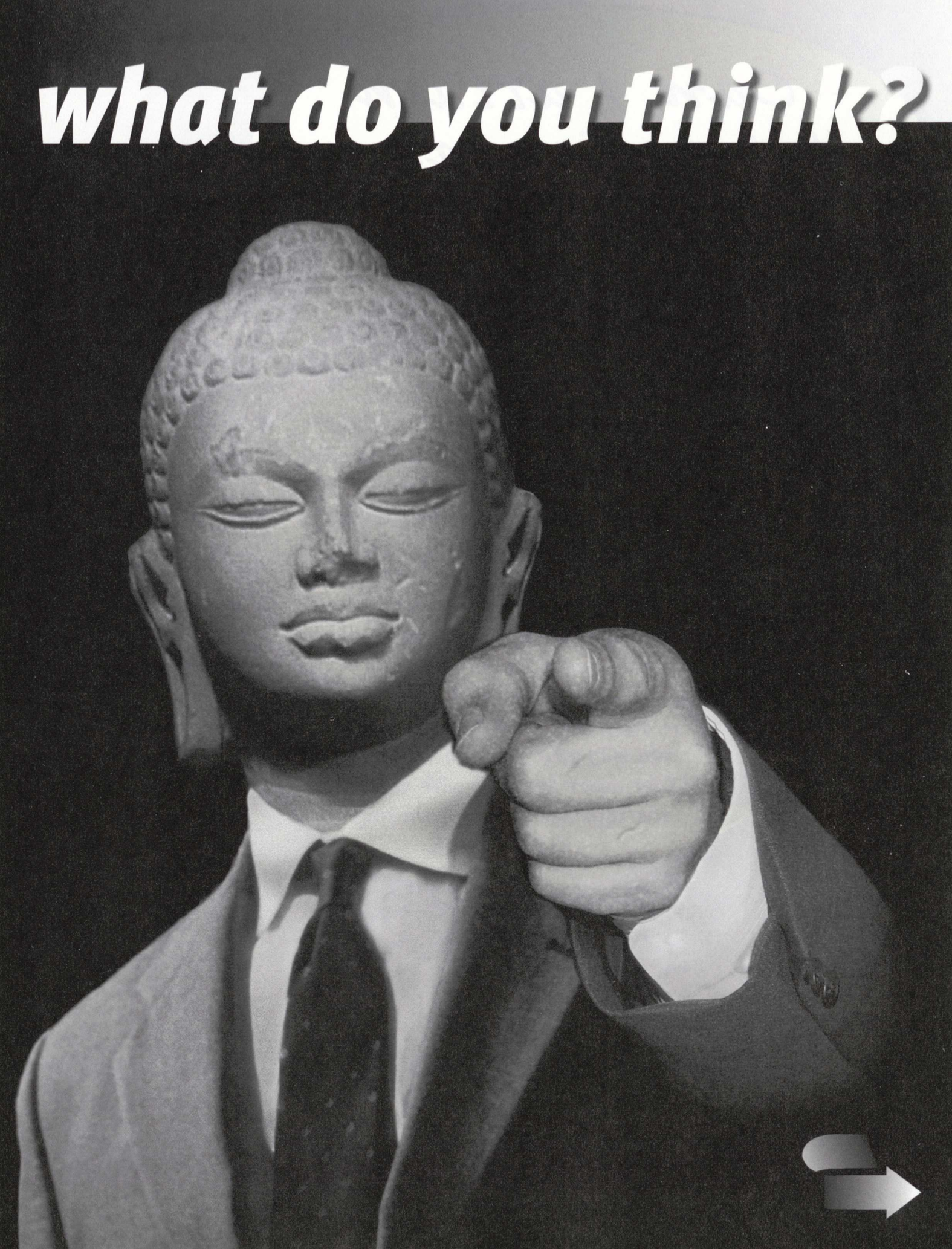
despite the fact that the Buddha always spoke disapprovingly, except in the case of those already enlightened, of taking one's own life.

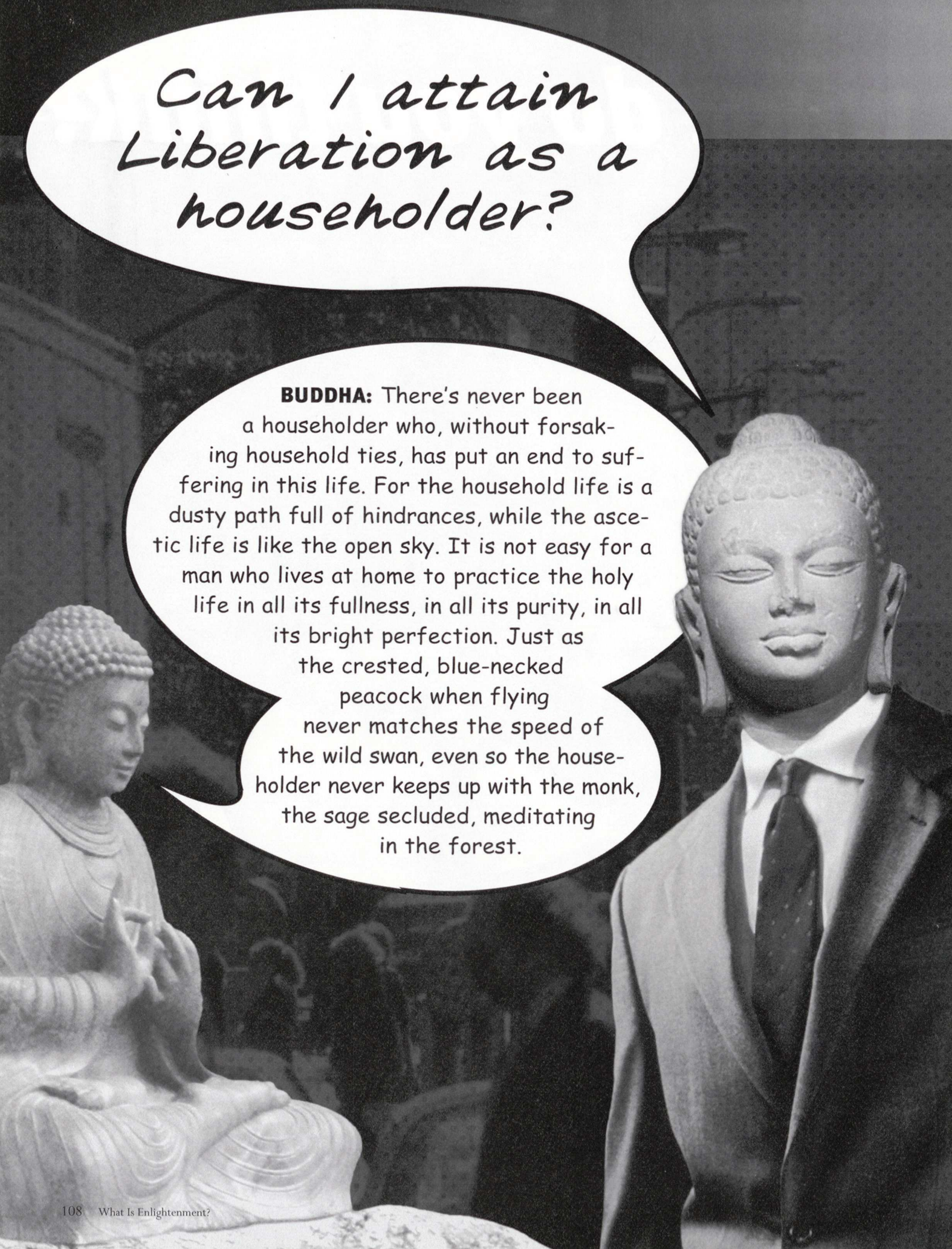
The fiercely austere and isolated lifestyle of the solitary monk was devoid of any comforts, and was thus one designed to smash out Mara by means of almost total sensory deprivation. Having spent the entire night in the jungle engaged in meditational exercises aimed at lifting him out of sensory consciousness altogether, he would, in the morning, emerge, with senses guarded against the possibility of being entranced by the sight of women with disheveled clothing (M I 462; A III 95), and enter the villages in search of the alms that would constitute his sole meal for the day, which usually took the form of the leftovers in the cooking-pot that remained after the family had finished its morning meal. Some, it is true, elected to take on additional hardships, such as dwelling under a given tree and sustaining themselves entirely on windfalls that fell within their reach. But this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that, apart from these additional, and voluntary, hardships, all else—every aspect of daily life—was strictly dictated by the Buddha.

So strict were the rules, that a good many monks did not make it, falling by the wayside, or even, as we have seen, committing suicide as a result of having to meditate in the cemeteries on rotting corpses in various stages of decomposition. And it is therefore little wonder that, immediately following the death of the Buddha, at least one monk is recorded as having expressed his relief, saying:

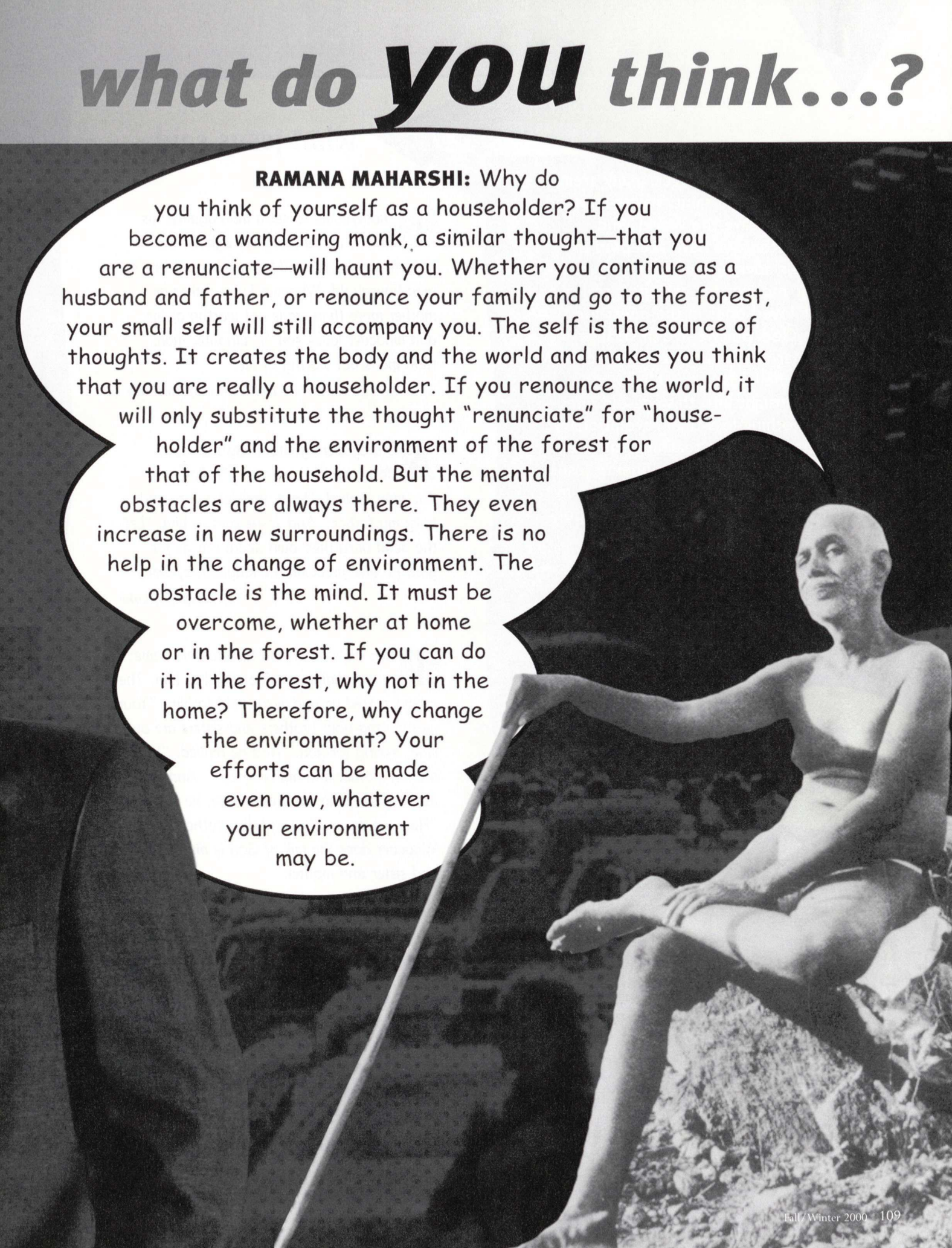
Enough, friends! Don't weep, don't lament! Well rid are we of the Great Recluse—we, who were oppressed with his "This befits you,

continued on p. 156


what do you think?


Can I attain Liberation as a householder?
BUDDHA: There's never been a householder who, without forsaking household ties, has put an end to suffering in this life. For the household life is a dusty path full of hindrances, while the ascetic life is like the open sky. It is not easy for a man who lives at home to practice the holy life in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection. Just as the crested, blue-necked peacock when flying never matches the speed of the wild swan, even so the householder never keeps up with the monk, the sage secluded, meditating in the forest.

what do you think...?



1

Throughout the ages, many great mystics and saints have exhorted us to leave the world. And whether we have accepted or rejected their advice, we have rarely questioned their motives for calling us to leave behind our loved ones in the quest for union with God. But we live in strange times. Popular author and religious scholar Stephen Mitchell offers some new and provocative insight into this age-old question in his nothing-less-than revolutionary reinterpretation of the teachings of one of renunciation's leading proponents: Jesus Christ. In his book *The Gospel According to Jesus,* Mitchell presents an alternative portrayal of the Son of God. Viewing him through the lens of modern psychology, Mitchell boldly suggests that there may be some complex complexes behind this prophet's passion for the renunciate life. Could it really be true? What do *you* think?

2

what jesus said:

I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother; one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

The Gospel of Matthew

As they were going along the road, Jesus said to someone, "Follow me." The man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

The Gospel of Luke

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside called to him. The crowd seated around Jesus said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

The Gospel of Mark

what do you think...?

3 the gospel according to stephen mitchell:

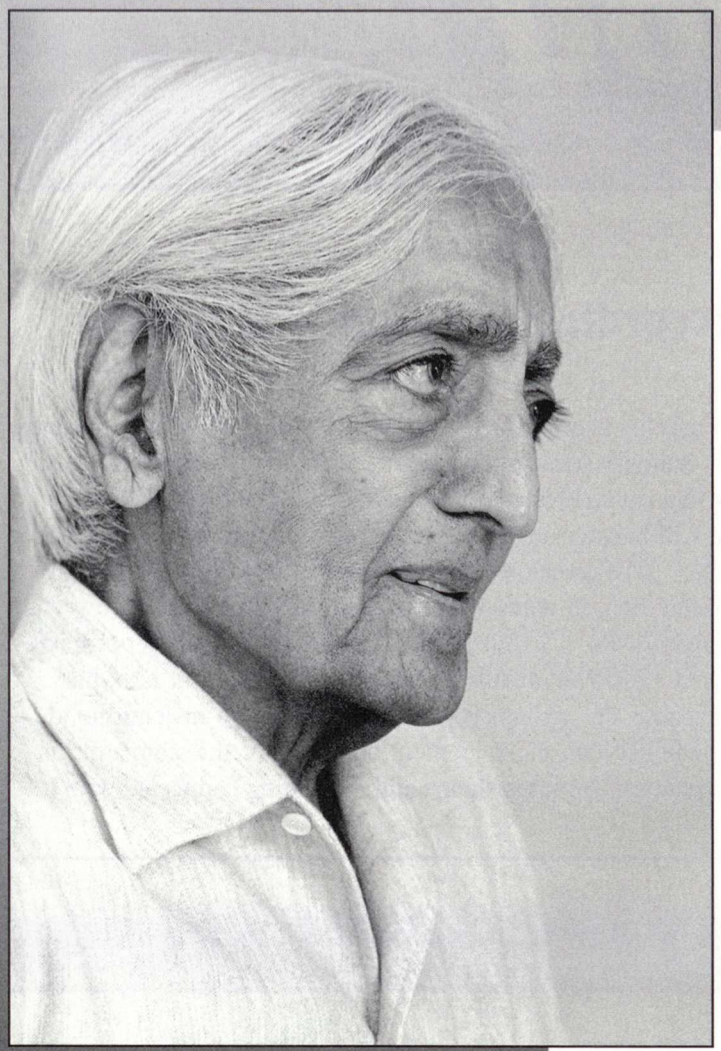
"[Jesus'] teaching about loyalty to parents is uniformly negative, and is . . . shocking, not only to religious sensibilities but to our ordinary sense of decency. . . . Even when we understand the concern for wholeheartedness that caused Jesus to teach as he did about family, we can recognize an extreme quality, a lack of balance, an off-centeredness. . . . It is apparent that he hasn't yet forgiven [his mother]. . . . His resistance to anything that has to do with family indicates that he hasn't let go." "Many men, in many religious traditions, have felt a powerful conflict between family life and religious life. . . . [But Jesus'] rejection of his mother seems to me an early, inadequate response to what he must have felt as her rejection of him, her incomprehension of who he had become. Or perhaps it goes back further, to his childhood. Perhaps it contains an unconscious or half-conscious element of blame for the stigma of his birth, and was part of his distancing himself from his shame and everything connected with it."

4 could these great spiritual luminaries also be suffering from the same renunciation complex as the prince of peace?

the sage ramakrishna:
"The bound soul can free himself from attachment if, by the grace of God, he cultivates a spirit of strong renunciation. He regards the world as a deep well and feels as if he were going to be drowned in it. He looks on his relatives as venomous snakes; he wants to fly away from them. And he goes away, too. He never says to himself, 'Let me first make some arrangement for my family and then I shall think of God.'"

saint teresa of avila:
"If we religious understood what harm we get from having so much to do with our relatives, how we should shun them! I do not think anyone who has no experience of it would believe it. . . . How much of the world do we really leave when we say that we are leaving everything for God's sake, if we do not withdraw ourselves from the chief thing of all—namely, our kinsfolk? This matter has reached such a pitch that some people think, when the religious are not fond of their relatives, that it shows a want of virtue in them."

the tibetan yogi shabkar:
"Although we suffer so much from this dread of being separated from the relatives we love . . . can we be so sure that our dear ones are as dear as we think? Our parents claim to love us as their children, but their way of loving us is misguided and is ultimately harmful. By trying to give us wealth and property and get us married, they are tightening *samsara*'s hold on us. They teach us everything we need to know about . . . how to get rich and all the other harmful courses of action that will just make sure that we stay inescapably trapped in the lower realms. They could not do worse than that."



Question:

I should like to know what a religious life is. I have stayed in monasteries for several months, meditated, led a disciplined life, read a great deal. I've been to various temples, churches and mosques. I've tried to lead a very simple, harmless life, trying not to hurt people or animals. This surely isn't all there is to a religious life? I've practiced yoga, studied Zen and followed many religious disciplines. I am, and have always been, a vegetarian. As you see, I'm getting old now, and I've lived with some of the saints in different parts of the world, but somehow I feel that all this is only the outskirts of the real thing. So I wonder if we can discuss today what to you is a religious life.

J. Krishnamurti:

A *sannyasi** came to see me one day and he was sad. He said he had taken a vow of celibacy and left the world to become a mendicant, wandering from village to village, but his sexual desires were so imperious that one morning he decided to have his sexual organs surgically removed. For many months he was in constant pain, but somehow it healed, and after many years he fully realized what he had done. And so he came to see me and in that little room he asked me what he could do now, having mutilated himself, to become normal again—not physically, of course, but inwardly. He had done this thing because sexual activity

* renunciate

what do YOU think...?

"Is the denial of pleasure or beauty a way that leads to a religious life? To deny the beauty of the skies and the hills and the human form, will that lead to a religious life?"

was considered contrary to a religious life. It was considered mundane, belonging to the world of pleasure, which a real *sannyasi* must at all costs avoid. He said, "Here I am, feeling completely lost, deprived of my manhood. I struggled so hard against my sexual desires, trying to control them, and ultimately this terrible thing took place. Now what am I to do? I know that what I did was wrong. My energy has almost gone and I seem to be ending my life in darkness." He held my hand, and we sat silently for some time.

Is this a religious life? Is the denial of pleasure or beauty a way that leads to a religious life? To deny the beauty of the skies and the hills and the human form, will that lead to a religious life? But that is what most saints and monks believe. They torture themselves in that belief. Can a tortured, twisted, distorted mind ever find what is a religious life? Yet all religious assert that the only way to reality or to God, or whatever they call it, is through this torture, this distortion. They all make the distinction between what they call a spiritual or religious life and what they call a worldly life.

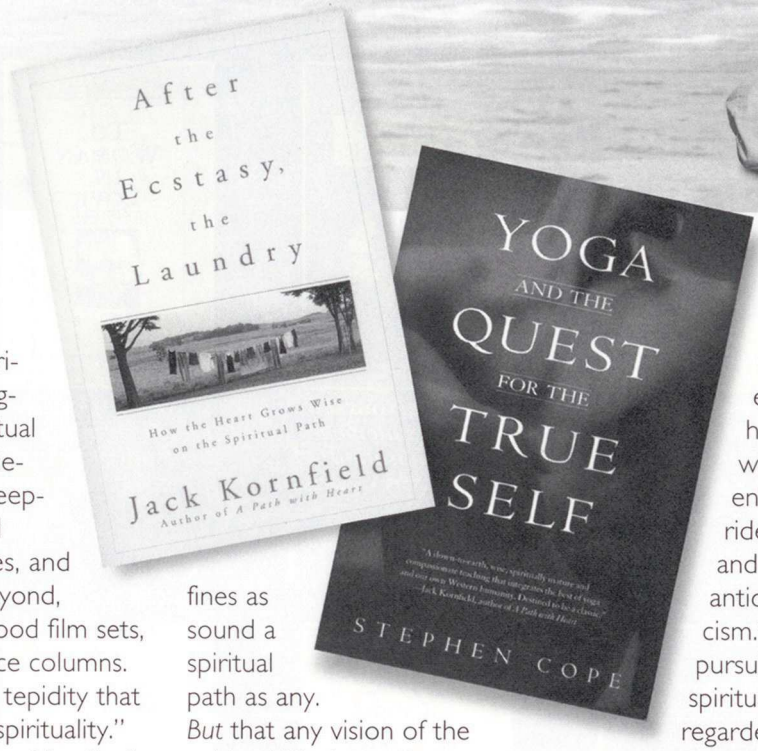
A man who lives only for pleasure, with occasional flashes of sorrow and piety, whose whole life is given to amusement and entertainment is, of course, a worldly man, although he may also be very clever, very scholarly, and fill his life with other people's thoughts or his own. And a man who has a gift and exercises it for the benefit of society, or for his own pleasure, and who achieves fame in the fulfillment of that gift, such a man, surely, is also worldly. But it is also worldly to go to church, or to the temple or the mosque, to pray, steeped in prejudice, bigotry, utterly unaware of the brutality that this implies. It is worldly to be patriotic, nationalistic, idealistic. The man who shuts himself up in a monastery—getting up at regular hours with a book in hand, reading and praying—is surely also worldly. And the man who goes out to do good works, whether he is a social reformer or a missionary, is just like the politician in his concern with the world. The division between the religious life and the world is the very essence of worldliness. The minds of all these people—monks, saints, reformers—are not very different from the minds of those who are only concerned with the things that give pleasure.

So it is important not to divide life into the worldly and the non-worldly. It is important not to make the distinction between the worldly and the so-called religious. Without the world of matter, the material world, we wouldn't be here. Without the beauty of the sky and the single tree on the hill, without that woman going by and that man riding the horse, life wouldn't be possible. We are concerned with the totality of life, not a particular part of it which is considered religious in opposition to the rest. So one begins to see that a religious life is concerned with the whole and not with the particular. ■

Page 108-109 quotations from: Stephen Mitchell, *The Gospel According to Jesus,* Harper Collins, New York, 1991, p. 238; *The Pali Canon,* Sutta Nipata: I.12 Muni Sutta (The Sage) and III.1 Pabbaja Sutta (The Going Forth), Handful of Leaves CD-Rom version 2.0, 1999; **Page 110-111 quotations from:** *The New Oxford Annotated Bible,* New Testament (Matthew 10:34-39 p. 15; Mark 3:31-35 p. 52; Luke 9:57-62 p. 96), Oxford University Press, New York, 1991; Stephen Mitchell, *The Gospel According to Jesus,* Harper Collins, New York, 1991, pp. 44, 46-47, 51, 58; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1970, p. 222; *The Way of Perfection: Teresa of Avila,* translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, Image Books, New York, 1991, pp. 84-85; Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher,* AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 1998, p. 87. **Page 112-113 excerpt from:** Mary Lutyens, ed., *The Second Penguin Krishnamurti Reader,* Penguin Books, New York, 1970, pp. 201-203.

a call to medio

What Is Enlightenment? *editor Susan Bridle takes off the gloves and exposes the fallacy behind what she calls the new "plateau spirituality" most clearly defined by the two new spiritual bestsellers* After the Ecstasy, the Laundry *by Jack Kornfield and* Yoga and the Quest for the True Self *by Stephen Cope.*



There is a creeping spiritual malaise that is befogging contemporary spiritual culture, a seemingly undetectable virus that is sweeping meditation halls and yoga studios, bookstores, and seminar centers, and beyond, to boardrooms, Hollywood film sets, PTA meetings, and advice columns. It is a pervasive spiritual tepidity that one could call "plateau spirituality." Or "cake-and-eat-it-too spirituality." Or "inclusive, postmodern, relativistic, stretch-the-definition-until-it-means-everything-and-nothing spirituality." It's the sensitive and multiple-perspective embracing insight that "I have my truth and you have your truth." That all meaning is personally conferred. That nothing is inherently more "spiritual" than anything else. That "following your bliss" (whatever that may be) defines as sound a spiritual path as any. *But* that any vision of the spiritual life that calls us to rise to the heights of human possibility, that aspires to the transcendent, is repressive, linear, hierarchical—and even, the very cause of the planet's every ailment.

Tricycle magazine editor and Zen practitioner Helen Tworkov speaks to this in her insightful analysis of the erosion of enlightenment in Western Zen Buddhism at the conclusion of her book *Zen in America.* She explains that "Enlightenment—oddly enough—has become all but a dirty word. . . . The quest for enlightenment has been derided of late as the romantic and mythic aspiration of antiquated patriarchal monasticism." She observes that the pursuit of the pinnacle of the spiritual quest "is now often regarded as an obstacle" by contemporary interpretations of the spiritual path that emphasize "everyday Zen" and "mindful attention in the midst of ordinary life."

Historically, Buddhism and other enlightenment traditions have held that a radical leap beyond the known, resulting in a profound and permanent transformation of the human being, is the single abiding goal that defines the spiritual path. But times have changed. In the

translation of these traditions to the West, not only have our eyes lowered from the lofty goal of reaching the spiritual summit, but the goal itself has been radically redefined. Indeed, the spiritual quest—once a heroic journey in search of a rare prize—is now no longer truly a "quest" but a "process," a process that can most aptly be described as the universal application of the principle "I'm OK, you're OK." Now our mantras and *koans* do not inspire us to stretch beyond ourselves—for that would imply a dreaded "judgment" that we are not in fact already Buddhas and might actually have a little further to go. Instead, our modern mantras and *koans* are self-affirmations intended to calm and soothe, or a kind of fairy-dust we can sprinkle over our most mundane activities to transform them, in our own minds at least, into profound spiritual rituals.

The disease of plateau spirituality is being transmitted by carriers as diverse as health and wellness magazines and esteemed religious studies professors. And two of this year's most influential spiritual best-sellers, Stephen Cope's *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self* (Bantam Books) and Jack Kornfield's *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry* (Bantam Books), distinctly communicate the virus, each in its own way. Lauded in the popular spiritual press as the most comprehensive and sophisticated presentations of the spiritual path to date, these two books are the most prominent new additions to the swelling ranks of East-meets-West spiritual roadmaps offered by cartographers committed to integrating traditional enlightenment teachings with the insights of contemporary psychology and the complexities of our busy modern lifestyles. Their hallmarks are a sensitivity to what they have deemed are the unique psychological needs of contemporary Western spiritual seekers and a debunking of what they assert are the dangerously naive spiritual ideals of antiquated Eastern enlightenment traditions.

After the Ecstasy, the Laundry is Jack Kornfield's eighth book, and is the clearest expression yet of his conclusions about the nature of enlightenment and the spiritual path. A synthesis of traditional teaching parables, myths, personal anecdotes, and excerpts from interviews he conducted with numerous long-time practitioners and spiritual guides, the book is his manifesto of a "mature spirituality" for our times. One of the fathers of American Buddhism, Kornfield cofounded the

Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California—the institutions most influential in introducing Theravada Buddhism and its practice of vipassana meditation to America. *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self* is Stephen Cope's first literary effort, born of his ten years in residence at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health. He offers an intimate account of his long and winding personal journey—from psychotherapist battling his own depression and midlife crisis after the breakup of a love affair, to up-and-coming yoga scholar and spiritual teacher on the new age lecture circuit. The book is a sort of novelization of his autobiography, with composite characters and scenes created as platforms for his philosophical musings. Both Kornfield and Cope are practicing psychologists with private therapy practices, and both are convinced that the role of psychotherapy is paramount in the transplantation of Eastern spirituality to the West. Kornfield has been at the forefront of the movement to "marry Freud and the Buddha" for two decades. With this book Cope establishes himself as a champion for the marriage of Freud and Patanjali, the Hindu sage and father of the yogic path.

Kornfield's particular strain of the plateau malaise is his vision of "mature" spirituality—a spirituality disabused of unrealistic ideals and expectations. Indeed, it is the title of his book itself—*After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*—that most concisely conveys the essence of his message. He relentlessly asserts, over and over and over again, that although we may have glimpses of spiritual awakening, the main event of the spiritual path is entrenching ourselves for the long haul in the "laundry room of our sustained [spiritual] practice." And for Kornfield, "spiritual practice" can include just about anything. His personal preference, however, seems to be perpetual meditation upon and endurance of our shadows, limitations, angers, fears, anxieties, and "unmet needs." His advice to the spiritual seeker involves about one percent ecstasy and ninety-nine percent laundry. Section titles include: "Ideals Are Not Realities," "The Messengers of Suffering," "Crash and Burn," "The Gate of Sorrow," "Humility and the Dark Night," "Honoring the Fall," and, of course, "The Dirty Laundry." He insists that "we need to acknowledge both our gifts and our foibles, whoever we are," enjoining us to "combine sanctity and flawed humanity," to have "a more humble approach to our full human nature," to "allow our ideals to embrace our humanness"—and to generally give infinite breeding room for neurosis and negativity. In fact, Kornfield's "mature spirituality" is simply cynicism thinly disguised as humility—a "humility" that Kornfield himself wears writ large on his sleeve. With a style that is more confessional than inspirational, he litters the book with intimate accounts of his various foibles and limitations, presumably intended to uplift us through their honesty and conspicuous modesty. With this book, Kornfield advances himself as a passionate advocate for plateau spirituality's campaign to shun the heights—or even any slight rise in elevation. After making our way through the first third of the book, which explores variations on these themes, we come to a section entitled, "Beyond Satori." It begs the question: Did I miss something?

Stephen Cope's plateau spirituality is conveyed through his equally adamant suspicion of spiritual idealism. In *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self* he criticizes being "obsessed with the notion of transformation" and the "hyperbolic accounts" of the spiritual attainments of Indian saints and yogis. He challenges our "mistaken Western assumptions about 'enlightenment,'" explaining that "as we Westerners become more experienced with yoga and meditation, we will begin to become more realistic about their outcomes." He encourages, as well as exemplifies throughout his own narrative, vigilant skepticism, deconstructing and psychoanalyzing the delusion, projections, and wishful thinking in every step taken on the spiritual path by himself and those around him. Repeatedly reminding us that "the valleys are as low as the mountains are high," he cautions against the dangers of "intoxicating idealism." Cope's synthesis of psychology and yoga results in a worldview that is—to borrow a phrase from Philip Reiff's classic *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*—"implacably hostile to the transcendent." In one of the book's defining moments, Cope recounts a talk given by Jungian analyst Marion Woodman at a week-long conference on psychotherapy and yoga held at Kripalu: "As long as we try to transcend ourselves, reach for the sky, pull away from ground and into spirit, we are heroes carved in stone. We stand atop the pillar alone, blind to the pigeon's droppings. Don't try to transform yourself. Move into yourself. Move into your human unsuccess. Perfection rapes the soul."

In their new and improved maps of the spiritual path, Kornfield and Cope both devote a lot of attention to examining the repressive, life-denying aspects of patriarchal religions that they assert have enslaved our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls for millennia. Yet in all

this insistence on the pitfalls of the path, they seem to lose sight of the path—and the goal—altogether. Or more accurately, they have so adapted the path to suit our bourgeois American preferences and comforts that it's hard to make out any outlines of the shape or direction of the spiritual path at all. As Helen Tworkov put it, "We want the dharma to accommodate itself to us—we don't want to accommodate ourselves to the dharma. That's the American way." And while Tworkov acknowledges that there is a long tradition in Buddhist literature to challenge students' missing of the mark by becoming attached to enlightenment experiences, she makes clear that this criticism, when it is expressed by masters who have come down from the metaphorical mountaintop, is categorically different from the disparagement of enlightenment by teachers or students who have never truly viewed reality from the mountaintop: "When a great Zen master knocks enlightenment, it is one thing; but the denigration voiced by many Americans has been too often accompanied by an unacknowledged lack of aspiration, an appeal for approval from the dominant Christian culture, an attachment to personal comfort, and an indulgent lifestyle." "The middle way [has become] solidly middle class."

Cope's case for forsaking the mountaintop is rendered with full pathos and poignancy in his final chapter, "The Triumph of the Real." In fact, in his closing argument he proclaims that mature spirituality, *real* spirituality, is the product of disillusionment. During a meditation retreat throughout which he was besieged by doubt, depression, frustration, and restlessness, he was haunted by a voice that said, "Give up. Just give up." He left the retreat and reflected on his many years on the spiritual path. "As I left the meditation hall that evening, I felt disillusioned, sad, and a little angry. But mostly, I felt tired. I felt a great wave of skepticism about the entire project of spiritual practice. . . . Why does it have to be such a big deal, taking up so much room in my life? I realized that I was tired of spending all my vacations on retreats, meditating, doing yoga, eating 'clean.' I wanted to have more fun. . . . When all is said and done, most of the stages of spiritual practice are stages of grief work. We have to let go of our deeply cherished dreams and illusions. And there's no way we're going to let them go until we have pretty much worn ourselves out." Cope proceeds to deconstruct the entire spiritual quest: "Instead of our addiction to sex, drugs, or rock 'n' roll, we're addicted to the light. Addicted to the dark side, addicted to the light—what's the difference?" At the end of his decade-long quest, Cope concludes that there is "no pot of gold at the end of that rainbow."

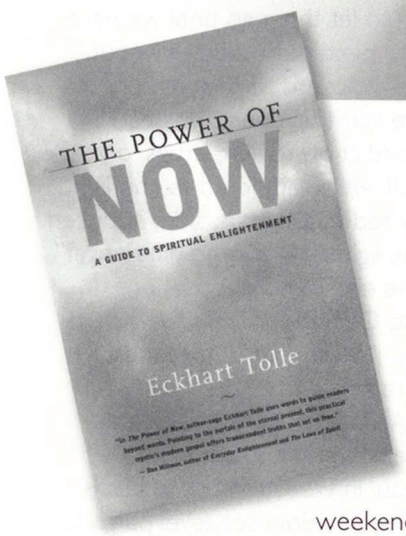
According to Kornfield and Cope, if we find ourselves on a plateau, in vast stretches of plains, or even in below-sea-level parched desert climes, we should accept ourselves as we are, make the best of it, settle back and enjoy the view. The mountain is probably a myth anyway. This is Cope's "being real," Kornfield's "more humble approach." But what really is this "humility" that is such a central tenet of plateau spirituality? This being "real" about being "only human"? On the one hand, Kornfield's and Cope's philosophies of modest aspiration present a valid critique of much of what is rigid and repressive about traditional religious belief systems and can provide a welcome relief from the habitually ingrained "shoulds" of our Sunday-school youth. They offer a kinder, gentler spirituality. But on the other, they leave ample room for complacency, delusion, compromise, and cynicism in a world where most of us, given a chance, will too willingly be complacent, deluded, compromised, and cynical. In Andrew Harvey's *A Journey in Ladakh,* Thuksey Rinpoche casts a penetrating light on the motives so often beneath the guise of humbly accepting our limitations as being "only human": "As long as there is *samsara,* there will be an evasion of the inner perfection that is man's essence. This is perhaps the saddest of all the tragedies of *samsara,* and the most painful. . . . Often when men say they are helpless, trapped, imperfect, they are really saying, 'I do not want to endure my own perfection, I do not want to bear my own reality.' Imperfection is more comforting, more human than perfection. Many men want to believe that man is imperfect because it makes it easier to live with their own imperfection, more forgiving towards themselves. And who can blame them? . . . To discover an inner power that is completely good and gentle is frightening; it robs us of every comfort, every safety in resignation or irony. Who can live naked to his own perfection? And yet who, once seeing and acknowledging his own perfection, could bear not to try to realize it in living? To see it is hard; to realize it within life is the hardest thing." ■

Quotations from: Helen Tworkov, *Zen in America,* Kodansha Globe, New York, 1994, pp. 258, 263, 265; Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry,* Bantam Books, New York, 2000, pp. xix, 122, 149, 208, 221; Stephen Cope, *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self,* Bantam Books, New York, 1999, pp. xiii, xv, 24, 31, 188-189, 274, 294-296; *WIE* Issue 14, "Can Buddhism Survive America?" an interview with Helen Tworkov, 1998, p. 91; Andrew Harvey, *A Journey in Ladakh,* Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1983, p. 207.

Time is the Enemy

a review of Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*

by Carter Phipps



Last March I traveled with one of my fellow editors to the sunny beachfront town of La Jolla, California to attend Inner Directions publishing house's annual spiritual conference. La Jolla, which means "the jewel" in Spanish, lives up to its name, a stunningly beautiful resort town where it seems that California's marriage of the spiritual and the material may have found its happiest home—as attested to by the BMWs parked in front of Deepak Chopra's world famous Center for Well Being just a few blocks up from the palm tree-lined beach. As the fog rolled in and out over the three-day weekend like the waves on the southern California sand, we watched, along with 500 others, as a series of spiritual teachers presented each, in turn, their understanding of nonduality—what many believe to be the essential truth that not only lies at the heart of all religious traditions but is at the core of any authentic spiritual path. However, as the events of the weekend made increasingly clear, it is one thing to speak about nonduality, and another thing altogether to truly communicate the depth, power, and significance of that mystery which lies beyond all opposites. When Eckhart Tolle took the stage on the last morning of the conference, his words carried with them the timeless transmission of one who has fallen very deeply into the spiritual dimension of life. In his one and a half hours on stage, he brought to life the subtle and profound nature of enlightenment, earning him the respect, appreciation, and rapt attention of the audience, along with the first and only standing ovation of the entire weekend.

It was immediately after that presentation that I purchased Tolle's new book *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, a former underground hit whose recent success—with over 100,000 copies sold and a place on Oprah Winfrey's list of favorites—has made its author a fast-growing presence on today's spiritual circuit. Aptly titled, the book is a meticulous and detailed deconstruction of everything that inhibits our ability to see beyond the confines of our own minds into the power and beauty of life lived in what Tolle calls "the Now," or "Being," or "Presence." At first glance it might seem like just one more in a growing genre of books full of tips on how to be more mindful and awake in our daily life, but Tolle's clear writing and the obvious depth of his experience and insight set it apart. Enlightenment, according to Tolle, is simply a "natural state of *felt* oneness with Being." And

being, in Tolle's teaching, is defined as "the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death." It is also, as he goes on to explain, "deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. . . . When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of 'feeling-realization' is enlightenment."

Using a question and answer format throughout the book, Tolle weaves his words together like a carefully constructed net designed to catch and constrain all the objections of the mind and ego to the freedom of being he is pointing to. His basic message is simple: disconnect from the thinking mind, shift your attention from "mind to Being, from time to Presence." Indeed, time is the enemy in Tolle's teaching, and the mind is the enemy's tool. We must reject them both, abandoning our psychological attachment to the past and future, realizing that a mind-identified condition is "a form of insanity." "Be so utterly, so completely *present,*" Tolle tells us, "that no problem, no suffering, nothing that is not *who you are* in your essence, can survive in you. In the Now, in the absence of time, all your problems dissolve. Suffering needs time; it cannot survive in the Now." While he never strays far from this basic point, Tolle parlays his message into a wide-ranging discussion of such diverse spiritual topics as freedom from thoughts and emotions; the student/teacher relationship; death and dying; the human ego; our physical body, sexual relationships, and gender issues; and even the design of human evolution. And through it all, the "power of Now" serves as a sort of universal "portal" that can always take us (or bring us back) into a state of presence, providing access to the "unmanifested dimension of life," and freeing us from anything and everything that would interfere.

The more I read of *The Power of Now,* the more I was convinced that in Eckhart Tolle's teachings we had stumbled upon a genuine and profound expression of the nondual realization, a rare pearl in the shallow tidepools of new millennium spirituality. Indeed, in a time when the teachings of Advaita Vedanta—the ancient Hindu doctrine of nonduality expressed exquisitely in the last century by Ramana Maharshi and others—are being used by Western seekers as a quick and easy passport to a dubious, if not downright nihilistic, "enlightenment," Tolle's book shines with authenticity, a welcome addition to a spiritual climate grown rife with reductionism. Thankfully, he refuses to use the subtle and profound teachings of nonduality to whitewash the darker sides of human nature or pretend that the human ego is simply an illusion that we need not concern ourselves with. Instead, his call to

awakening contains within it an honest appraisal of the reality of the human condition. Referring to the "collective egoic mind" as the most "dangerously insane and destructive entity ever to inhabit this planet," he speaks at great length about the negative and inevitable consequences inflicted on both ourselves and others when we are unable or unwilling to surrender ourselves to the liberating power of "the Now."

Yet, as impressive and refreshing as the book is, Tolle's presentation of the spiritual life is not without its disconcerting moments, and some of his conclusions are worth a second look. Are we really in the middle of a "profound transformation that is taking place in the collective consciousness of the planet and beyond," even as our "social, political, and economic structures . . . enter the final stage of collapse"? Are women really "closer to enlightenment" than men, and is their monthly menstrual cycle poised to become the powerful catalyst for their widespread awakening? Does greater consciousness actually lead to a "significant slowing down of the aging of the physical body"? Whatever the ultimate veracity of these and other unusual declarations, their inclusion in the book only served to raise further questions, rather than illuminating or clarifying the territory of enlightenment.

But perhaps the most important issue to examine with a finer eye is the very nature of the nondual teaching itself, because in the final analysis, Tolle is a nondualist through and through. The essential point, expressed beautifully over and over again in the book, is to always, no matter what the circumstance, return to the Now, return to being, return to that mystery where there never has been and never could be any problem whatsoever. And while Tolle goes to great lengths to acknowledge and address the mental, emotional, and psychological issues that we must confront in doing so, the practices and methods he suggests are, in essence, all derivatives of this one fundamental movement, this one absolute inner shift from doing to being, from time to the Now, from duality to nonduality. "Direct your attention inward," he says, "If you get the inside right, the outside will fall into place. Primary reality is within, secondary reality without." Whether in the nondual tradition of Advaita, the Dzog-chen teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, various schools of Zen, or even some of Jesus' teachings (which Tolle often quotes in his book), this nondual approach has been a fundamental part of the spiritual landscape for millennia. Yet, it is an approach that has also endured much criticism over the years for its perceived failure to present a truly complete and integral path to awakening. One of history's most

ardent and articulate critics of this view was the Chinese Ch'an Buddhist Master Tsung-mi (780-841), who spoke out in his own time against what he saw as the dangers inherent in any teaching that did not place importance on the need for "gradual cultivation." He felt strongly that those spiritual teachings, like *The Power of Now,* that emphasize a fundamental, inner shift of awareness, must be balanced by a cultivation of the dynamic and active aspects of our nature—the positive transformation, in other words, of our motivations, our actions, and our capacity to discriminate between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome in the world of time and space. While he would no doubt have agreed with Tolle that nondual insight, what he called "sudden awakening," must be the foundation of any genuine path, Tsung-mi calls to mind contemporary critics of the nondual approach when he claims, (as summarized here by Buddhist scholar Robert Buswell) that "for full realization to occur . . . the symbiotic relationship between sudden awakening and gradual cultivation must be recognized" so that "each aspect supports the development of the other. The sudden awakening at the beginning of the student's practice assures a proper attitude toward cultivation," while "gradual cultivation ensures that the awakening is kept dynamic. Through cultivation, awakening is applied in ordinary life, protecting the student from indifference to the sufferings of others and the compulsion to seek quietude and isolation which often characterizes ascetic hermits."

Interestingly enough, the application of awakening in "ordinary life" was one of the most oft-repeated themes at the Inner Directions conference last spring. Speakers and participants alike seemed to be struggling with the question of how to live our deepest realizations of enlightenment, the very issue that prompted Tsung-mi to make such bold criticisms of the "sudden awakening" schools of Chinese Buddhism 1,200 years ago. *The Power of Now* injects into this perennial discussion a practical and accessible nondual teaching of enlightenment whose burgeoning popularity will hopefully inspire not only appreciation for the rare wisdom it contains but also deeper thought about these very important issues. Whatever the case, with Eckhart Tolle's growing presence on bestseller shelves usually reserved for much lighter-weight fare, it will be interesting to see what time has in store for this unusual modern mystic. ■

Quotations from: Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now,* New World Library, Novato, 1999, pp. 10, 42, 43, 64, 84, 102, 130, 190; Robert Buswell, *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen,* University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1991, pp. 49, 59-60.

myself up." Maybe he would come to that realization because he got cancer. Or maybe he would come to that realization because his wife would leave first and say, "I'm so sick of being with you, you're just an asshole." And then he would have one of those death-in-life experiences where everything falls away, and if he was lucky he would know it was an initiation and he would go through what the Buddha's talking about—the path of renunciation—so that he could be born again. That dark night of the soul, where you lose your identification and all of the accoutrements that come along with it, is a great gift.

I know that for me, when I went through a divorce and lost the dream I had of what it meant to be a good mother and have a perfect home life—if at the time somebody had said, "Oh, but it's a great gift," I would not have appreciated the loss as a gift. I went from living in a beautiful, big home to living in an apartment with my two little kids and having no money. But in retrospect, I can see that that was more important to me in many ways than my fifteen years with my guru. That was my forty days and nights in the desert, where I lost my sense of self, of who I thought I was and should be, and found that indestructible place of strength inside of me that could, God willing, survive anything. That's what I think Jesus and the Buddha are talking about there. They're saying, "Whatever it takes, find the indestructible core inside yourself that survives all death. If it takes giving up everything and walking away from your parents and not looking back, if you need such a radical shake-up, do that. And then see what happens." Generally I think it leads people back into life. I think you get shaken up, you get your values all turned around, you get awakened, and then you participate in life in a new way. Maybe for someone like the Buddha, his role was never to go back, so he could be a model of the death-in-life experience for everybody. Jesus obviously had to take it to being actually hung on a cross, so we could see, "Oh, you have to die in order to live. Oh, I get it, thank you." He had to do that. They were martyrs. I don't think all of us have to be martyrs. ■

Quotations from: Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, Bantam Books, New York, 2000, p. 228; Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *Judaism*, George Braziller, New York, 1962, p. 73; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1970, p. 353; Anonymous, quoted by Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987, p. 70; *The Pali Canon*, Sutta Nipata: III.1 Pabbaja Sutta (The Going Forth), Handful of Leaves CD-Rom version 2.0, 1999.

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culture that is so much better than anything that has come before; I've got . . ." Well, you know how it goes. Andrew points out that the "new" approaches to spirituality—including transpersonal psychology and ITP—are often nothing much more than new forms of boomeritis. And again, I could not agree more. (You can see a brief description of "boomeritis" in Chapter 2 of the modestly entitled *A Theory of Everything*, just out from Shambala.)

The emotional attitude of boomeritis tends to be, "Nobody tells me what to do!" And there is no question that the "pick and choose" nature of ITP can play directly into the hands of boomeritis. Spirituality then degenerates into the cafeteria model so prevalent in our culture: "Let's see, I'll take a little of this, a little of that, a little of the new physics, a little breathwork, some indigenous tribal goodies, toss in a little systems theory, some Goddess rituals, and, ooooh, let's see, gimme some shamanism for good measure and two cups of ayahuasca. Great! I am soooo f—ing enlightened I can't stand it."

Needless to say, Andrew is not impressed. Me neither. Neither are you, I am guessing.

But remember that all those egoic games are simply a misuse of the relative paths in general and of ITP in particular. One of the things that ITP is truly good at is simply making the *relative* bodymind more healthy in its own terms. We already have considerable scientific evidence that practices such as ITP can turn back the physiological aging process *by over a decade* and significantly reduce the incidence of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and most degenerative diseases. Again, this will *not* cause enlightenment! But it will do two things: it will help your relative bodymind become much healthier in its own terms, and it will help to make you a little more accident prone. And then, in the presence of a true Master, you might be just a little more likely to confess and admit your enlightenment, and simply but directly recognize that my Master is my Self.

(If you would like to investigate further some forms of ITP, you might begin with Michael Murphy and George Leonard's *Integral Transformative Practice* or my own *One Taste*. The actual phrase "integral transformative practice" can be used to apply strictly to Murphy and Leonard's approach, or it can be used to mean any balanced practice that includes the many levels and dimensions of human potentials. In this essay, usually I mean the latter unless specifically indicated. But I very much appreciate the work Murphy and Leonard have done, and

they are the first to point out that their ITP can also involve working with an acknowledged spiritual Master. Keep in mind, too, that there are many different forms of ITP, and new forms will continue to evolve as this experiment unfolds.)

As I said, one of the reasons that I recommend ITP to people is simply what it does for the relative vehicle—it makes body and mind healthier. It's very hard to do *satsang* from a wheelchair, or with a stroke, or confined to a hospital bed. ITP only covers the relative realm, but it makes that realm more healthy and thus easier to release—easier to fall into the recognition that your real Self is "bodymind dropped." When the relative vehicle is unhealthy, or in pain, or uncomfortable, it is the squeaky wheel that demands the oil of attention; but when it is functioning smoothly, it is that much easier for the self to let go of its attachment to the individual bodymind and uncoil in the vast expanse of All Space, where it will find its ever-present home.

At the same time, when you awaken to the absolute truth, that does nothing much to help the relative vehicle. You can perfectly awaken to radical Spirit and pure Self, but that will not allow you to perform graceful athletics with your body; it will not allow you to understand quantum mechanics with your mind; it will not turn your personality from a nerd into a sophisticate; it will not get you a new job. One Taste simply bypasses all of those relative vehicles and leaves them much as it finds them. Those relative vehicles, in order to be improved, have to be engaged in their own terms. And if we want our relative vehicles to be a bright and transparent window of the enlightened Self, we need to polish and practice those vehicles on the relative level. Would you rather be enlightened and have a heart attack, or be enlightened and not have a heart attack? The enlightened Self does not care which (for it embraces all that arises equally and impartially), but your relative self will definitely care! And that is where ITP can help considerably: it will polish the relative vehicle, lighten its density, make it more transparent to the Divine.

Andrew's concern, again, is that all this fussing around with the relative vehicles can detract from the radical, absolute, nondual Truth—and again I agree with him. But if the teacher is alive to this danger, and the teacher has confessed his or her own ever-present Recognition and Realization, then there is no reason that the teacher cannot recommend

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both relative and absolute, for both can be useful, even though only one is ultimate. The problem, Andrew would say, is that too many approaches are offering only relative practices and forgetting the absolute, and that is very true and very sad.

This caution applies to *stages* in the relative realm as well. Extensive cross-cultural research has demonstrated that in the *relative* realms (gross, subtle, and causal), individuals tend to progress through various types of stages (including cognitive, affective, and moral stages). These stages do not apply to the absolute truth, only to the relative, but on that level, there is an enormous amount of evidence for them. But nobody, and certainly not me, wants to confuse these relative stages with absolute truth!—and thus confuse finite stages with infinite release. (And, for those of you who have asked: Kaisa Puhakka did not "single-handedly transcend and include" my work in this area; she presented no alternative to it, she simply reminded people that both she and I believe this research needs to be set in pure Emptiness or pure nondual Spirit and not made into a fixed and rigid system, and Kaisa is certainly right about that.)*

So the point about ITP and about spiritual practices in general—all of which attempt to attain certain states or achieve certain goals—is that they are all of the relative realm. You can indeed attain various gross, subtle, and causal states, and ITP is clearly one of the most effective means of doing so. And while those practices will also make you more accident prone, they nonetheless have nothing to do with absolute truth and final enlightenment, for enlightenment can neither be attained nor achieved, but only confessed here and now, usually in the good company or *satsang* of those who have already admitted the ever-present Truth.

Andrew-I to Andrew-II

In "A Spirituality That Transforms," I suggested that many enlightened teachers—teachers truly alive to ever-present One Taste in all states, high and low—tend to go through two phases, as it were, of their own teaching work. The first phase is a pure offering of nothing but One Taste—a blast of pure consciousness and absolute truth—and a neglect of any of the relative vehicles and relative practices. However, because (1) this is often ineffective (it's just too much for many practitioners to confess at the beginning), and (2) even if it does work, it often produces a lopsided result (with people alive to pure consciousness who can't even hold a job), these teachers then move into a second phase, where they employ, in effect, some sort of ITP, or some sort of practice that includes both absolute and relative vehicles. In "A Spirituality That Transforms," I gave as examples Adi Da and Chogyam Trungpa, both of whom started out teaching "only God" (or "only Ati") and then ended up teaching the Seven Stages and the Nine Vehicles, respectively—in other words, a more integral practice involving both absolute and relative.

Andrew tells me that he has also done something quite similar, and I think he puts the case for this more balanced approach beautifully. "My position on all relative approaches to the unapproachable has evolved significantly and even dramatically since the early days of my teaching career." (I have divided my written work into several phases, pompously called "Wilber-I," "Wilber-II," etc., and Andrew then uses that scheme to humorously refer to his own evolution—half-kidding, but also quite serious.) "The 'only-the-absolute' approach that you describe could be called 'Andrew-I,' and now, almost fifteen years later, I could say my teaching has evolved into 'Andrew-II' or even 'Andrew-III'"—a balance of absolute and relative. "I began to notice that nondual blasts rarely transformed the entire being. It became glaringly obvious that practice, i.e., meditation, contemplation, confrontation, self-study, and engagement on *all* levels of our human potential needed to be energetically undertaken if the result was going to be a complete transformation."

Given that more balanced and comprehensive approach, Andrew's criticism then applies to those paths that err to one side or the other. For those paths that get so involved in relative practices that they forget the absolute Goal and Ground (and that *can* include approaches from ITP to vipassana), Andrew said, "Radical liberation just isn't in the picture at all, and without it, the all-important evolutionary tension that makes all things possible obviously isn't there either." On the other hand, there are the approaches that center only on the absolute, such as the "neo-Advaitist" movement. "With the neo-Advaitist explosion that we seem to be in the midst of, I almost always take the opposite position. Their insistence that only consciousness is real usually results not in genuine liberation, but rather tends to provide the easiest (and scariest) escape from real life and the ever-challenging real implications of being a fully *human* being.

"In fact," Andrew continued, "this was what led to the dissolution of my relationship with Poonja. Anyway, it becomes such a subtle matter in the end—the relationship between enlightenment and human development and evolution. So simple on one hand, so complex and

*see *WIE* Issue 17, "The Transpersonal Ego: Is There a New Formation?"

delicate on the other."

Indeed, so simple yet so complex. What I find so encouraging about this is that all of us—all of us teachers and students of enlightenment—are at this time in history involved in a truly grand experiment. Never have *all* of the world's "growth technologies" been fully available to a single culture: we have access not only to all of the forms of Western psychotherapy and human potential techniques, we have access to virtually all of the world's great wisdom traditions as well. And we are all now engaged in this "simple yet complex" experiment in how best to balance all of these approaches, including the relative and absolute, and thus find the best ways to both awaken to our ever-present Self—awaken to the absolute—and then skillfully and compassionately express that ultimate Reality in the relative world, balancing *nirvana* and *samsara* in each and every gesture we make. We are involved in this grand experiment, this gesture of balance, this graceful acknowledgment that we are both the One and the Many in every move we make.

And when you acknowledge that simple recognition, then you will indeed be in the world but not of it, because the world will be in you. Your ego is in the world, but the world is in your Self. Abide as the Self right here and now, and notice: The clouds float by in your awareness, and you are all of that. The sun is shining in your consciousness, and you are all of that. The birds are flying through your Big Mind, and you are all of that. The earth arises in your awareness, and you are all of that. You—the real you—is not in the world at all, but the world flows through you, within you, and you embrace it all. Within your being the world arises, and you are one with its every inhabitant, fiercely with compassion and gently with one gesture, this single Self that is only you, timelessly and forever. You are that Self, here and now, watching the world arise within you, radiant to infinity. It has always been so, and you have always known this. It is so even now, and even now you already know it. ■

Ken Wilber is the first psychologist-philosopher to have his *Collected Works* published while still alive (seventeen books in eight volumes, available from Shambhala.com). His most recent book is *Integral Psychology—Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy.* He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Reference: *WIE* Issue 12, "A Spirituality That Transforms," 1997, p. 22.

after illusions, I have only a burning desire to live a life of renunciation and to discover that which is Real!

Lloyd: Now, now, Sidney, you do not want to be too flurried in your passion! The aversion with which you are speaking about being in the world really does make me wonder if perhaps there isn't something you're trying to avoid or escape from. Freedom doesn't have anything to do with escaping anything, but rather with embracing all of life *as it is*, accepting it and welcoming it and treating it like a friend rather than an enemy! Only in allowing room for all the dualities in life to manifest, free from judgment, are we able to be truly at peace with all of life and with ourselves. You are obviously finding it difficult to accept all of the stress and disappointment that we so often find in life. There was a time when I spoke in much the same way as you are now, but eventually, after doing years of psychotherapy, I was able to address many issues in a way I never would have been able to do otherwise. I learned to deal with my hurt, my anger, my fears, and my secret desires. Believe me, Sid, I learned through hard experience that you can reach for the stars and become fascinated with all kinds of spiritual experiences and insights, but when you take an honest look at where you are, your feet are still always on the earth—no matter how much we would like to wish otherwise. We so want to be happy, and it is so easy to forget that we are human beings, subject to all the frailties of being human. We all have pain, anger, misunderstanding, hurt feelings, and deep wounds from our childhood and society that we have to deal with in some form or another, sooner or later. And it is vital that we deal with all of this pain and anger with forgiveness and compassion for ourselves and for all of those with whom we have crossed paths along our way. So please, *don't* use the spiritual search and all of the excitement you are now discovering to avoid what sounds to me like very strong and painful feelings! They'll just come back to haunt you if you do not deal with them now.

Sid: But Lloyd, there is no time to waste! All human life is subject to death and decay, to sickness and old age, to ceaseless change. You suggest psychotherapy, but how can I preoccupy myself with examining the dream when I have seen that this dream of a separate existence is a nightmare, causing endless suffering, that I must wake up from!

Lloyd: Sid, you sound awfully upset, and judgmental as well! Now forgive me for asking, but is everything going well in your relationship with your wife? I know that since you had your child, things have been difficult. Have you considered couple counseling?

Coming to his senses, Sid Arthur takes his teacher's advice and returns that night to his palatial Marin County estate and his family. The next morning he takes a good, hard look at himself and his life, reexamining his motives for wanting to run away from his home and responsibilities. He thinks much about the pressure from his father to inherit the family business empire, his recent difficulties with sexuality, and his resistance to accepting his all-too-human limitations. Concluding that the inner turmoil he had been experiencing was in fact only an expression of an immature desire to escape from responsibility and commitment, he supplements his meditation practice with psychotherapy. There he begins to understand why it was that he felt such a strong need to run away from his friends, family, and neighbors. He delves deeply into his past, learning much about himself, and in time comes to terms with the naively romantic and idealistic notion of spiritual liberation that had once convinced him that he had to leave the world. His attraction to psychology eventually inspires him to become a transpersonal psychotherapist, and upon getting his university degree he opens up The Center of Sacred Wholeness, which offers relaxation techniques, psychotherapy, meditation practices, breathwork, and the latest body/mind technologies to help people address all aspects of themselves in their spiritual search. Devoting himself tirelessly to raising his three children, working as CEO of his father's multinational corporation, fulfilling his activist and board member duties for several charitable organizations, and writing books that help share his understanding about the value of pursuing the spiritual journey in the context of everyday life, his name and fame grows inspiring many others to follow his example of "bringing the sacred into daily life." He occasionally looks back at that turning point in his life, when he sipped cappuccino and expressed his idealistic urgings to the teacher whom he now occasionally helps teach, Lloyd Hirshfeld. He shakes his head and smiles to himself, wondering where on earth he would be now if he had run off on impulse in his search for liberation.

Awakening with a jolt, Sid Arthur of Sausalito immediately became

aware of the full moon shining brightly down on him and his hundreds of disciples sleeping around him in the redwood forest in the wee hours of the morning. Sitting up on his right side and resting his head in the palm of his right hand, he chuckles to himself while remembering the contents of the dream he just awoke from.

Musing, he recalls thankfully how he did not take the advice of his teacher, Lloyd Hirshfeld. He had bid him farewell and departed from his family and home, abandoning all vestiges of his former life. Venturing forth into the unknown in his search for liberation, he had traveled far and wide, undertaking various spiritual practices in his endeavor to discover an understanding and condition beyond impermanence, a knowledge that revealed the futility of searching for security in that which is ultimately empty.

Sitting under a tree one day, in the fields of a village in a far-flung land, he had undergone an explosive transformation that liberated him from the endless cycles of death and rebirth. In his realization of Truth, he was freed from all ignorance, all clinging and craving to that which is transitory; from all doubt and fear; and from the interminable wheel of becoming. He had achieved the complete contentment, the supreme Victory, and had come upon a knowing of that which is beyond all knowledge.

His awakening sent shockwaves throughout the spiritual world, and news of his transformation spread far and wide. He began to teach, reawakening in many the belief in the possibility of final emancipation in this life. Soon thousands of students had gathered around him, many catching the same passion for freedom that had motivated their teacher to leave all behind in search of that most precious jewel.

After the morning meal, Sid Arthur begins to instruct those who have gathered around him. He tells them about his dream of the night before, and of the time when his former teacher tried to convince him to combine his quest for truth with other, more worldly endeavors and concerns. Continuing on late into the day, he speaks about the joys of renunciation and about the need to give all of oneself to the pursuit and discovery of the highest attainment. Later, Sid Arthur and his followers sit for their evening meditation. When it is finished, he rises, smiles, then winks at a student, once his teacher, and walks off as the day slowly turns to dusk. ■

world, the relinquishment of attachment to the world?

ET: Yes. Sometimes people ask, "How do you get to that? It sounds wonderful, but how do you get there?" In concrete terms, at its most basic, it simply means to say "yes" to this moment. That is the state of surrender—a total "yes" to what is. Not the inner "no" to what is. And the complete "yes" to what is, *is* the transcendence of the world. It's as simple as that—a total openness to whatever arises at this moment. The usual state of consciousness is to resist, to run away from it, to deny it, to not look at it.

AC: *So when you say a "yes" to what is, do you mean not avoiding anything and facing everything?*

ET: Right. It's welcoming this moment, embracing this moment, and that is the state of surrender. That is really all that's needed. The only difference between a Master and a non-Master is that the Master embraces what is, totally. When there is nonresistance to what is, there comes a peace. The portal is open; the unmanifested is there. That is the most powerful way. We can't call it practice because there's no time in it.

AC: *For most people who are participating in the East-meets-West spiritual explosion that is occurring with ever-greater speed these days, both Gautama the Buddha and Ramana Maharshi—one of the most respected Vedantins of the modern era—stand out as peerless examples of full-blown enlightenment, and yet, interestingly enough, in regard to this question of the right relationship to the world for the spiritual aspirant, their teachings diverge dramatically.*

The Buddha, the world-renouncer, encouraged those who were the most sincere to leave the world and follow him in order to live the holy life, free from the cares and concerns of the householder life. Yet Ramana Maharshi discouraged his disciples from leaving the household life in pursuit of greater spiritual focus and intensity. In fact, he discouraged any outward acts of renunciation and instead encouraged the aspirant to look within and find the cause of ignorance and suffering within the self. Indeed, many of his growing number of devotees today say that the desire to renounce is actually an expression of ego, the very part of the self that we want to liberate ourselves from if we want to be free. But of course the Buddha laid great stress on the need for renunciation, detachment, diligence, and restraint as the very foundation on which liberating insight can occur.

So why do you think the approaches of these two spiritual luminaries differ so widely? Why do you think that the Buddha encouraged his disciples to leave the world while Ramana encouraged them to stay where they were?

ET: There's not one way that that works. Different ages have certain approaches, which may be more effective for one age and no longer effective in another age. The world that we live in now has much greater density to it; it is much more all-pervasive. And when I say "world," I include the human mind in it. The human mind has grown even since the time of the Buddha, 2,500 years ago. The human mind is more noisy and more all-pervasive, and the egos are bigger. There's been an ego growth over thousands of years; it's growing to a point of madness, with the ultimate madness having been reached in the twentieth century. One only needs to read twentieth-century history to see that it has been the climax of human madness, if it's measured in terms of human violence inflicted on other humans.

So in the present time, we can't escape from the world anymore; we can't escape from the mind. We need to enter surrender while we are *in* the world. That seems to be the path that is effective in the world that we live in now. It may be that at the time of the Buddha, withdrawing was much, much easier than it would be now. The human mind was not yet so overwhelming at that time.

AC: *But the reason that the Buddha preached leading the homeless life was because he felt that the household life was full of worries, cares, and concerns, and in that context he felt it would be difficult to do what was needed to live the holy life. So in terms of what you're saying about the noise and distraction of the world, that is actually precisely what he was addressing and why in fact he led the homeless life and encouraged other people to do the same.*

ET: Well, he gave his reasons, but ultimately we don't know why the Buddha put the emphasis on leaving the world rather than saying as Ramana Maharshi did, "Do it in the world." But it seems to me, from what I have observed, that the more effective way *now* is for people to surrender *in* the world rather than attempt to remove themselves from the world and create a structure that makes it easier to surrender. There's a contradiction there already because you're creating a structure

to make it easier to surrender. Why not surrender now? You don't need to create anything to make surrender easier because then it's not true surrender anymore. I've stayed in Buddhist monasteries and I can see how easily it can happen—they have given up their name and adopted a new name, they've shaved their heads, they wear their robes—

AC: *You're saying that one world has been abandoned for another. One identification has been given up for another; one role has been dropped and another has been assumed. Nothing has actually been given up.*

ET: That's right. Therefore do it where you are, right here, right now. There's no need to seek out some other place or some other condition or situation and then do it there. Do it right here and now. Wherever you are is the place for surrender. Whatever the situation is that you're in, you can say "yes" to what is, and that is then the basis for all further action.

AC: *There are many teachers and teachings today that say that the very desire to renounce the world is an expression of ego. How do you see that?*

ET: The desire to renounce the world is again the desire to reach a certain state that you don't have now. There's a mental projection of a desirable state to reach—the state of renunciation. It's self-seeking through future. In that sense, it is ego. True renunciation isn't the desire to renounce; it arises as surrender. You cannot have a desire to surrender because that's non-surrender. Surrender arises spontaneously sometimes in people who don't even have a word for it. And I know that openness is there in many people now. Many people who come to me have a great openness. Sometimes it only requires a few words and immediately they have a glimpse, a taste of surrender, which may not yet be lasting, but the opening is there.

AC: *What about the spontaneous call from the heart to abandon all that's false and illusory, all that's based on the ego's materialistic relationship to life? For example, when the Buddha decided, "I have to leave my home behind"—it would probably be hard to say that was an egotistical desire, looking at the results. And Jesus saying, "Come follow me. Let the dead bury their dead."*

ET: That is recognizing the false as false, which is mainly an inner thing—to recognize false identifications, to recognize the mental noise, and what had been identification with mental images as a "me" entity, to be false. That is beautiful, that recognition. And then action may arise out of the recognition of the false, and perhaps you can see the false reflected in your life circumstances and you may then leave those behind—or not. But the recognition and relinquishment of all that is false and illusory is primarily an inner one.

AC: *Those two cases, the Buddha and Jesus, would be examples of powerful outer manifestations of that inner recognition.*

ET: That's right. There's no predicting what is going to happen as a result of that inner recognition. For the Buddha, of course, it came because he was already an adult when he suddenly realized that humans die and become ill and grow old. And that was so powerful that he looked within and said that everything is meaningless if that's all there is.

AC: *But then he was compelled to go off, to abandon his kingdom. From a certain point of view he could have said, "Well, it's all here right now, and all I need to do is just surrender unconditionally here and now." Then I guess the result could have been very different, he could have been an enlightened king!*

ET: But at that point he didn't know that all that was necessary was surrender.

AC: *Yet, when Jesus was calling the fishermen to leave their families and their lives to follow him and, similarly, when the Buddha would walk through towns and call the men to leave everything behind, their surrender was demonstrated* in the actual leaving, *in saying "yes" to Jesus or the Buddha and letting go of their worldly attachments. And obviously there would also be their inner attachment to let go of as well. In these cases, letting go wasn't only a* metaphor *for inner transcendence; it also meant* literally *letting go of everything.*

ET: For some people that *is* part of it. They may leave their habitual surroundings or activities, but the only question is whether or not they have already seen the false within. If they haven't, the external letting go will be a disguised form of self-seeking.

AC: *For my last question I'd like to ask you about the relationship between your understanding of enlightenment, or the experience of nondual consciousness, and engagement with the world.*

In Judaism, fully engaging with the world and human life is seen as the fulfillment of the religious calling. In fact, they say it is only *through wholeheartedly living the commandments that the spiritual potential of the human race can become manifest on earth. Jewish scholar David Ariel writes, "We finish the work of creation . . . God stands in need of us because only we can perfect the world."*

Many enlightenment or nondual teachings like your own emphasize the enlightenment of the individual. Indeed, transcendence of the world seems to be the whole point. But our Jewish brothers appear to be calling us to something very different—the spiritualization of the world through devoted men's and women's wholehearted participation in *the world. So is it true that nondual enlightenment teachings deprive the world of our wholehearted participation in it? Does the very notion of transcendence rob the world of the fulfillment of our potential to spiritualize it as God's children?*

ET: No, because right action can only flow out of that state of transcendence of the world. Any other activity is ego-induced, and even doing good, if it's ego-induced, will have karmic consequences. "Ego-induced" means there is an ulterior motive. For example, it enhances your self-image if you become a more spiritual person in your own eyes and that feels good; or another example would be looking to a future reward in another lifetime or in heaven. So if there are ulterior motives, it's not pure. There cannot be true love flowing into your actions if the world has not been transcended because you're not connected with the realm out of which love arises.

AC: *Do you mean pure action, untainted by ego?*

ET: Yes, first things first. What comes first is realization and liberation, and then let action flow out of that—and that will be pure, untainted, and there's no karma attached to it whatsoever. Otherwise, no matter how high our ideals are, we will still strengthen the ego through our good actions. Unfortunately, you cannot fulfill the commandments unless you are egoless—and there are very few who are—as all the people who have tried to practice the teachings of Christ have found out. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is one of the main teachings of Jesus, and you cannot fulfill that commandment, no matter how hard you try, if you don't know who you are at the deepest level. Love your neighbor *as* yourself means your neighbor *is* yourself, and that recognition of oneness is love. ■

Quotations from: Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, New World Library, Novato, 1999, p. 117; David S. Ariel, Ph.D., *Spiritual Judaism: Restoring Heart and Soul to Jewish Life*, Hyperion, New York, 1998, p. 9.

I see it as the difference between nonattachment and detachment. Detachment implies a withdrawal or a pulling back, maybe even an indifference. I don't see the Buddha's path as being detachment. I see it as *non*attachment—being completely present without clinging. And in that, for me, is the union of emptiness and compassion. So there is the possibility of being totally engaged, but without clinging to anything.

AC: *That would be the miraculous position of enlightenment.*

JG: Yes. And different people will express that enlightenment, and also see the path to it, in different ways. There may be periods when one does need seclusion from the world in the way that is being suggested. But that's a slice of a much longer journey.

AC: *Unlike Buddhism, in Judaism and Islam, specifically Sufism, not only are renunciation and transcendence of the world along the lines of what the Buddha taught discouraged, but sometimes they are harshly criticized as going against the fundamental tenets at the core of their religious doctrine. Sheikh Tosun Bayrak of the Halveti-Jerrahi order of Sufis said in an interview for this issue of* WIE,

> Renunciation is a sin. Renunciation means that I am thirsty, and he, Allah, is offering me a glass of water and I say, "No thank you." That's a sin! . . . It's arrogance in the extreme, this renunciation business. This isn't just my opinion; this is the opinion of the Sufis. You should take whatever it is that you receive, and you should put it to good use. If you don't want it, give it to somebody who needs it! I have, praise to Allah, enough money. But if he gave me a million dollars today, I'm not going to refuse it. I'm going to take it and I'm going to give it to the ones who need it and keep some for myself too. I'll buy myself a new car instead of an old one, and maybe a $150 pair of shoes. That would be the day!
>
> So there is no going to the monasteries, no climbing up the Himalayas. . . . You have to go out into the world and participate. For example, my own teacher, Sheikh Muzaffer, loved to eat, loved good food. And he had a young wife, whom he loved very much. He used to say, "Money—there should be a lot in your pocket, but none in your heart."

And also for the Jews, fully engaging with the world and life is seen as the fulfillment of the religious calling. In fact, they say it is only *through wholeheartedly living the commandments that the spiritual potential of the human race can become manifest. Jewish scholar David Ariel writes,*

> When we become the master of our own lives and enjoy all that the world offers, we have brought out the divinity within us. When we help another person to ascend the ladder, we finish the work of creation. When we help bring out the human potential of each individual, we have brought God into the world. God stands in need of us because only we can perfect the world.

Even though I know that, particularly in Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva *ideal of vowing to liberate all sentient beings before oneself is a core element of the teachings, still that salvation of others before oneself refers specifically to their liberation from the bonds of* samsara, *not, as these Middle Eastern religions emphasize, to the spiritualization of the world itself. So how do you, as a prominent Buddhist teacher, respond to the accusations of our Middle Eastern brothers that your religion not only inhibits the fulfillment of the potential spiritualization of the world through man but actually encourages the abdication of our responsibility for it?*

JG: I think that discussion is happening on the wrong level because that's looking at the form—whether one is living in the palace or living in a cave, whether one is in relationship or not in relationship. I don't think those are the fundamental questions. I think the fundamental question is: W*ho* is it that's fulfilling the desire or renouncing that desire?

AC: *But the only thing is,* you're a Buddhist! *So don't you want to respond at all to this question, as a Buddhist? I just wanted you to comment a little bit on the world-renouncer's teachings on transcendence of the world.*

JG: In a way, I'm living more like a Sufi than a Buddhist monk. But again, I don't see the form as being the essence of the realization. For example, if you go to the movies, you get totally caught up in the story of the movie. And it could be the movie of a monk in a cave or it could be the movie of somebody enjoying life fully, but then you look up and see the beam of light going through the theater and landing on the screen, and you realize—nothing is happening! There's nothing happening on the screen. It's all an appearance. I think that if we get too caught up in which appearance is the right appearance or which appearance is more spiritual, it completely misses the point that freedom is not about which movie is playing; it's in the mind being free of clinging, whatever the form.

AC: *Indeed, that's the ultimate answer to all these questions, and, of course, after that there is nothing to*

say. But the reason I am asking these questions is that Sufis also have teachings of nonattachment. And if we look at classical Buddhism, there's obviously a big emphasis on renouncing the world and becoming a monk. And I'm sure traditional Buddhist monks feel strongly about their path. But in Sufism, they say, "No, doing that is basically denying Allah or God," and they feel strongly about that! *So going into these questions helps to illuminate the issue. Many people these days use the answer that you've just given as a way to avoid having to come to terms with how attached we really are. And the fact is, most people—as I'm sure you know, you're a teacher—are deeply, profoundly attached, and so on a more relative level these issues become* really *important.*

JG: I was at a Buddhist-Christian conference at Gethsemane some years ago talking about different spiritual traditions. And the Dalai Lama said repeatedly, "You know, my way is right for me. Your way may be right for you." It's totally respectful of the possibility that people employ different skillful means at different times. I don't see the point in making sweeping generalizations like, "Yes, the Sufi celebration of life is the way!" or, "No, Buddhist renunciation is the way." It really has to do with—

AC: *What's actually happening inside the individual.*

JG: Exactly. And just as we said, somebody could live an outwardly renunciate life and be filled with desire. But equally, somebody could be living a totally engaged life, filled with desire. And so it always comes back to what really is happening. And that's where a teacher can be very helpful, because sometimes it *is* hard to see for oneself. As we know, it's very easy to get entangled.

AC: *Okay, so one last try—*

JG: To get me to have an opinion?

AC: *Yes, right!*

JG: *"Those guys are no good!"*

AC: *(laughs) I have one last question. I think it can be said that for most people who are participating in the East-meets-West spiritual explosion that is occurring with ever-greater speed these days, both Gautama the Buddha and Ramana Maharshi, one of the most respected Vedantins of the modern era, stand out as peerless examples of full-blown enlightenment. And yet, interestingly enough, with regard to this question of the*

right relationship to the world for the spiritual aspirant, their teachings diverged dramatically.

The Buddha, the world renouncer, encouraged those who were most sincere to leave the world and follow him in order to live the holy life, free from the cares and concerns of the householder life. Yet Ramana Maharshi discouraged his disciples from leaving the household life in pursuit of greater spiritual focus and intensity. In fact, he discouraged any outward acts of renunciation and instead encouraged the aspirant to look within and find the cause of ignorance and suffering within the self. Indeed, many of his growing number of devotees today say that the desire to renounce is an expression of ego, the very part of the self that we want to liberate ourselves from if we want to be free. Of course, the Buddha laid great stress on the need for renunciation, detachment, diligence, and restraint as the very foundation on which liberating insight can occur. Why do you think that the approaches of these two spiritual luminaries differed so widely? And why do you think that the Buddha encouraged his disciples to leave the world while Ramana encouraged them to stay where they were?

JG: In a way, there's a very simple answer to this question, which is: I really don't have any idea!

AC: *Fair enough.*

JG: But again, it really goes back to what renunciation means. As you were summarizing Ramana's teaching—encouraging his disciples to look in and to see where the attachments are and to let go of them—I see that as not very different from what the Buddha did. He saw renunciation as a way of creating skillful conditions to do exactly what Ramana was saying to do. So, again, I wouldn't make this huge division.

AC: *It's an important question, though, because many people easily get fixed ideas about what enlightenment is. At least with these two men, most agree that* whatever *it is, these guys are bona fide examples of it. So, even though the Buddha did have lay disciples who were enlightened, he obviously put an emphasis on leaving the world, whereas Ramana really did not. And the Buddha got into a lot of trouble for all these guys running off and leaving their families—running away from their worldly responsibilities in order to live the holy life. He created quite a stir and a lot of people were upset. So it begs the question:* Why *did he do it?*

JG: It is leaving the lay life for one of greater simplicity, not for some self-centered motive, but for most, it is to develop a deeper wisdom and compassion that can truly help the world. I think there's also a growing appreciation in our own culture for the value of simplicity and for disengaging from the treadmill, even for short times. Living in the India of Ramana Maharshi, and I know this from my own time in India, was a pretty simple, quiet life. And although I'm not totally living that way now, it's very appealing to me. So when I think of the simple life of monks and nuns, in the way the Buddha taught, it seems delightful. ■

Quotations from: Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry,* Bantam Books, New York, 2000, p. 228; *Insight* Magazine, "To the Forest for Refuge," Fall 1998, pp. 3-6; *The Pali Canon,* Sutta Nipata: I.12 Muni Sutta (The Sage) and III.1 Pabbaja Sutta (The Going Forth), Handful of Leaves CD-Rom version 2.0, 1999; *WIE* Issue 11, "Maybe Angels: A Confluence of Imagination and Rational Inquiry" an interview with Rupert Sheldrake, 1997, p. 66; Andrew Harvey, *The Return of the Mother,* Frog Ltd., USA, 1995, pp. 28-30; David S. Ariel, Ph.D., *Spiritual Judaism: Restoring Heart and Soul to Jewish Life,* Hyperion, New York, 1998, p. 9.

YE: I can understand why this approach is popular these days. And if someone has not been exposed to a Torah approach, then it can sound very good—the whole world is open. People are searching, and that's good. But if you're wandering too long, you can get lost.

Where does the uniqueness of the Jewish people begin? It begins when God came down into the world and gave us the guidebooks. He said, "*Kinderlach*,* you want to live a good life? This is what you have to do. Choose Life." This is the doctor saying, "If you don't want a heart attack, do this." Thinking, "I know better than God" or, "My heart will tell me what to do and I *know* it's right because it feels so good and it feels so right. . . ." Well, the Torah tells us otherwise.

WIE: *The Jewish tradition teaches a path of full engagement with the world. But if we are very involved with the things of the world, it seems like it could be easy to become lost in a materialistic or mundane relationship to life. If we want to devote ourselves to the spiritual pursuit—to realizing oneness with God—isn't it necessary for us to find a way to "be in the world but not of it"?*

DE: That's where the *tzaddik* comes in. God has given us great leaders and they point us to the Torah, where all the directions are. And if you follow the Torah with joy and happiness, the mundaneness of the world just melts away.

YE: If we're not sensitive to the reality of the world, then we can easily be lost.

Hassidism gives a two-step approach to dealing with the world: *escafia* and *habcha*. This concept can be explained on a very simple level. If you have two pieces of cake in front of you, *escafia* would say: Eat the one that you like less. You're demonstrating your control over your desires in a very practical way. The next level is *habcha*, to take *everything* of the world and transform it into good. Not so easy. Ultimately, the level of *habcha* is to take the one you like the best and use the extra energy that comes from the happiness you feel to study more and do more *mitzvot* and give more charity. But that's a level of devotion that doesn't come easily—where you're taking what is in the world and elevating it.

WIE: *How do you cultivate that level of devotion?*

YE: By constantly being aware of the world and of yourself. You have to look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Am I serving God in the

*children

way that God wants? Am I able to really make a difference in the world?" Did I thank God with a blessing beforehand and a blessing after, when he gave me something? How many times is a person going to give us a gift if we don't say "thank you" afterwards? The *mitzvot* that we have are not given to us to make us good people. We *become* good people by doing them but that's not *why* we do them. We do them because it makes us godly people. When we do the *mitzvot,* we are connecting to God.

WIE: *Would you say that it is really* through *observing the commandments—through fully embracing life in the world—that a Jew will find true spiritual fulfillment?*

DE: You know, in the time of the Temple in Jerusalem, the holiest man in the world was the High Priest. And to be the High Priest, he *had* to be married. If he was single, he couldn't be the High Priest. It was a law. Why? Because if you have a wife and children, then you really know what to pray for. If he wasn't married, he could never reach that spiritual level; that level of holiness only comes from being in a family—then you really pray for the right things.

The world looks upon holiness as withdrawing from the world. The *fakirs* in India, they go up on a mountaintop, clothed in a sheet and eat only a handful of beans a day and a cup of water. These people, they are great men, involved in such meditation. But what does God need their thoughts for? If they came down from the mountain, they could do so many good things for all the starving people. They could help feed the people and find jobs for the people; they could use their abilities to help. They are wonderful people and I wouldn't criticize them at all, but that's not Judaism. They're withdrawing from the world, and God has enough angels in heaven—he doesn't need our thoughts.

We are on an anti-poverty campaign in Springfield where I live. People who never had a suit of clothes, we give them a coat to wear when winter comes. Then we find people who are spiritually starving. The average person in Springfield has never seen the Sabbath! Never lived that commandment! That's true poverty—spiritual poverty. So we invite them down, we show them the Sabbath, we sing with them, we dance. We do anything just to lift them out of that kind of poverty. ■

Quotations from: David S. Ariel, Ph.D., *Spiritual Judaism: Restoring Heart and Soul to Jewish Life*, Hyperion, New York, 1998, p. 9; Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality: A Seeker's Guide*, Random House, New York, 1999, p. 70.

and more popular, blurring the lines between what is considered to be spiritual and what is considered to be secular. In her recent book The New American Spirituality, *Elizabeth Lesser writes, "The bliss of the world is no less spiritual than the bliss of transcendence," and goes on, "We can indeed 'follow our bliss' as we follow the spiritual path, whether that bliss is . . . reading a holy text or running a marathon." So my question is: Are the proponents of this new spirituality on the right track? In the end, what exactly is the difference between a holy life and a worldly life? Is there any difference at all?*

TB: What they say is, in a sense, true. If, in running the marathon, you feel that the force in you which permits you to run is from God, the ground which you are running upon is from God, and the breath which you inhale and exhale is from God, then this experience is indeed more important than reading the Bible in vain. But they're not teaching this, you see. What they say is taken from the scriptures; it's true. But their intention, by saying that a marathon is equal to the Qu'ran, is to abolish the Qu'ran. Their premise is right, but their actions and their intentions are wrong.

You see, there is nothing new in the world. But they think that because we're living in the twenty-first century, things have changed. Nothing has changed. The same thing is valid now as was valid for the caveman, except, of course, that life was simpler. Life became more complicated, but we still have the same sized brain. And we have the same good and bad, right and wrong, sweet and bitter, dark and light—everything has existed for a long time. The camel became the airplane, but everything is the same. At the time of Jesus, all these problems that we have today existed. Read the Bible. The villains were there. The thieves were there. The murderers were there. The politicians were there. Everybody was there, doing the same thing! So what makes people think that new solutions have to be found? What makes them think that they know better than Jesus? They're arrogant, and that's the problem.

WIE: *Would you say that in the Islamic teachings, our daily lives in the world are sanctified through our ongoing voluntary submission and surrender to the will of God?*

TB: It's not as simple as that. Submission, yes, but *cognizant* submission. Not blind submission. That's the difference between the orthodox and the mystic. The orthodox *blindly* submits, and in blindly submitting, imagination may intervene. While the Sufi, the mystic, tries to *understand* and submit, and therefore taste what he is eating. The orthodox eats at McDonalds and then goes to a French restaurant and eats beef bourguignon. To him, it's the same thing. He doesn't taste it, he just submits, he eats. But the Sufi chooses. The hamburger tastes bad and he recognizes that, so he goes and eats the beef bourguignon. He tastes his religion and he understands what he's doing. He submits willingly and knows that one thing doesn't taste good and the other does. That's the difference.

WIE: *In the "new American spirituality," instead of that kind of cognizant submission to a higher authority, many people are speaking about* self-*authority—where it is up to* us *to pick and choose as we see fit from among the world's wisdom traditions, to find our own methods and spiritual practices that suit our lives in the world.*

TB: There you go *kaputski*. There you go crazy. There you go arrogant. You're saying: I know better than God. I know better than Jesus. I know better than Moses. I know better than the sheikhs. You see, we are forbidden to say "my." We are forbidden to say "me." This is *my* idea. This is *my* concept. This is *my* right. This is *my* wrong. Forget it, it's just anti-discipline. This is self-glorification, making your own self your God. And that's deadly. And those people, they die. They're living zombies. They live this life with imagination, with no concept of truth, no concept of reality. They live in their imagination, and they die in their imagination and they will wake up when they die and say, "Oh, my God, what have I done to myself?"

For 6,000 years in Judaism, for 2,000 years in Christianity, for 1,500 years in Islam, hundreds of thousands of saints and spiritual teachers have devoted themselves to this, and they have found and refined the relationship of the human being to the world, to life, to the hereafter. And here comes this man or this woman who studies a little psychology, a little philosophy, and rejects the whole thing. Millions of people, intelligent people, devout people, have made this their specialty. We are living in a period of specialty, but those people were super-specialists. And their documents are here, their words are here, their principles are here. It's not even worth discussing.

May Allah help these people. That's all that I can say. And may Allah forgive them.

WIE: *I have one last question. At what point on the spiritual path are we ready to be of service to the world?*

TB: At the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. This is in the Qu'ran. Allah said that "I have created man so that he can make *ibadat* to me." *Ibadat* means "service." But it also means "worship." So the true worship is in service. Allah said that "I have created man so that he serves me." But God doesn't need service. On the contrary, he is *our* servant. Every minute of our lives, we are being served. I inhale; he makes me inhale. I exhale; he makes me exhale. He brings me coffee; he makes me drink the coffee. Twenty-four hours a day, to all of us—from the microbe to the highest specimen of this creation—he's in continuous service. So what does he mean when he says that he has created human beings so that they would serve him? In short, he means to serve his creation. If we are the supreme creation, then we have to serve those in creation who are like us, who are in need, or who are under us. That's the purpose of our creation.

So as I said, service should be from the moment you are born until the moment you give your last breath, but you have to find out in what way. That's what's most important. We have to find out in what manner we are supposed to serve.

WIE: *Based on everything you've said, it seems that in the Sufi view, the ultimate expression of our spiritual lives is found in the world. I wanted to ask you about this because in some of the great traditions, East and West, they say that what we are looking for is found in the afterlife or in some future birth.*

TB: No. Hell is here. Paradise is here. Everything is here. ■

Quotation from: Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality: A Seeker's Guide*, Random House, New York, 1999, p. 30.

Fr. McNamara **continued from p. 96**

into the desert (let's use the desert as a symbol), they become the best possible witnesses of the living God. What greater testimony could there be that God is alluring, that God is absolute, that God is demanding? And in so many cases it's a very enriched mind that does that; it's a noble person. Any kind of person who does that becomes a living witness, but the more noble the person, the greater the witness. People say, "God alone satisfies that man or that woman. Nothing but God." And that's worth all the preaching and all the writing in the world—just living that way.

There have been people like that from the beginning, and there will be until the end. They are the people who keep the world from falling apart. It's not the people who are busy all day and all night in offices, on computers, in the hurly-burly of the world, but the people who have a pure heart and who want only God. The overflow of that—its benefit for the world—is tremendous.

My favorite example is St. Anthony the Hermit. He was the first hermit, in the fourth century. He heard a sermon in church that quoted that exact same statement of Christ's that you just read, and he went off to the desert and stayed for eighteen years. Then he came back, and he was alive with love and he had a tremendous effect on people. He was sustained by God, and because of that he just radiated God.

Look at Jesus himself. The apostles would wake up in the morning, and they wouldn't be able to find him because he was out in the desert communing with his Father. Now if *he* had to do that—how ridiculous we are to think that we could pull it off under our own steam.

In all the traditions, it is the great people who take that kind of radical step away from the world. It's not just an individual thing, a private kind of spiritual matrimony with God. It's also an apocalyptic thing. They are willing to wage war with the enemies of God. And they do it first of all by being committed entirely to God, and then, once they make themselves available to him, they are also willing to be sent by him, if he sees fit, into the worst places in the world. All they know is that they have to make themselves available, by going into the desert, and then whatever God does is fine with them. But if they don't take that first step, nothing happens.

WIE: *Many people today feel that the contemplative life, the life of solitude and renunciation, is fundamentally self-centered, merely an escape from the problems of our modern society. Yet both you and the cofounder of your* Spiritual Life Institute, *Mother Tessa Bielecki, have claimed the very opposite—that the contemplative life is the crucial and missing answer to many of the most pressing issues of the human predicament, "perhaps the only hope for the future of our endangered planet," as Mother Tessa says. Could you explain why you view the renunciate or mystical life not as a flight from the world's problems but rather as the best way to get at the essence of what ails the human race?*

WM: The reason a human being renounces the so-called world in pursuit of the contemplative life is because that person not only accepts responsibility for him- or herself, but they are literally in love with the world, and they are convinced that by moving into solitude, they move into the heart of reality. And from that God-centered place, deep down

The Gateway Experience

In-Home Training Series

NORMAN CARTER

The Gateway Experience In-Home Training Series evolved directly from The Monroe Institute's world-renowned Gateway Voyage. Thousands of people have journeyed from around the world to attend the highly acclaimed Voyage or another of the Institute's six-day residential programs. Given the popularity of these life-enhancing programs, it is easy to understand why the Gateway Experience is widely considered the preeminent in-home course for developing, exploring, and applying expanded states of awareness. Indeed, like the Voyage, the Gateway Experience has attracted loyal participants from all walks of life and from every corner of the globe.

Wave VII is an *odyssey of self-discovery* and, as such, is aptly titled *Odyssey*. The name implies an extended adventurous voyage, an intellectual or spiritual quest. Certainly, by this definition, the entire GE program may be considered an odyssey. Wave VII is also a milestone in this regard, as prior to its release GE enthusiasts were not permitted an opportunity to work with Focus 21 (the bridge to other energy systems). The extraordinary states of awareness made possible in Focus 21 had previously been reserved for the Institute's residential programs.

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On an individual level, it may be observed that the universe works with impeccable timing in matters related to personal growth and spiritual development. Untold numbers of individuals, for example, have been guided to attend Institute programs at what may be considered the most appropriate time. Similarly, we were guided to release Focus 21 exercises with Wave VII to be used for the first time outside Institute programs.

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—from the Foreword to *Wave VII–Odyssey*

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in the universe, in the real—from that prayerful center, they believe that they can touch and uplift everyone in the world to some degree. So what they are seeking is more reality, more communion, more salvific human activities that will help the whole world. They are not primarily trying to perfect themselves or sanctify themselves, because only God can do that, and only the exigencies of life can do that, when one is responsive to them and therefore allows God to break through.

There's absolutely no selfishness in the life of a genuine monk, a genuine contemplative. No, they are called by God to make themselves present to him so that he can use them for the benefit of the world.

WIE: *Many people today feel that the whole concept of renunciation and monasticism is outdated in the modern world, based on values that are world-denying, patriarchal, and which imply a false split between the world and God, between the body and the spirit. What would you say to those who feel that we need a new form of spirituality based on a total integration of the worldly life and the spiritual life?*

WM: Certainly your whole life is your spiritual life. There is no doubt about that. We do have to integrate every aspect of our lives into the center, into the god-spirit that permeates and sustains us. But it is obvious to me, and should be obvious to everyone, I think, that the monastic life, if properly understood, is the most conducive way to achieve this end. Because the monastic life *does* integrate them. It provides the most balanced possible life, if it's genuine.

For example, our own life in the Carmelite order I started is the only instance I know of where there is a marvelous cooperation and balance between man and woman, between solitude and community, between work and play. That has always been the purpose of monastic life, to provide the most humanizing set of circumstances or conditions so that God is free to sanctify the human being and then to act, through the human being, on the whole world. I think that because people don't understand the real meaning of monastic life, they falsely see a separation. The whole purpose is to unite and to integrate everything, but on a deep level. There are a lot of shallow, superficial efforts in that direction today, but they are kind of juvenile and transient; they're passing fads. Whereas the monastic life is so essential and so substantial that it goes right to the heart of the human being and the human world, and there unfolds effectively.

WIE: *Why do you think it is that there are now so few people interested in the kind of life that you have undertaken?*

WM: I think that most people in this modern age are seduced by the workaday world. The average human being is being deceived by hyper-activity, feverish activity. It's dispersed human energy. It is not hitting the target. It is not uplifting the world. It's just a roundelay of repetitive mechanisms, over and over again, with no final end.

George Santyana, the great Harvard professor, said, "A fanatic is one who, having forgotten the end, multiplies the means." And that's what we're all doing. Where are we? We don't know. Who are we? We don't know. We're just

busy. And that embarrasses us, and so we keep doing more things to cover over the embarrassment, the emptiness, the hollowness of our lives. So given the condition that we're in, we shy away from the contemplative life.

WIE: *Do you think that is also partly because the predominant message in the spiritual world right now seems to be that you* can *do it in the midst of the world, in the midst of your work and your life? Does this message help to blind people to what you were just speaking about?*

WM: Yes, and that's so seductive because it's half true. You *can* do it in your present circumstances and conditions, but *not* unless you take radical steps for transformation. And so people say, "Oh yes, we can do it in these circumstances and conditions, *if* . . ." But they never follow up the "if." They never introduce those measures, those disciplines, those habits of life that will make it possible. So ultimately it's possible, but existentially it's not possible because no one is doing what it takes to make it possible.

WIE: *It seems that even those people who do have a genuine passion and interest in spiritual life often don't consider the step of monasticism. I wonder if that's also partially because it has been denigrated in our modern society.*

WM: I've given retreats to a lot of people who are totally dissatisfied with their way of life, but they don't have the gumption, they don't have the bravery, they don't have the heroism to change it. They know it's killing them. They feel like robots, automatons, but they don't have the courage to change. It would mean stepping out of that rat race, taking a stand against that whole current. It's a lonely, heroic thing to ask of anyone, and so people won't do it.

WIE: *I have one last question. As a spiritual practitioner, I know that it can be quite a shock to come back into the world after a period of time in seclusion, and I'm sure that that is even more true for someone who's spent as much time as you have in solitude. I was curious what your experience is of spending time out in the world. What do you see when you walk out into this modern society?*

WM: I guess I see two things, progressively. One is that I'm more and more aware of the unreal aspect of what I go back out into, as opposed to the ideal situation in which I live. The noise, the frenzy, the lack of meaning in things. For instance, the expressed, articulated relationship of creature to Creator is not obvious. It's not there, or at least when it's there, it's smothered, it's submerged. I never hear anyone refer to God except by profane language. It's all very remote, and it's all very separate. People have somewhere a spirituality, they have somewhere a religious duty, and it's pretty conventional. They go through it on Sunday. So I feel all of that right away when I enter the world. I feel a sense of, "I'm an alien." And there's a sadness with that.

On the other hand, despite all that, because of some kind of awareness of God that has become habitual, I sense his presence *more* in the turmoil. But at the same time it's kind of a "negative presence." I don't mean that he's absent, because he's not absent. I sense *our* absence, not the absence of God. I perceive and appreciate God in an alien world. ■

future Buddhas had to depend upon a master who could guide them to the spiritual path that they could follow in a proper way—where there is the method to liberate. Without a master, there is no way anyone can attain enlightenment.

AC: *How do you feel about the notion of democracy, which is an American ideal, being applied to the path to enlightenment?*

PR: There is no benefit to following the democratic spiritual path. And there is no power that can be established through it. That is the problem. And why? It is not because they have more afflictions like hatred or anger or anything like that—they do have some compassion. But this kind of practice will not bring any result; they are just wasting time.

The main reason is this: one has to receive transmissions and blessings from the lama, the master, from someone who has the experience of what is called enlightenment, otherwise there is no real path. Having a qualified master who really knows how to guide one on the spiritual path becomes a real antidote that liberates one from the suffering of *samsara*. From the enlightened Buddha until the present masters, the enlightened mind has been transmitted from master to disciple. Whenever that transmission takes place, it has to be kept very pure, without breaking any precepts, *samayas*, or words of honor. There has to be a very pure lineage, otherwise there will be obstacles on the path and one will not achieve ultimate realization. If a seed is a little bit rotten, it will not grow.

If someone does not have that clear understanding, that clear experience, that clear realization to guide another, then others cannot really benefit. That is why we have to rely upon someone who has this kind of realization and get guidance through them. Everything depends upon having a qualified master to guide one on the path.

The path that the Buddha attained complete enlightenment by is what he has been giving in all these teachings. This is how he guided the rest of his followers: "If you *do* this kind of practice, then you can have this kind of liberation." In India and Tibet, there are thousands of practitioners following Buddha's teaching and instruction, and they have gotten all kinds of realization and benefit. As we carry through with our spiritual practice, one needs to have some kind of result or benefit or power. Not just a small result or benefit. We need to have the immeasurable benefit of having the ultimate realization of attaining complete enlightenment.

AC: *Would you say that the notion of democratic spirituality is comfortable for the ego?*

PR: Yes, it is comfortable for the ego. They think, "Oh, I have my rights." They think, "I'll just feel comfortable." This is not beneficial. If you have a seed and the seed does not have a very energetic core, even if we plant it, it will not grow to fruition.

AC: *Rinpoche, these days more and more people are practicing Buddhist methods of meditation. Some practice with some understanding of the Buddha's teaching of emptiness—the teaching that all phenomena and experience is ultimately empty and without substance. Other people practice meditation without any understanding of emptiness or appreciation of its fundamental role in the Buddha's teaching. Can dharma practice lead to liberation without*

the practice being grounded in an understanding that emptiness is the basis of everything?

PR: In general, emptiness has many levels. Only thinking or feeling that one is experiencing emptiness doesn't necessarily lead to enlightenment. It is very difficult for someone who does not have any understanding of emptiness, or who is just doing simple meditation, to attain realization. To have realization, one has to have a path that liberates. And liberation means to be liberated from this afflicted mind. So to be liberated from this afflicted mind, one needs to have the antidote. And the antidote is the realization of selflessness, or emptiness of the self and all phenomena. But if one just carries through the practice, then slowly one reaches higher levels of the path, and in that way, slowly, one can have liberation.

AC: *Can spiritual practice lead to enlightenment or liberation from the world without the practitioner* inwardly *renouncing his or her attachment to the world?*

PR: The problem is that one will not release that attachment and will not realize emptiness.

AC: *Because one is still attached to the world?*

PR: Yes. ■

Quotations from: *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin,* translated by Matthiew Ricard, State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 27; *Now,* interview with Penor Rinpoche by Gordon Laird, June 1-7, 2000; *WIE* Issue 1, "To Keep a Precious Jewel," January 1992, p. 8; Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry,* Bantam Books, New York, 2000, p. 228; Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality: A Seeker's Guide,* Random House, New York, 1999, p. 70; *The Pali Canon,* Sutta Nipata: I.12 Muni Sutta (The Sage), Handful of Leaves CD-Rom version 2.0, 1999; Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher,* AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 1998, p. 137.

> *this befits you not," may now do what we wish and not have to do what we do not wish. (D II 162)*

It is quite clear that, in the Buddha's day, it was only the select few who could cope with the lifestyle demanded of them, yet such a lifestyle had to be adhered to if liberation were to ensue. Liberation does not, after all, come easily. Perhaps it is not surprising if, since the Buddha's day, there has been a decreasing number of those able to endure such rigor, and the history of Buddhism is such that, over the centuries, it has tended to become so relaxed that it is today difficult to find any monk whose lifestyle even approximates to the former ideal, most having abandoned the middle way in favor of a lifestyle more akin to that of the materially minded religious elite against whom the Buddha and his contemporaries had been protesting.

Much of the blame for this, no doubt, lies at the feet of those who have seized upon a very short, and somewhat obscure *sutta*, known as the Kalama Sutta, in which the Buddha admonishes his followers to reject evil and unwholesome states only when they themselves know them to be such, and not to be misled in such matters by hearsay or tradition, or by the status of whoever is speaking of them. Though nothing of the sort, this little *sutta* has been seized upon, almost as a godsend, by modern lay Buddhists in the West, who have seen in it a charter for rejecting whatever aspects of the Buddha's teaching they do not personally approve of. Thus we find such "Buddhists" these days claiming that there is no need to believe in rebirth, despite the fact that it is central to the Buddha's whole teaching, or to adhere to any of the rules which do not appeal to them.

This is, of course, not merely a modern phenomenon, for even in the Buddha's day, some monks, it seems, took to eating in the evening as well as in the morning and during the day, maintaining that they had not seemed to have suffered any disadvantage thereby. (M I 474) At this the Buddha is somewhat outraged—if such an enlightened and passionless being can be—and insists that it is simply not open to the monk to decide that he will or will not do this or that aspect of the teaching as and whether it suits him:

> *For a disciple who has faith in the Teacher's instruction and lives in unison with it, monks, it is a principle that: "The Teacher is the Lord, a disciple am I, the Lord knows, I do not know." (M I 480f)*

And whilst monasticism is still prominent in many Asian societies, Buddhism has, at least in the West, become not only by and large an essentially lay movement, in which practice, which once used to occupy every waking moment, is now relegated to a part-time hobby, but also one in which its practitioners feel justified in picking and choosing out of the Buddha's teachings only those with which they feel comfortable.

If the price of liberation was so high, even during the lifetime of a living Buddha, one can only wonder to what degree of spiritual success such watered-down practices are capable of leading. For in another *sutta,* when asked whether the whole world, one-half, or one-third of it will escape the perils of *samsara,* Ananda, the Buddha's constant companion, replies that it is not a matter of urgent concern to the Buddha as to how many will escape the perils of *samsara;* what he says is simply that all who have done so, are doing so, or will do so, do so only by following all of the practices that make up the path he has laid down for them. (A V 194f)

Back in the fifth century B.C.E., however, most of the Buddha's converts were more resolute in their determination to secure for themselves the supreme prize, of which they had already had a preview, or foretaste, during the course of the progressive talk. For these there could be little fear of backsliding and reverting to the lay life, with all its attendant ills, however great the temptation. And in some cases that temptation was one of great magnitude. We are told, for instance, that Ratthapala (M II 55ff), a young man of good family, encounters the Buddha, comes under his spell by means of his progressive talk, and, as a result, judges the household life too restricting for living the holy life and so decides to shave off his hair and beard and go forth into the homeless life of the monk. However, he is told by the Buddha that he must first secure the consent of his parents. This they refuse to give and, moreover, not only try to dissuade him, extolling the virtues of a life given over to sensual pursuits, but also attempt emotional blackmail:

> *You, dear Ratthapala, are our only child, dear and beloved, you live in comfort and are well cared for; you, dear Ratthapala, do not know anything of suffering. Get up, dear Ratthapala, eat and drink and amuse yourself; eating, drinking, amusing yourself you can enjoy diverting yourself with sense-pleasures and doing meritorious things. We do not consent that you should go forth from home into homelessness. If you were to die we should be desolate without you. How could we, while you are living, consent to your going forth from home into homelessness?*

Ratthapala is, however, quite un-

impressed, and:

> *Not receiving his parents' consent, lay down there on the bare ground and said: "Here there will be death for me or going forth."*

At this, his parents solicit the help of his friends, who at first also seek to discourage him but, in the process, realize the obstinacy of his resolve and successfully persuade his parents to allow him his wish—which they do on the condition that he come back and visit them at a later date.

Ratthapala goes forth and in the course of time attains liberation. Then, remembering his parents' former stipulation, he asks leave of the Buddha to visit his parents, whereupon:

> *The Lord with his mind carefully reflected on the venerable Ratthapala's reasoning of mind. When the Lord knew that it was impossible for the venerable Ratthapala, throwing off the training, to return to the secular life, then the Lord spoke thus to the venerable Ratthapala: "Do now, Ratthapala, that for which you think it is the right time."*

It is perhaps worthy of note that such permission was granted only when it was clear that the proposed return visit to the family circle would not result in Ratthapala's defection. Ratthapala arrives outside his former home and is seen by his father. But his father seemingly does not recognize him as his former son and, clearly still smarting with disaffection for the Buddha and his followers, not only refuses him any almsfood but also abuses him saying, "Our only son, dear and beloved, has gone forth amongst these shaveling recluses"—which must call to mind the negative connotations of such expressions noted earlier. At this point the family slave-woman emerges from the house intending to throw out the previous evening's barley-gruel; but at Ratthapala's suggestion (which in fact contravenes the rule of silence during an almsround—cp PS 159) she instead tips it into his almsbowl—and as she does so, she recognizes his hands and feet and voice. She informs his mother of his return and so overjoyed is his mother that she renders the slave a freed woman. Ratthapala is subsequently approached by his father saying:

> *Can it be, dear Ratthapala, that you are eating last evening's barley-gruel? Surely, dear Ratthapala, you should come into your own home?*

Ratthapala replies:

> *Where, householder, is there a home for us who have gone forth from home into homelessness? We are houseless ones, householder. I did come to your home, householder, but I received neither alms there nor a refusal, all I received was abuse,*

adding that in any case he has done with eating for the day. Ratthapala's reply may strike us as both somewhat haughty and unnecessarily cold-hearted, but we should not forget that, in his eyes, he is no longer the man's son. That son died on the day he was reborn a spiritual son of the Buddha, and he is, like the traditional Hindu *sannyasin* [renunciate], breaking the rules by returning to his former home. Or perhaps it is because he foresees that his father is already plotting an attempt at "deprogramming" him, for having invited Ratthapala for a meal on the following day, he both hides a huge pile of gold behind screens and also summons Ratthapala's former wives, charging them to adorn themselves with things once liked by him.

In due course Ratthapala enters and seats himself in readiness

for the meal, whereupon his father draws back the screens and says:

> *This, dear Ratthapala, is your mother's wealth, the other is your father's, the other your paternal grandfather's. It is possible, dear Ratthapala, both to enjoy riches and do meritorious things. Come you, dear Ratthapala, throwing off the training and returning to the secular life, enjoy riches and do meritorious things,*

a suggestion that demonstrates that he is completely unaware of there being anything to the Buddha's teaching other than its exoteric form [with its focus on the accumulation of merit through doing good works] and thus why it is impossible that Ratthapala, no longer his son, can revert to his former identity. Ratthapala responds by stating that his father would be best advised to dump the whole lot in the river Ganges.

Unwilling to concede defeat, his father then brings in his former wives, who take him by the feet and ask him what kind of nymphs he hopes to secure by living the holy life. Ratthapala, in denying this to be the goal that he seeks, addresses them as "sisters," at which they fall down fainting. He then turns to his father saying:

> *If you would give food, householder, then give it—but do not annoy us!*

and then finally, following the meal—and just to show that the attempted deprogramming has failed—he utters the following verses:

> *See the pranked-out puppet-shape,*
> *a mass of sores, a congeries,*
> *afflicted, much thought of,*
> *for which there is never stability.*
>
> *See the pranked-out form*
> *with jewels and rings,*
> *the bones sheathed in skin,*
> *resplendent with the clothes,*
>
> *The feet dyed with lac,*
> *the face with powder smeared—*
> *enough for delusion of a fool,*
> *but not for the quester of the Beyond.*
>
> *Hair braided eightfold,*
> *eyes with collyrium smeared—*
> *enough for delusion of a fool,*
> *but not for the quester of the Beyond.*
>
> *Like a new collyrium-box,*
> *embossed, is the foul body, adorned—*
> *enough for delusion of a fool,*
> *but not for the quester of the Beyond.*
>
> *The trapper set the snare;*
> *the deer touched not the net.*
> *Having eaten the crop, we go*
> *while the deer-catchers lament,"*

before fleeing to resume his preferred lifestyle of dwelling in solitude in the depths of the jungle. ▪

Peter Masefield graduated in philosophy and religious studies at the University of Lancaster in 1972 and was awarded a Ph.D. in 1980 for his work on oral initiation in the Pali Canon. He has spent considerable periods of time in Sri Lanka and India. He currently teaches at the University of Sydney.

Abbreviations:

A	Anguttaranikaya
D	Dighanikaya
Dhp	Dhammapada
It	Itivultaka
M	Majjhimanikaya
MLS	Middle Length Sayings
PS	Peta Stories
PV	Petavatthu
S	Samyuttanikaya
SA	Commentary on Samyuttanikaya
Ud	Udana
Vin	Vinayapitaka

Citations refer to issues of the Pali Text Society, London

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takes me months to really read and digest the material in each issue and the responses it generates in me. It is important that you include so many perspectives on each topic and leave it to us readers to come to terms with the profound differences expressed.

After I read the "What is Ego?" issue, I felt that there was something missing in the debate. I realized that nowhere was there presented a coherent view of a "real Self" or "divine self" as a component of being human. My concern can best be expressed in terms of the well-known metaphor of the Master in his coach, something I first encountered in Gurdjieff's teaching.

The metaphor describes a human being in terms of a coach, horses, a coachman, and a Master being carried in the coach. The coach itself represents the body, that which carries one through life. The horses represent one's emotions and passions—pulling energetically in different directions unless properly harnessed. The coachman is the ego and, whilst the Master is asleep, it is the coachman who decides where to go. The Master represents the real Self, and cannot play any role in the journeying through life until awakened. Once awakened, it is the Master's role to take charge of the coachman, to tell him where to go and what to pay attention to.

Within this metaphor, there is no point in defeating or killing the coachman (ego), since then one would have a coach and horses out of control. The key task is to bring the coachman under control so that the real Self, the one who has been awakened, can determine where to go in life, what to do, and how to live.

It seems to me that if one does accept the existence of a real Self, then mastery of the ego becomes a practical issue of differentiating one from the other, withdrawing one's identification and investments in ego, and learning to nourish and listen to the real Self.

Jake Chapman
Somerset, U.K.

ZERO TOLERANCE

The "What is Ego?" issue was fascinating and certainly thought-provoking. There is such an odd discrepancy between the psychological and spiritual views of ego, and these interviews really threw that discrepancy into sharp relief. The fact that some of the psychoanalysts had little or no appreciation of spirituality and the possibility of ego-transcendence came as no surprise, but what particularly struck me was the reluctance of many spiritual teachers to contemplate any place at all for the ego in the scheme of things.

I think this is partly due to some confusion. Some teachers talked of the "ego" in terms of physical needs, impulses, and desires—food, comfort, sex, and so on. Yet in the psychological model, this is precisely what the ego is *not*. Rather, that is the *id*, the instinctive, automatic craving for bodily satisfaction and gratification. Finding ways to handle such urges appropriately, according to one's goals (spiritual goals included), is one of the ego's main functions. Ironically, those ascetics who are using their will to overcome such urges are not "killing their ego" but actually strengthening it!

In earlier times, many such teachers saw the material world as the antithesis of the divine. In simple, black-and-white dualism, *physicality* was the root of all evil and the main obstacle to spiritual perfection. To get closer to God, one had to pursue techniques

involving physical self-deprivation and self-abuse. Today most of us would regard such methods as verging on the pathological, and certainly not as the one true path. Yet it has become common now to take a similar zero-tolerance approach to the ego. It is now the mind's sense of self that is seen as the enemy of God, the main obstacle to spiritual perfection.

Contrasting ego with enlightenment certainly helps to alert us to the choice between a life of relative self-delusion and a life of awakening. But to polarize ego and enlightenment so absolutely seems to me like the same old dualism in a new guise: "Enlightenment good. Ego bad. Ego must die!"

An assumption that often goes with this polarized view is that all aspects of selfhood are ego. Any manifestation of an "I" is regarded as a blot on the cosmic landscape, a vice to be eradicated. Seeking to transcend ego for the sake of that Truth is one thing, but confusing one's very presence with ego and egotism is quite another. It is one of those pre/trans fallacies that Ken Wilber talks about: imagining that pre-egoic naiveté is the same as trans-egoic enlightenment. I remember listening to one revered teacher from India telling a large audience, "Freud was a wicked man. Evil!" Why? Because he believed in developing a strong, healthy ego over and above mere instincts and conditioning.

Of course, the ego doesn't know who we truly are at the level of ultimate Reality. It paints a pretty false picture. But that's the game we are all here to play until we come to realize *for ourselves* that there is some other Truth to us, something real that *we* can experience and express more directly. In this vein, perhaps we could rephrase Engler's famous aphorism to: "You have to lose yourself before you can find your Self."

Barry McGuinness
Bath, U.K.

CODDLING THE EGO?

You seem to have an agenda to prove that psychotherapy has no place in liberation. But where does the path to liberation actually begin? If we experience a profound shift in our perspective through the help of a therapist, even though we may still have a primitive view of enlightenment, is it not the beginning? If we slowly, but seriously, become conscious of our intention to be free, isn't that the beginning? Are there only certain kinds of experiences that count as one moves towards liberation?

One of the interviews I found most striking was the one with Jack Engler ["The 1001 Forms of Self-Grasping"], which left me open to possibilities other than "ego vs. true nature." I was struck by the definition of ego as: the "myriad forms of self-grasping." Bingo! This is how we experience ego—the masking of the ideas we have about ourselves. A good therapist *does* challenge one's ideas about oneself. Simply because the tools are different doesn't mean the ego is being coddled!

Janet Crockett
Boise, Idaho

PERSONALITY STUFF? PUH-LEEZE!

The Buddhist ox-herding paintings referred to by Robert Frager ["The Beast on Which the Buddha Rides"] provide my favorite metaphor for relating to the ego. One tames the instinctual nature—one doesn't kill it—and then one rides it home. Prior to taming it, however, we must find it. This means seeing it clearly, exactly as it is. Like many others, I started on the path with naiveté to spare, and thought I had seen my ego clearly when in fact I had refused to see it at all. As a result I was quite stuck. Therapy helped me out significantly. (Perhaps the greatest clue that I needed psychological work was my intense fear and revulsion at the thought of it: "Personality stuff? Puh-leeze.")

Psychological work isn't always an expression of narcissism or New

Age woundology. It can be very helpful in clearing away self-deception and putting our feet on the ground. As the Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee made clear, our buried psychological complexes—what Jung called "the shadow"—are not so much obstacles to our growth as our greatest assets. They contain the very psychic energy we need to go into the depths of ourselves, to penetrate to the hidden heart where God resides. Simply characterizing our wounds and complexes as illusory figments of the ego doesn't transform them, or us. We need to see them and tame them.

Tyee Bridge
Portland, Oregon

A SUBTLE FORM OF DELUSION

In Andrew Cohen's provocative interview with Kaisa Puhakka ["The Transpersonal Ego: Is There a New Formation?"], he asked her to "get out of the way," and speak from enlightened mind, to assume the enlightened perspective. Yet Puhakka's ego/mind is either *literally* out of the way, or it isn't. If it is, then when she speaks of letting go of "the maps" and "the need to know" (and being "the one who knows"), the limitless, unknowable mystery will be transmitted through language and through form, putting us all in touch with the ego-shattering Truth beyond mind. Then again, if a person *isn't* truly coming from enlightened mind, then all that will be communicated is intellectual theory, albeit subtle, elaborate, and even "transcendental" theory.

What I think Andrew Cohen has done in this interview is re-enact what amounts to the creation of the transpersonal view, in which the mind *conceptually* (but not actually) transcends itself and so generates a theory of consciousness that incorporates a conceptual model that seems to include both the manifest and the unmanifest aspects of consciousness—but is, in reality, totally impotent at best, and a source of an incredibly subtle form of delusion or ego at its worst. What Puhakka comes up with seems to "transcend and include" everything, including herself. But it's actually quite blasé and uninspiring to the part of us that deeply recognizes we are already free, and at the same time, totally unthreatening to the part of us that is convinced that we are inherently limited—proving what Cohen said in his introduction: This may be the newest and most dangerous formation of ego yet.

Ernest Mavrides
London, UK

TWO FACTORS OF WHOLENESS

Your Spring/Summer 2000 issue with its theme "What is Ego?" is one of the finest condensations of this subject that has ever appeared in print. Divided, as it was, into three viewpoint sections—the spiritual masters, the integrators, and the psychologists—it presents its subject in a variety of manners, easily digestible and fascinating in its breadth.

Coming, myself, from a spiritual background with an interest in psychotherapy and its perhaps-not-so-obvious connection to the endeavor of self-discovery, it was particularly fascinating to read the interviews focusing on the psychologists vis-a-vis the spiritual masters. Given this kind of psychotherapy and spirituality, East and West dichotomy, I was interested to see if any parallels in approach between the two would be brought out, coming as they do from totally different cultural perspectives. And sure enough I was not disappointed.

Of paramount importance in both the spiritual growth and the psychological integration of the individual is the concept of accepting personal responsibility for one's life. Without this foundation firmly established in the person, no real growth or recovery can take place. At least not for very long; because the person who is not firmly rooted in taking responsibility for his actions in life will eventually have the tendency to undermine whatever growth or recovery has taken place by attempting to place the blame for his predicament on something outside of himself. Henry Stein ["Was Ist Das Ich?"], speaking for the Adlerian school of psychotherapy, pointed this out when he emphasized that there is essentially one person "calling the shots and having an intention. It's not instinct, and it's not something like the universal unconscious that is affecting you. *You* (emphasis added) have *chosen* to do this, at some point." He went on to say that "when people are willing to accept this responsibility, they almost have a sense of being reborn, and the sense of freedom and empowerment is wonderful."

Amrit Desai, in his interview with Andrew Cohen, makes this same essential point when talking about the importance of following the prescriptive and proscriptive injunctions of *yama* and *niyama,* those things which one should abstain from doing and those things which one should practice doing. He points out that when a person is young that person is "driven by fears, insecurities, demands, competition, jealousy, anger, fear, blame, shame, [and] guilt." All these seemingly foreign forces which one can blame as being the cause of his aberrant behavior. These drives, Desai explains, are

different forms of energy which need to be managed, and in the path of yoga "*consciousness* becomes the manager of the energy."

Just as important as the issue of taking responsibility for oneself, and perhaps going hand in hand with it, is the concept of recognizing the fiction of the individual ego. Here, James Hollis, speaking on behalf of Carl Jung's ideology, points out that the ego can come under the influence, or be "possessed" by, different complexes, such as a money complex, a power complex, an aggression complex and so on. For instance, who a person thinks he is can be a complex. One could be poor and therefore have the identity of himself as being poor, and thus display, or play the part of, this fiction he has created for himself in his mind. He identifies so strongly with the part that he invests it with energy, creating a reality where none existed before, since being poor is only a momentary condition. In the next moment, one could win a lottery and the condition (and feeling) of being poor would vanish in an instant.

The Ch'an Buddhist master, Sheng-yen, echoes this sentiment by explaining that "the idea of ego revolves around the idea of attachment or clinging. The ego originally does not exist." He goes on to say that one of the main goals of Ch'an is to get the student to drop the ego, to "put it down" in the sense of letting go of it. This amounts to being able to see through the fiction of the ego that the student himself creates; and in doing so he achieves a level of enlightenment, thus removing one of the major barriers in his way an the path to full enlightenment.

Undoubtedly, realization of these two factors can help to bring about the beginning of a condition of psychological integration and spiritual unfoldment in the individual. It seems obvious, at least to me, that the two disciplines of psychotherapeutic processes and spiritual practices can go hand in hand in the endeavor of creating a condition of wholeness within a human being. One of the main points of spiritual practice is to reach a condition within the individual wherein he can recognize the truth in any given situation and be able to respond spontaneously in the correct manner. This implies that he be mentally and emotionally mature—that he be able to practice the *yamas* and *niyamas* almost without having to think about them. It further implies that for him to be able to do this he must not be under the sway of a chaotic or reactive mind, but must be able to maintain his awareness of the present moment in order to recognize the truth of that moment rather than a fiction created by his unclear mind. The more time he spends in this state the closer he will come to a non-dualistic realization of life.

Ian Allan Andrews
Yuma, Arizona

MORALITY IS THE FOUNDATION

Your latest issue was a nice Easter present. I enjoy your magazine, particularly your willingness to examine the guru-disciple relationship objectively. I lived at Rajneeshpuram in Oregon for three and a half years. The prevalent idea that the guru can do no wrong creates a barrier to really perceiving objectively what is occurring. The quote that you highlight from Osho Rajneesh—"The moment you say 'no' to anything, you have become the ego"—simply furthers this mindless acceptance and participation in corruption and evil ["Osho, Tantra and Ego"]. It is impossible to say a full wholehearted "yes" without retaining the ability to say "no." One is meaningless without the other. Such choices are the basis of morality, and in my experience, morality is the foundation of spiritual growth.

Susan Ananda Star
via email

THE SLIPPERY WAYS OF EGO

Thank you for the beautiful interview with Venerable Master Sheng-yen ["No Escape for the Ego"]. This enlightened Zen master/*bodhisattva* is a pure wind from the East to scatter the clouds of confusion in the West regarding "What is ego?" There is no question for Master Sheng-yen that the ego is an obstacle to enlightenment. This contrasts with Jack Engler's declaration that "you have to be somebody before you can be nobody." In fact, Master Sheng-yen says that it's more difficult for a person with a strong ego to attain enlightenment. But whether one has a strong ego or a "soft" ego, he makes clear that victory depends on one's intention: "They have to have this burning desire to know." His words have the power and authority of one who has achieved victory and now helps others to do the same.

Two of the exchanges in the interview were of particular interest to me. The first deals with a state of false enlightenment—where the ego is elated rather than transcended. The second deals with the danger that can arise from the empowerment of ego that may occur from spiritual experience and could lead to trouble. Master Sheng-yen says that "there are some individuals who think they are liberated" and that therefore they no longer "need any morality." He states that "the Chinese Ch'an masters emphasize the importance of upholding the precepts." These are vital warnings regarding the slippery ways of ego.

I spent time in two Buddhist communities, first at the San Francisco Zen Center, with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, and then at Vajradhatu in Boulder, Colorado, with Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. I spun my wheels for twenty-five years, mouthing the desire for liberation but stubbornly refusing to change. I kept my ego intact. And I was in good company. In both spiritual communities, the "best and brightest" student became the chosen heir of the master. And in both cases, the ego swelled; they became special and separate, and they fell on their faces as a result of sexual scandal. It was a big mess. The fall-out was division in the community, mistrust, cynicism, and a trail of jaded students disappointed in the practice. This treachery is the dark side of ego, of being "somebody."

So I want to express appreciation to *What Is Enlightenment?* for presenting Master Sheng-yen. May the world awaken to this Master's call and allow "no escape for the ego"!

Loring Palmer
Somerville, Massachusetts

GOOD WORDS

I would like to thank you for the wonderful and very necessary work that you are doing. Hildegard von Bingen (a many-faceted German woman mystic who went against the Pope in her time, and was banned for it) said that her job was "to be a feather on the breath of God." You, with the work you are doing, are a feather on the breath of authentic spirituality in the West. The big splashes that you sometimes also make in our little pond are equally necessary and delightfully liberating. We need your voice to advocate real radical enlightenment, rather than the feel-good pussyfooting that so many believe spirituality to be. May you listen carefully and splash a lot for a long time to come.

Eirik Balavoine
Oslo, Norway

I congratulate you on this particular issue of *WIE*. It is absorbing reading, providing enlightening views on various traditions' understanding of the ego. The diligence with which the subject matter was approached, the exhaustive background research, and the selection of interviewees impress me. Thank you again for this worthy publication. May it contribute to a better understanding and awareness of the role of the ego as an obstacle on the spiritual path.

Eamo McGrath
Marlborough, Massachusetts

The experience of my childhood was filtered into and through *Mad* magazine. The experience of young womanhood was filtered into and through *Cosmopolitan* magazine. My experience as an adult was filtered into and through my own journals and paintings, as I could find no publication that spoke to the essence of my experience without exploitation.

It is a true pleasure to have recently discovered *WIE*. The insight, courage, and commitment to do so "simple" a thing as to ask questions and then "allow" such varied answers to be received and presented is . . . revolutionary. Thank you so much!

Stefanie S. Etzbach
Kew Garden Hills, New York

I just discovered your magnificent magazine for the first time on the bookshelves in Perth, Australia. Having built up the largest health club chain in Australia (always seeing them as "new age temples of self-improvement"), you can imagine my delight to find Jack LaLanne and Frank Zane, my childhood heroes, as part of your investigation. Great confirmation!

Thanks for a fantastic publication.

Brian Fletcher
via email

SHORTCHANGING THE DIVINE

I would like to offer the following comment on your recent *WIE* edition on "What is Ego?" The movement of humans from early undifferentiated states of consciousness into individuation has been seen by ancient peoples as a fall, thus such mythology as the Adam and Eve story. I, for one, do not see this as a fall but as a positive movement into a more individuated mental/rational state—but one, nonetheless, that must be surpassed. To see this movement as an error is to shortchange the Divine, as if the Ultimate Reality didn't see what was coming nor know what It was doing. (See Georg Feuerstein's *The Structures of Consciousness*, or Ken Wilber's *Up from Eden* for good overviews of this perspective.)

Here is a relevant quote from one of the spiritual giants of the 20th century, The Mother [Mira Richard] "Individualization is a slow and difficult process. That is why we have an ego, otherwise you would never become individualized. In the end, individualization—and the consequent necessity for the ego—exists for the return to the Divine Consciousness to be conscious and willed, with full conscious participation."

I consider the ego to be part of the self, but not its entirety. When our ego-drives have been "blown out," self-reflexive consciousness continues, until that in turn is also blown out. The ego is a tremendous force of energy. The problem with it is that it is unstable and can direct those forces toward undesirable goals. But I dare say that all of us who have taken up the spiritual quest in earnest initially use all of those ego drives in its pursuit, and this is not a bad thing. The paradox is that these energies only take us part of the way. We eventually end up in what seems to be a dead-end street, which is when we are called to give up the ego altogether. This seeming "dark night" experience demonstrates that the ego can no longer enjoy the energies of its love of the pursuit, and this absence is perceived as a loss. What is lost is not the Divine (how could that be?) but our ego enjoyment of it.

Running through the various articles seemed to be the pervasive sense that the self can give up the self. But the self must continually offer itself to the Divine service, and at some point, the Divine will take up the offer. The whole tenor of the articles seems to make enlightenment entirely dependent on our own effort, as if the Divine was not leading in this dance, but was uninvolved in the whole adventure. I consider that to be nonsense. Our job is to give everything we can all the time to the Divine, and to leave the rest to the Divine.

David Spillane
Chiang Mai, Thailand

MORE THAN ONE EGO

The issue on ego was interesting and provocative as usual. So many of the contributors, and particularly the most "advanced" ones, spoke of the ego as if there were just *one* thing. It was good or bad (usually bad); it was useful or dangerous (usually dangerous); it was strong or weak (usually too strong)—but in all cases it was just one thing.

But if Ken Wilber is right, and I think he has much to contribute on this particular issue, there is more than one ego, and each level of ego has its own problems and advantages. This is my own interpretation, and if it is too far from Wilber, he can complain and add his own two cents worth:

We start off with a "body-ego." It is impulsive and self-centered. It wants what it wants when it wants it. We move on from that into a "membership ego," when we want to be loved and accepted into a family group. We begin to be more in control of our own impulses, particularly if the family reinforces this. The next stage is

the standard mental ego, the bastion of rationality. Here we have lost a great deal of impulsivity. We are our own person, with our own personality and our established roles. But we do need to have our ego supported by the respect and acclaim of other people. This is the typical form of the ego with all its greedy demands for support and its inauthenticity.

After that—if we continue to develop, and this is now a matter of choice rather than social pressure—we enter the stage of "centaur consciousness." Here we acquire a new openness and authenticity. We are spontaneous and creative. We have lost the defensiveness of the earlier stages. This type of ego does not need support, boosting, defending, and so forth. It has a new level of awareness. This is very different from the mental ego, but it is still a single self, with definite boundaries: I am I, and you are you.

With the next level of development, the definite boundaries are lost. We are now not so distinct from the soul next door. We can even share in the same world without needing boundaries. This is still an ego, but a much more diffuse one, which does not insist on its importance. If development continues, we enter the causal world where all symbols and images are lost. We do not need them anymore. We are now in the deep ocean of spirituality; the sacred is not a strange land anymore, but it is where we essentially live. This is still an ego, but it is so much less demanding than any of the previous egos that it may appear at first as though it is not an ego at all. However, it does still have its own demands and limits of a kind.

If we then move on into the nondual, all this purity and quality of essence disappears as it is no longer needed. We are now in that paradoxical state that cannot really be named. It could be said that we are enlightened, except that there is no one there to be enlightened. At this point we can really say that there is no more ego.

This is only a thumbnail sketch. But I think it is enough to suggest that the idea of the ego needs to be more sophisticated than this all-or-nothing character, which appeared so often in your issue.

John Rowan
North Chingford, UK

A LIMITED VIEW OF EGO

Thank you for another excellent issue of *WIE* ("What is Ego?"). One of the most striking things in this issue is that some of the people who are considered to be the most enlightened seem to me to have the most limited view of the ego. Their view can be summed up as, "the ego is the enemy, kill it."

When considering this view of the ego several questions come to mind. How can we ever be whole by killing a part of ourselves? How can we achieve oneness by dividing the whole into parts and then trying to eliminate one of the parts? Isn't wanting to kill the ego (myself) a form of self-rejection and a rejection of reality as it is right now? Isn't wanting to "kill the enemy within" to make life good the same violent philosophy as wanting to kill outer enemies to make life good? Doesn't it seem unlikely that a large part of us, the ego, would have no positive function at all? Is there really nothing to learn from pride, fear, anger, desire, or a thousand other ego states?

Ego-killing philosophies are examples of the overly simplistic good/bad and real/unreal frameworks. "If we kill everything bad then life will be good" and "divine is real and material is unreal." But reality is not only black and white. It is also ten thousand shades of gray. While Yes/No philosophies are simple and therefore appealing, I do not think they are an accurate reflection of reality.

The ego may eventually be outgrown or transcended. And while we can gently cultivate this happening we should not try and kill or deny the ego. It is real and has value even if it is temporary.

Richard Eisenberg
New York

NOT OF THIS WORLD

I really enjoy the deep and serious approach your magazine brings to philosophical and spiritual inquiry, especially in today's materialistic society. It's a voice sorely needed on our mainstream newsstands.

I describe myself as a psychic astrologer who has received a gift: the ability to trance-channel spiritual teachings from a group-entity that has named itself "The Brotherhood of Light Workers." I asked them for their input on the theme of Ego, and here is what they have offered:

Q: *What is ego, from a non-Eastern point of view?*

A: We have not considered this topic yet as it is a non-issue here, but we can see how important it is on earth/in the physical.

Ego, then, is the name for a merging of awareness of innermost drives, nonverbal or cellular feelings and instincts, and conditioned responses to environment. This threefold merger has as its basis a clear way to navigate through the world. Ego is not real, but a structure of loose components, each more real than the name "ego."

Innermost desire is the soul's urges to take form and attempt a new journey through physical

existence. These desires are not so much appetites as they are urges to reach, or complete, a chosen task. The urge must be met or the attempt dies (as does the person). Thus, it is an essential component of life.

Instinct or cellular feeling is different. It reflects feelings, or responses, to the impact of physical being—attraction and magnetism versus repellent and disgust. The third component is: fear of death, fear of dissolution, or removal from form. This component fights for its continuation as thought, idea, and judgment in the face of life's challenges.

Take all three and your merger looks like this: the urge to exist and experience, the fear of not doing so, and the nonverbal reaction to what's encountered. Together, these result in a whole, a person, an ego. Dismantle any one, and you have a partial being (unfeeling, unmotivated, unresponsive)—you have a kind of zombie! But realize each component in its essential and majestic role, and you can transcend your small merger. When the construction is really analyzed, the larger merger breaks apart into its loosely held items, and the ego ceases to be. The illusion of "wholeness" is uncloaked. The inner remains. The Divine remains. The cellular remains. But as a loose-knit complex, not as a *thing*. And understanding dawns—true understanding, not that of the intellect, but that of connection to Spirit.

Judy Thomases
Garnerville, New York

EGO, SELF AND NO-SELF

What follows are the words of Bernadette Roberts, who I believe contributes tremendously to this inquiry. She comes from a Christian contemplative tradition. Her book *What Is Self?* has very helpful insight about ego. She asserts that we must not confuse the ego with the self. After the loss of ego, the "self"—whether it be the Higher Self, Pure Consciousness, Consciousness-Bliss-Being etc.—must move on and eventually fall away just as the ego did previously. Even this Self is impermanent. All that can be said of ultimate reality as it IS, is only that it is none of these things.

"Hinduism's fundamental belief is that the nature of ultimate reality (*Brahman* or Absolute) is Consciousness, and that *Brahman* or Consciousness is the true nature of all that exists. The human experience of *Brahman* is called *Atman* and is characterized by *satchidananda*, or the experience of being-consciousness-bliss. Although no distinction is admitted between *Brahman* and *Atman*, using two terms for one ultimate reality suggests a distinction. The goal in life is to realize *Atman*, realize we are *Atman*, that *Atman* is our true self or true nature. Since *Atman* IS *Brahman*, to realize *Atman* is no different from realizing our true self as *Brahman*, or realizing that the essence and ultimate reality of self is *Brahman* or consciousness. To distinguish between Consciousness as *Brahman-Atman* and consciousness as an illusory, false or separate self (*jiva*, *ahankara*), Hinduism employs the term "Pure Consciousness" for *Brahman-Atman*, and reserves the term "reflective consciousness" for everything man experiences as an individual self.

It seems that Pure Consciousness or *Brahman-Atman* is not held to be disconnected from ordinary selfconsciousness. Rather Pure Consciousness is said to be a higher level of one and the same consciousness, or just a higher level of selfconsciousness. Thus, there is no real break in continuity, or yawning chasm between the divine and human consciousness, the former being a higher level of the latter. At the same time, however, self-consciousness is regarded as an error, an illusion to be dispelled, which would seem to indicate that there is no true connection between self-consciousness and Pure Consciousness.

How we get from one consciousness to the other seems to be a particular Hindu problem. The Hindu regards the realization of his true self or *Atman* (*Brahman* in human experience) as his ultimate enlightenment, while the Buddhist regards the realization of no-self or no-*Atman* as his ultimate enlightenment. The question, of course, is what the Hindu and Buddhist mean by "self" or "*Atman.*" If by "no-self" or "no-*Atman*" the Buddhist only means ego, in the sense of a false self, then there is little difference between these two religions; the difference would only be semantic. But if by "no-self" the Buddhist means no-*Atman* in the Hindu sense of *Atman*, then the difference between these two religions is explosive and enlightening. . . .

Hinduism is right when it says that the experience of Brahman IS self or *Atman*. But what Hinduism does not address is the fact that *Atman* eventually falls away, ceases to exist altogether. Thus the Hindu self is not divine and not eternal; rather, the deepest self is that in man which experiences the divine, but is not itself divine. This means that the divine lies beyond all such experiences, beyond all consciousness and beyond anything that could be called consciousness or self. As it turns out, then, consciousness' most authentic experience of the

divine is NO experience. That we believe our experiences of the divine to be the divine is the final illusion of self to fall away in the no-self experience."
–*excerpted from* What Is Self? *by Bernadette Roberts*

Karl Disley
via email

THE DREAM IS (NOT) OVER
(with significant help from John Lennon)

Thank you *WIE* for a very interesting issue.

Ego is a concept
By which we measure
Our pain
I'll say it again
Ego is a concept
By which we measure
Our pain
Yeah . . .

Ego believes in magic
Ego believes in I-ching
Ego believes in Bible
Ego believes in tarot
Ego believes in Hitler
Ego believes in Jesus
Ego believes in Kennedy
Ego believes in Buddha
Ego believes in Mantra
Ego believes in Gita
Ego believes in Yoga
Ego believes in kings
Ego believes in Elvis
Ego believes in Zimmerman
Ego believes in Beatles
Ego believes in Masters
Ego believes in Alter-Ego
Ego believes in reality.

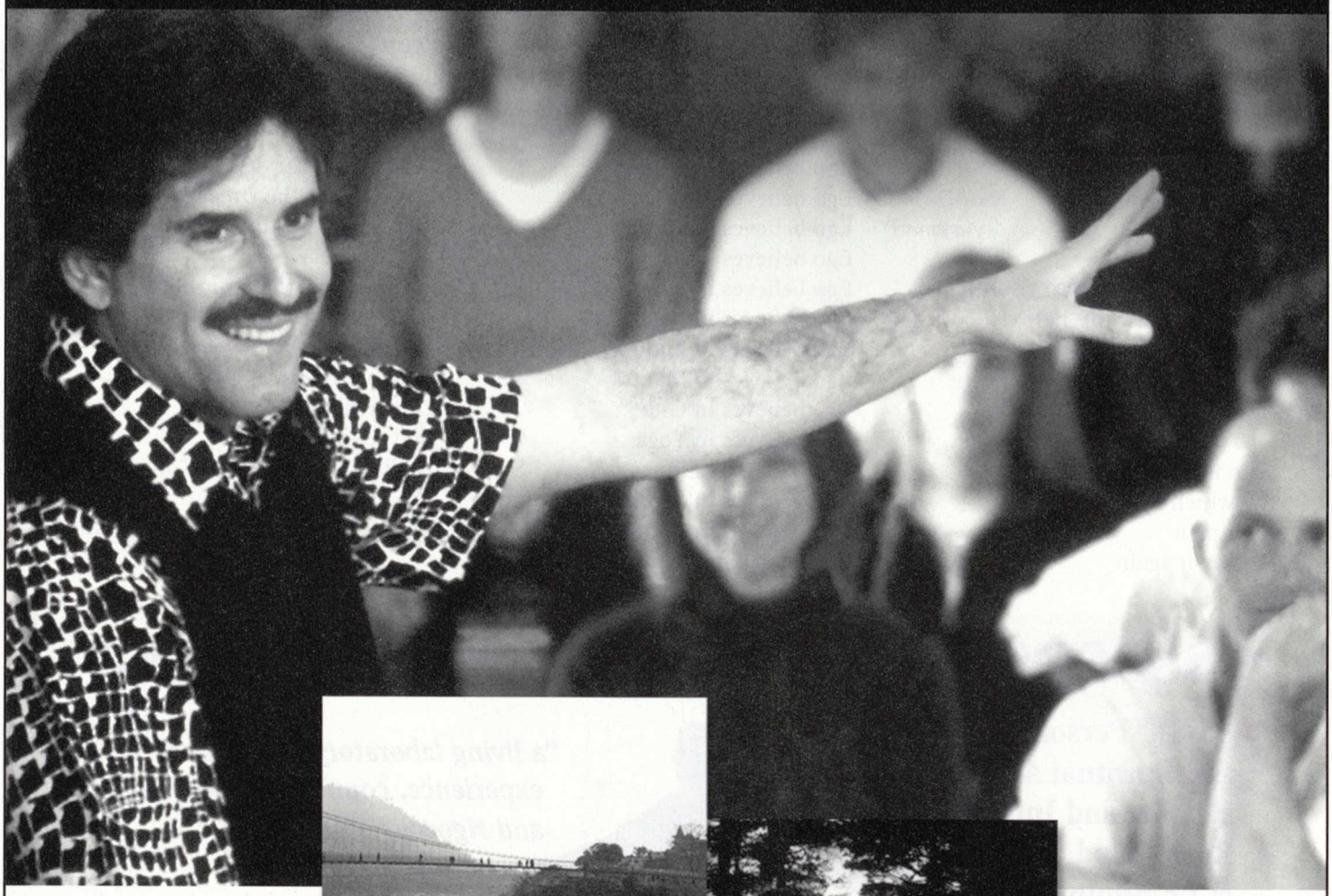
But what is reality?

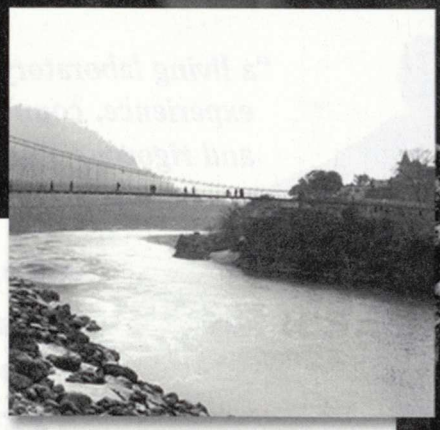
Reality is a tear
In the eye of the Dreamweaver
And who holds the blade and
the spear
But Ego, Ego the Grim-Reaper.

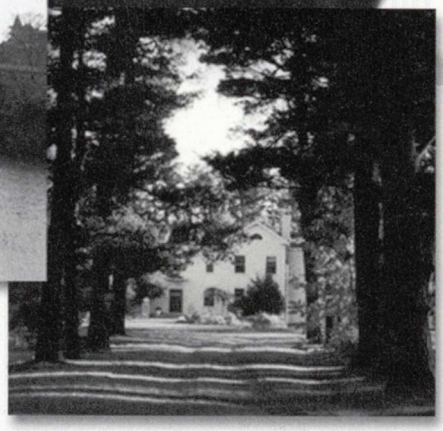
The dream is not over
What more can be said?
The dream is not over
And so, dear friends
You'll just have to carry on
The dream is not over.

D. Laguitton
Sutton, Canada

On Retreat with Andrew Cohen







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