

THE 10,000 DHARMAS RETURN TO THE ONE: A Look at Engaged Buddhism

by Ruth Klein

photo supplied by Fellowship of Reconciliation



Vietnamese Zen Master coming to the US this fall

THICH NHAT HANH will be in the United States from September 20 through early November, sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. He will be staying at the Providence Zen Center from September 20 until October 20. Public talks are tentatively scheduled for Sept. 22, in Northampton, MA; Oct. 3, in Boulder, CO; Oct. 13, in San Antonio, TX; retreat during the week of Oct. 16-20 and public talk Oct. 29 in Ojai, CA; during the week of Oct. 29, in San Francisco Bay Area.

For details of his East Coast schedule, contact Providence Zen Center, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864 Tel. (401) 769-6464. For his West Coast schedule, contact Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704.

(Ruth Klein, a board member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, has a doctorate in counseling psychology and is an artist. She has been a resident of the Providence Zen Center for the past four years and is a Dharma Teacher in the Kwan Um Zen School.)

En route to the Walk for Peace in New York City several years ago, I commented to friends that if I could get along with my Dad for several days, that in itself would constitute a major action for world peace. At the time it was a joke, and yet—who holds the scale to weigh the relative merits of each action? Where does inner work end and outer work begin? Are they different? Engaged Buddhism is grounded in the teaching of interdependence: the Ten Thousand Dharmas return to One.

Buddhist philosophy and practice has a unique contribution to make to the contemporary peace and ecology movements, to the realm of social and political action. At the heart of the contribution is the recognition of non-duality, that one need not perpetuate the patterns of confrontational politics which we experienced in the 60's and still encounter so frequently in today's activists and groups. Ryo Imamura, past-president of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, has noted that whereas peace has been traditionally seen as the absence or oppo-

site of conflict, in the Buddhist sense peace and conflict are one.

The cause of peace is not furthered by laying blame "out there." As Pogo, in the best Buddhist tradition, says, "We have met the enemy and he is us." There is no peace other than that which we experience in the moment; true compassion does not recognize boundaries, be they personal, geographical, or political. Peace does not take sides, does not seek to exclude.

Just as there is no "us" and "them," so there is no "inner" and "outer." Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the most respected teachers of Engaged Buddhism who lives now in France, teaches the need for peaceful means to achieve the goal of peace. Without time set aside for quiet and meditation, "we will lose ourselves quickly in a life of worry and action, and our responses will become increasingly useless."

This emphasis on the means being the end is an acknowledgement of the law of karma, the law of cause and effect. A story is told of Nhat Hanh's response to a painful message about the persecution of Buddhist monks and nuns in Vietnam. The telegram was placed at the base of a statue of the Buddha and, recognizing a need to detach from the situation in order to function clearly and effectively, he withdrew to the forest for the day. In so doing he avoided what Thomas Merton called "a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by non-violent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork." It is necessary, as Nhat Hanh teaches, to know when to "close our windows."

"Psychic numbing" refers to the process of shutting down in the face of vast amounts of suffering in today's world, choosing to become unaware. How can any one of us dare to open to this suffering and risk the feared consequences of living with so much pain? Through Buddhist practice and the development of non-attachment, honoring the law of impermanence, we can learn to open, and to let go; to take in the suffering and not get swallowed by it. Dr Joanna Macy and others teach this in the "Despair and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age" workshops which she developed.

Chakdud Tulku Rinpoche says of the transformative power of awareness: "Tibetan Buddhists use the peacock as the symbol for the Bodhisattva, the Awakened Warrior who works for the Enlightenment of all sentient beings. The peacock is said to eat poisonous plants which it transmutes into the gorgeous colors of its feathers. It does not poison itself, just as we who wish for world peace must not poison ourselves."

There are a number of groups whose major path is that of Engaged Buddhism. Nipponzan Myo Hoji, a Japanese Buddhist subject of the Nichiren order, is devoted to the establishment of world peace through their practice, oftentimes public, of chanting and beating on drums as they walk through the world. They have erected stupas dedicated to peace the world over. The first Peace Pagoda in the Western hemisphere will have its opening ceremony in Leverett, Massachusetts on October 5, 1985.

The Tiep Hien order, composed of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, was founded by a group of Southeast Asian Buddhists as an instrument of their vision of Engaged Buddhism. During the Vietnam war members and supporters of the Tiep Hien order were active against the war, ran many social service projects, and cared for many of those suffering the war's effects.

Many members and supporters died, and today the order continues in France, with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh its most well-known monk.

Started in 1958 by Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, Sarvodaya Shramadana is a self-help movement in Sri Lanka, using Gandhian principles and Buddhist philosophy to channel spiritual awareness into social action in 6,000 villages.

In the United States, there are two organizations representing Engaged Buddhism, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and Buddhists Concerned for Animals. BPF is currently comprised of eleven chapters, with affiliates in England and Australia. Its statement of purpose includes raising peace and ecology concerns among American Buddhists, as well as bringing the Buddhist perspective to contemporary peace and ecology movements. The BPF is non-sectarian and brings Buddhists from many different traditions together with one common purpose, that of realizing world peace and harmony. BPF members initiated or were strongly involved with the full range of activities described below as being representative of Engaged Buddhism. The national office is sponsoring a visit by Thich Nhat Hanh to the U.S. in the fall.

Buddhists Concerned for Animals was established early in 1982, and now has about 2,000 members. They estimate that at least 25% of their membership is not Buddhist, but individuals who appreciate the Buddhist approach to this emotional subject. They were formed to work toward ending the often cruel and unnecessary use of animals in laboratory experiments. BCA launched a landmark campaign aimed at improving conditions in the animal laboratories at the University of California at Berkeley, and is currently engaged in a campaign for farm animal protection. Both BPF and BCA publish informative and thought-provoking newsletters.

The range of actions encompassed by the term Engaged Buddhism are as wide and diversified as are Buddhists themselves:

** June, 1982, members of the Minnesota Zen Center coordinated a 3-day zazen peace vigil in NYC coinciding with the U.N. Special Session on Nuclear and General Disarmament. A sign explained, "We are sitting to be peace."

** Study groups have been established to explore the relationship between lifestyle and ecological crisis; between military expenditures and world hunger.

** Robert Aitken, Roshi, and his wife Anne, are among many to withhold a percentage of their taxes as war-tax resisters.

** Monastics and laypeople from many different Buddhist sects joined in a peaceful public vigil, in 1984, in Los Angeles to protest the arrest in Vietnam of Buddhist monks and nuns from the Unified Buddhist Church.

** The Providence Zen Center, along with many others, endorsed and supported the International Fast for Life.

** Ven. Maha Ghosananda, one of the few surviving Theravadan Buddhist monks from Cambodia, has arranged for five monks in the refugee camps in Southeast Asia to come to the U.S. each month. The first monks arrived in June.

** Celebrating the tenth anniversary of Korean Buddhism in the U.S., Zen Master Seung Sahn hosted the Great Masters

World Peace Assembly in 1982 at the Providence Zen Center.

** Kahawaii, the Journal of Women and Zen, explores issues of Buddhist practice as it relates to lesbians and gay men, rape, abortion, motherhood, and the sexual relations between teachers and students.

At the same time, many actions have been and are continuously made on the personal and interpersonal level. To be at peace with oneself, to not inflict violence on self or others in the form of impossibly high demands and expectations, is the work of Engaged Buddhism, as is developing loving relationships with friends, family, and colleagues. As Chakdud Tulku Rinpoche says, "True compassion is utterly neutral and is moved by suffering of every sort, not tied to right and wrong, attachment and aversion."

We speak of compassion as a quality, a noun, when in fact it is a verb. Engaged Buddhism intergrates meditation and action so that social/political activity is the arena in which to make our practice manifest

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Volume 35, Number 6 December 1984

Attain utmost emptiness;
Hold firm to stillness.
The ten thousand things stir about;
I only watch for their going back.
Things flourish,
But each returns to its root.
Returning to the root is peace.
And peace is a going back to reality.

Lao Tse

In cooperation with the Kwan Um Zen School, we are offering free gift subscriptions to *Fellowship in Prayer*, a bi-monthly publication which explores the spiritual practices and experiences of people from different faiths. Free copies of Herymon Maurer's translation and commentary on the *Tao Teh Ching* will be sent to new subscribers while the limited supply lasts.

Name _____

Address _____
Street

Town _____

State _____ Zip _____

Fellowship in Prayer
134 Franklin Corner Rd.
Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648

**The Path of
Compassion**

A new book of contemporary writings on the engagement of Buddhism and Buddhists in the political, social and economic affairs of our world, by:

Robert Aitken-Roshi
H. H. the Dalai Lama
Ven. Maha Ghosananda
Thich Nhat Hanh
Jack Kornfield
Joanna Macy
Gary Snyder, and others.

Edited by Fred Eppsteiner
and Dennis Maloney.

The Path of Compassion is available by mail for \$9.95 per copy. Postage and handling charges are \$1.05 for one copy and \$.25 for each additional copy.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship
Rochester Chapter
P.O. Box 10605
Rochester, NY 14610.