

## READING MATTERS

**SEEKING THE HEART OF WISDOM, "The Path of Insight Meditation", Joseph Goldstein & Jack Kornfield, 1987, Shambhala, 195 Pages, Paperback, \$10.95.**

*Reviewed by Dhananjay Joshi*

"In the Seeing, there is only the seen. In the Hearing, there is only the heard. In the Sensing, there is only the sensed. In the Thinking, there is only the thought." That's Buddhism in a nutshell. It is both the beginning and end of practice.

I still remember very clearly. Several years ago a very close friend of mine walked in after attending a retreat at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and she was so excited! She said she had just met two most wonderful teachers and she kept referring to them as Jack and Joseph (and Joseph and Jack!). Later on I had the opportunity to meet them both and I understood what she meant. Over the past years, Jack and Joseph have become known as two of the most accomplished and skillful teachers of Insight Meditation.

It is a rather unique blend of teaching styles that they present, but the clarity of teaching is unmistakable. The evening Dharma talks by Jack or Joseph are always a source of profound learning and yet a lively experience with an unending repertoire of humorous anecdotes from various teachers.

We waited a long time for this book. It is a wonderful collection of meditation instructions given during retreats. It is also quite comprehensive in scope. The chapter on levels of practice begins with arriving and observing and opening and leads us to a level of practice where "we begin to see clearly the laws that govern this process of body and mind". It is not easy, but with "gentle effort" we begin to gain insight into things as they are. "We see the undirected emptiness of things, how thoughts come and go, moods come and go... we are not the owners of this process... So, we finally stop. We let go." We learn about difficulties and hindrances in practice. We trick them and become friends with them. There are also chapters on factors of enlightenment, understanding karma, spiritual faculties, three basic characteristics of suffering, impermanence, non-self, and the path of service leading to an integration of practice in our lives with a spirit of acceptance and compassion.

Additionally, meditators will find the practical exercises at the end of each chapter very helpful.

The charm of this book lies in the way Jack and Joseph convey some of the most profound truths of life. They use many stories from the great teachers they have come across. In Sri Lanka, Jack paid a visit to a much-venerated master, Hina Tyana Dhammaloka. After a while...Jack relates, the master asked, "So, you teach meditation, yes?" "I try," I said. "Tell me, what is the heart of Buddhist meditation?" "There is no self," I answered, "...it is truly an empty process". He looked at me and then broke into a great laugh. "No self, no problem" he said, and he laughed and laughed..."

Then there is the story of Zen Master Seung Sahn. One of his students found him eating and reading at the same time and confronted him. He had heard of Zen teachings saying that when you eat, just eat...when you read, just read. What is this? Soen Sa Nim looked up and smiled and said, "When you eat and read, just eat and read."

The entire book is very inspiring. In giving clear instructions on Insight Meditation, what Jack and Joseph have done is shown a way to integrate our practice. Joseph says at one point, "As long as we separate out and

identify with any one part of the totality, we imprison ourselves in the limits we create in that very process. The path of Dharma, of Freedom is to understand and integrate each level of dualism and limitation. The key to doing this is mindfulness and wisdom."

I remember Zen Master Seung Sahn talking about three important aspects of practice: understanding your practice, believing in your practice, and practicing. After reading this book, it is very clear what we all need to do.

**TAKING REFUGE IN L.A., "Life in a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple", Photographs by Don Farber, Text by Rick Fields, Introduction by Thich Nhat Hanh (Aperture Foundation, New York, 1987, 108pp., 11x9 in., 40 B/W photographs, paperback, \$14.95)**

*Reviewed by Bruce Sturgeon*

*Taking Refuge in L.A.* began as a photography project. Don Farber was visiting Chua Viet Nam, the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles. It was January, 1977, a little more than a year after the end of the Vietnam War. He saw children running around playing games, a barber giving haircuts, Buddhist monks and nuns, and a diverse group of people sitting on the carpeted floor chanting together. This slice of "normal" Vietnamese life deeply moved him. From that first roll of film shot that day, a ten-year labor of love ensued.

The most striking feature of this collection of photos are the faces of the people. Don Farber has captured the essential humanness of all peoples in the faces of these Vietnamese refugees. Children, women, men, elderly, monks, and nuns—all evoking emotion borne of displacement, bitterness, and suffering, yet revealing innocence and a serene joy of life.

What are we to make of this, now more than 12 years after the Vietnam conflict? As Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh points out in his cautionary and provocative introduction, the conflict that was Vietnam has not ended. He also says that Vietnam is the suffering of the world.

The faces of these Vietnamese refugees show us the fruit of conflict. They have been forced to adapt to an alien society. The resignation and pain are evident as are the hope and courage of the human spirit. But as Thich Nhat Hanh warns, "The conflict is leading to the destruction of our own planet. When the destruction comes, where shall WE be able to seek refuge, even if with our technology, we become "space people" instead of "boat people"?"

"Ga mot nha boi mat da nhau"— "In order to fight each other, the chicks born of the same mother put colors on their faces." Putting colors on one's own face is to make oneself a stranger among one's own brothers and sisters. And as any soldier will attest it is easier to kill the foreigner, the enemy, than someone who has the face of a brother. Thich Nhat Hanh admonishes that each of us must remove the colors from our faces and be able to say: "I am your brother, I am your sister. Recognize me. We are all of the human kind and our life is one. We shall live or die together."

In the text portion of the book, author Rick Fields illuminates the history of Vietnamese Buddhists before, during, and after the Vietnamese War. Buddhism had its introduction into Vietnam in the first century A.D. when Indian merchants and missionaries arrived by sea en route to China. From then Buddhism enjoyed the ebb and flow of royal patronage and evolution within the monasteries and the hearts of the people. Buddhism's modern troubles began with the incursion of the French colonists and their Catholicism, the Buddhists aligning themselves with the Royal Resistance.

To me, the history during the Vietnam War was one of the most fascinating portions

of the book. Everyone remembers (or has seen footage of) the grim scene which was broadcast on the nightly news of a monk immolating himself. It was July 11, 1963. That act was the first in a long series of events that brought Vietnam (and Buddhism for that matter) into my consciousness and that of all Americans. And, until I read this book, I was under the impression that the monk was protesting the war. Wrong—he was protesting religious repression.

The monk was the Venerable Thich Quang Duc, abbot of Quan-Am (Kwan Seum Bosal) Temple in Gia Dinh. He left a simple note: "I pray to Buddha to give light to President Ngo Dinh Diem, so that he will accept the five minimum requests of the Vietnamese Buddhists. Before closing my eyes to go to Buddha, I have the honor to present my words to President Diem, asking him to be kind and tolerant towards his people and enforce a policy of religious equality."

Increased repression followed and six more monks died in the flames of self-sacrifice before the 20,000 monks, nuns, and leaders of Vietnamese Buddhism that had been jailed under Diem were released. (One of those who died was the father of Dr. Thien-An, the founder of Chua Viet Nam in L.A.)

The five requests? 1) Cancel the ban on flying the Buddhist flag. 2) Grant Buddhists the same rights as Catholics. 3) Stop arresting and terrorizing Buddhists. 4) Allow Buddhists the right to practice their religion. 5) Pay com-

pensation to the victims' families and punish those responsible for eight deaths (seven children) when paramilitary police opened fire on a crowd waiting to listen to a radio broadcast on Buddha's Birthday.

Diem was overthrown later that year, but the Buddhists were too politically naive to take advantage of the situation. Twelve more years of war and repression followed. Eleven nuns and monks immolated themselves in 1966, this time appealing to President Lyndon Johnson, all to no avail. Today the war has ended but a new religious repression visits the land.

Rick Fields also provide us with a cogent look inside the Chua Viet Nam temple in L.A. He attended a retreat there and his description brings to life the atmosphere which the temple creates and the importance of the temple to the refugees.

In closing, let me quote Thich Nhat Hanh once again, "I do not know how much happiness the people of Vietnam have gotten from the importation of Western Civilization to their country, but I know that the amount of suffering they have endured in the past few decades has been beyond measure. Both capitalism and communism are alien to their way of life, yet they have taken the conflict to be their own and learned to look at each other as enemies. Has humankind learned anything from their suffering? I do not know."

READING MATTERS continues on page 13

**Richard Shrobe, C.S.W., A.C.S.W.**

Psychotherapist

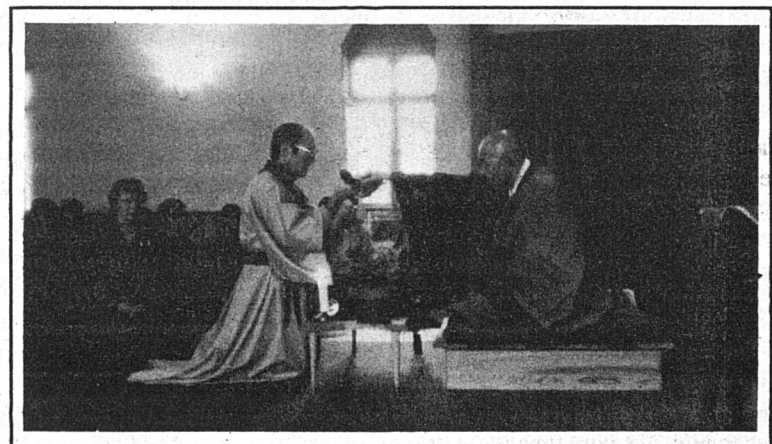
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READING MATTERS

(Continued from page 11.)

**The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration and Meditation—“Ancient Skills for Modern Minds”, Joel Levey, Wisdom Publications \$14.95**

Reviewed by Jon Kabat-Zinn

In this beautifully done book, Joel Levey has skillfully woven together contemporary insights into the value and need for meditation practice in our lives, with a large number of extremely evocative suggestions for making use of different ways to practice relaxation, concentration and meditation.

The first impression of the book is how beautiful it is physically and how satisfying it is to hold in one's hands. Wisdom Publications appears committed to publishing paperback books that embody in their appearance and materials a sense of care, attention and simplicity which is the essence of meditation practice. This is marred only by a number of spelling mistakes and typos which unfortunately were not caught by the proofreader. Nevertheless, it has the same feel as the Weatherhill paperback edition of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, which set a very high standard for how a book on meditation might look and feel.

The quality of the contents lives up to the surface beauty. The author masterfully describes for the reader in succinct introductory chapters of the major sections of the book: (1) the potential value of practicing relaxation, concentration and meditation; (2) what the essence of these practices consists of; and (3) how to apply them in one's life.

Joel Levey clearly has a great deal of experience teaching in a wide range of different settings and this is reflected in the precision and vividness of his instructions in and commentary on the various techniques. He is highly skilled in incorporating multi-sensory

"visualizations" into the instructions and suggestions for practice.

In essence, the book is a compendium of one or two page instructions regarding approximately fifty different meditation techniques from a number of different traditions. Major influences include Theravada and Tibetan teachers. The book is divided into sections on relaxation, concentration and meditation, followed by a short section outlining some application of meditative approaches to handling stress and pain, improving performance in sports, and using visualization and biofeedback. It is interspersed throughout with inspiring and wholly appropriate quotations from a wide range of ancient and contemporary sources and teachers, from Chuang Tzu and the Buddha to Albert Einstein and Henry Ford.

*The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration and Meditation*—“Ancient Skills for Modern Minds” can be used as a practical manual for inspiration and guidance both in deepening and enriching one's meditation practice, and in cultivating particular qualities such as compassion and generosity. As such it will be an especially useful and inspiring book for people who already have a strong meditation practice.

The book's major strengths are the simplicity of the author's explanations of the value of these meditative practices and his clear instructions for how to practice them. If the book has a weakness, it is that the value of disciplined and sustained practice of one method over an extended period of time is not emphasized adequately. In fact, it is not emphasized at all. Thus, the reader who is new to meditation may be somewhat overwhelmed by the sheer number of different techniques offered and might come away with the erroneous notion that doing "a little of this and a little of that" to fine-tune one's body or mind states is what meditation is about or what is required to manage the pain and stress in one's life. In the same vein, the reader who is new to meditation might also tend to be attracted to the visualizations offered to cultivate different kinds of internal experiences and feeling states, and avoid practicing the less sexy, more bare bones con-

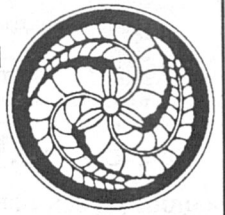
centration and mindfulness exercises which form the foundation for what in this reviewer's mind is the essence of meditation practice, namely moment to moment awareness.

However, these are the inevitable hazards of writing a short book which attempts to span such a wide range of different techniques and traditions. The author clearly states that he is using the word "meditation" to encompass three different types of practice: concentration practice; what he arguably terms "receptive" practice, meaning mindfulness; and "reflective" practice, meaning contemplative exercises to develop particular qualities. He also explicitly suggests that different blends of techniques may be more effective for individuals with different types of problems, although the beginner, again, is left with intuition alone for sorting through the alternatives.

For the readers of "Primary Point", who are for the most part involved in a personal meditation practice, *The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration and Meditation* is certainly a book that they will want to own and consult regularly both for inspiration and for ideas about enriching their practice. It is a real gem. Joel Levey has proven himself to be a highly articulate spokesman for the Dharma in the modern world and I, for one, am looking forward to hearing more from him.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine and director of the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Clinics at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. A long-time student of meditation, he is currently writing a book about his experiences teaching mindfulness in a medical setting.

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**RETREAT**

by Larry Goolsby

During the evening meal of the first day of the retreat, I noticed the other participants intent on their eating, and I realized that I didn't know most of these people. I didn't even know most of their names. I had spent the day with them in silence. The night before, I had slept on the floor in the same room with them, and now I was eating with them in silence.

No one talks during a retreat, so there is little chance to "get to know each other", to ask about each other's jobs, or to inquire about other social aspects of a person's life. In that respect we were still largely before distinction, before discrimination, before opinion, and before prejudice. In the words of Soen Sa Nim (Zen Master Seung Sahn), we had not yet had the chance to form divisive opinions about each other. We were still largely empty in that respect. We had no basis on which to create distinctions and separations. We had no basis on which to discriminate.

So here we all were, just eating. We were just doing these things—eating, sleeping, sitting in silence. We did these things as individuals, but to the degree that we had not created each other through "knowledge" about each other, we also ate, slept, and sat as a group—as one. There was no expressing of opinions, no arguing over religion or anything else. We didn't come to the retreat to do that. We just came to do this strange thing, this practice—this sitting, chanting, and bowing. I decided that if a person is just paying attention, this sitting, chanting, bowing, watching a sunset, and eating are all practice—the practice of being alive in this world. Practice is an expression of

our before discrimination nature, an expression of our true nature, our "human" nature.

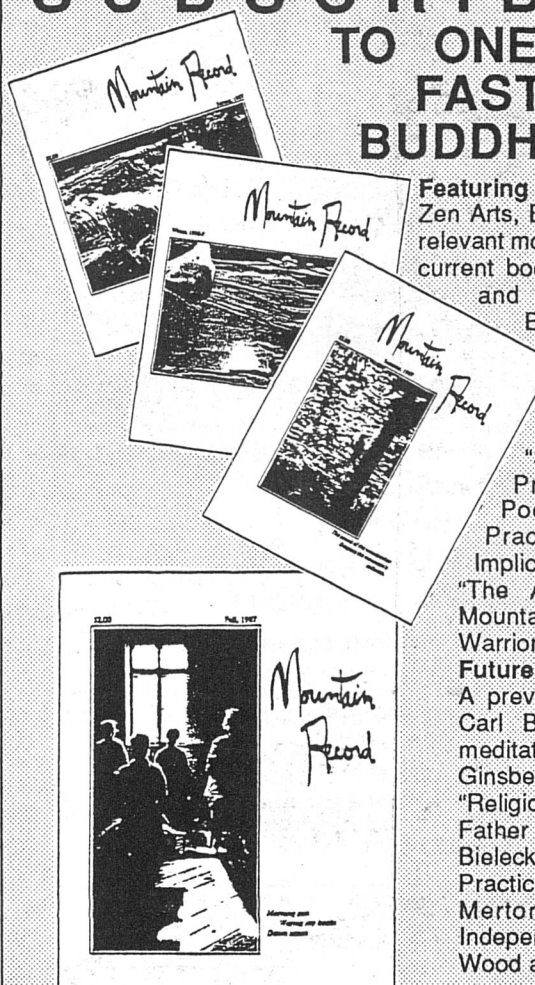
When we are sitting or bowing or chanting or eating, our mind wanders and we bring it back. It wanders again, and we bring it back again. Again and again. Sometimes when we are sitting, we bring our mind back and it is very still for a time. We are home for a while. We are living without discrimination.

It is a strange practice that we have—this sitting, chanting, and bowing. But, it's a strange world. We don't know where we came from before we were born and we don't know where we are going after we die. Nothing is stranger than that.

We are strangers in a strange land—a land of wondrous mysteries and forms arising from emptiness. The mystery permeates all. So we wander through this land of mysterious sights and sounds. Sometimes we practice; we just bow, we just chant, or we just eat. And sometimes we just sit watching our breath, aware of the stillness, aware of the emptiness: we return home. As we sit in the stillness, we may enter samadhi or we may not. We may become enlightened, or we may not. If we enter samadhi, we would still only be home. If we become enlightened, we would still only be home. And somehow, as we sit, with thoughts coming and thoughts going, we are still only home.

Larry Goolsby wrote this article after attending a retreat at the Nashville Zen Center. The article was excerpted by permission from "Paying Attention!", A Publication of the Very Center in Cookeville, TN., Bob Harwood, Editor.

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