

Michael's Tofu with Mixed Vegetables

Marinade:

1/2 cup soy sauce

1/2 cup dry sherry

1/4 cup seasoned Oriental vinegar

1 clove crushed garlic

3 tablespoons brown sugar

2 cakes firm tofu

6 cups shredded Chinese cabbage, bok choy,
kale or Chinese mustard greens

1/4 cup vegetable oil for frying

2 1/2 tablespoons fresh grated ginger

3 tablespoons fresh lime juice

3 tablespoons cilantro

In a small saucepan, bring the marinade ingredients to a boil. Simmer for 2 minutes and remove from heat. Cut the tofu into 1-inch squares. Place the squares in a single layer in a heatproof pan. Pour the marinade over the tofu, sprinkle some of the oil on top, and let it sit for about 20 minutes.

Preheat the broiler. Prepare the remaining ingredients before you start stir frying.

Broil the tofu for 7 minutes, until lightly browned, then turn it over and brown the other side. While it is cooking, stir-fry the ginger, and add the vegetables in 2 tablespoons of oil. When the vegetables just wilt, add the lime juice and cilantro (you could add some nuts), toss in the tofu, and serve.

BOOK REVIEW

Tony Somlai, Original Root Zen Center

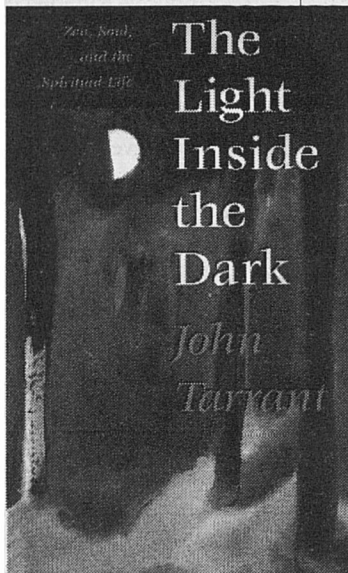
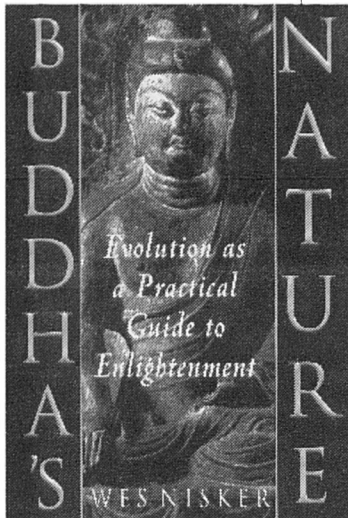
*Buddha's Nature:
Evolution as a Practical Guide to Enlightenment*
by Wes Nisker
Bantam Books, New York

*The Light Inside the Dark:
Zen, Soul, and the Spiritual Life*
by John Tarrant
Harper Collins, New York

Over the last 2500 years, Buddhist history reveals innovative constructions of relationships between the Buddha's teachings and the culture of each country it visits. This Buddhist "sociology of religion" is filled with examples of how the "new" belief affected societal aspirations, values, and ideology. For example, our school, the Kwan Um School of Zen, has the strong flavor and influences of the Korean people, as brought by our founder Zen Master Seung Sahn. To this day, many Korean flavors (like Kim Chee!) have a positive valuation in defining the identity of our practice.

Unlike our Korean spiritual parents, we Western students are in the infancy of this process of Buddhist enculturation. Two important points need to be addressed as we look at Buddhist teaching through "American" eyes. First, the power of our technological culture translated Buddhist teaching at an incredibly rapid pace. Where Buddhist teaching may have taken centuries to move from one region to the next, in our culture (with the internet, publishing, radio and TV) we are looking at much shorter times. Second, we Americans cannot discuss Buddhism without a focus on contemporary social life. The American field, in which Buddhism is being planted, is deeply entrenched with a strong belief in the power of the social sciences. Thomas Szasz, the eminent American psychologist, once suggested that psychology had become the religion of America and psychologists were now the high priests. *The Light Inside the Dark* and *Buddha Nature* are two of the current genre of books attempting to marry Buddhist teachings with American social life and sciences.

In *The Light Inside the Dark*, John Tarrant brings the Asian tradition of inquiry and experience to the Western method of



exploring the life of feeling, thought, and stories. Wes Nisker in *Buddha Nature* draws on several of the social sciences (neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and psychology). He views the Buddha as a spiritual scientist of the self.

In *Buddha Nature*, Nisker draws upon the works of other people who have tried to bring science and meditation practice together. He finds that the “modern self lives in a ‘culture of narcissism,’ with very little sense of being part of either a grand cosmic design, the unfolding processes of nature, or even a communal or historical destiny.” Nisker finds the Buddha’s Third Noble Truth a significant biological insight where “nature has given us the ability to train our minds to bring us new levels of satisfaction and freedom.” The remainder of his book follows four foundations of mindfulness (body and breath, first impression, states of mind, and thinking) as a guide to help “fully realize our human condition and develop its potential.”

Perhaps the most interesting insight provided by Nisker is his interpretation of how the Buddha’s teaching on the law of karma works in our lives and is related to our current understanding of evolution. He finds that our ignorance of the twelve links of “dependent co-arising” are the root cause of human suffering. For Nisker, the evolutionary process offers a new idea of reincarnation in that the human condition can be seen as “our shared incarnation, part of our common ‘evolutionary karma.’” Through the study of life reincarnating “form after form” Nisker believes that we can clearly see the forces that have come together to create this temporary life.

While investigating similar ideas to Nisker, Tarrant in *The Light Inside the Dark* relies more heavily on the field of psychology to provide insights into Buddhist teaching. He finds that human existence at times loses “the upper levels of consciousness,” sinking into personal grief. He finds that the inward and outer voyages have a heroic aspect to them in which they both make new connections that help achieve many ends. He begins this journey into “a life of awareness” at the “moment of helplessness.” For Tarrant, when life goes well there is not much need to change things. However, the belief in a good life falls apart and breaks away whenever a personal crisis appears. Tarrant believes that this crisis is the “gift” that begins a new life.

Tarrant investigates the mysterious, that place where nothing is said directly. Yet he believes that everyday, “we move into it and through it and are sustained by its graces.” He finds that in not-knowing we begin to trust our blindness and therefore are not blocked by seeing. He finds this ability to let go important, so that “we can embrace whatever comes.” This is one of the many ways that Tarrant attempts to help the reader find the light inside the dark.

It is important to remember that these two authors did not write definitive textbooks on Buddhism or science. Instead, they brought together several fields and theories reflecting their own individual beliefs. These two books, as well as the genres they represent, attempt to enlarge the reader’s understanding of these fields rather than provide valid explanations for them. Both books have a sense of urgency, of hurrying us through the marriage of Buddhism and American social science, never giving us a complete picture. At times, their stories lack precision and depth in translating Buddhist teaching and practice.

Buddhism in America is a baby in the first few moments following birth. It arrived in the delivery room of the behavioral sciences. However, we are still left with a simple question: has the marriage of Buddhism and the social sciences given birth to a healthy baby? Yes, or no? In some ways it’s like trying to solve a problem—how does it fit? All generations have believed that theirs is the one in greatest crisis. This generation has added Buddhism to its repertoire of responses to the crisis of mind suffering. For Americans today, the puzzle pieces of life’s suffering fit into a Buddhist social science paradigm. *The Light Inside the Dark* and *Buddha Nature* will help future American Buddhists understand how the baby took its first steps.