

**DHARMA** FAMILY **JOURNAL**

January 2000 | Volume 1 Number 1



**“Zen without bells and whistles.”**



January 2000

## Interview with Ed Wortz

BY MICHAEL ANDERSON

June 12, 1999

January 12, 2000 revised

MA What type of client issues do you deal with?

EW I treat mainly situational disorders, anxiety, phobias and depression and my client population is largely artists, writers, performing artists, and composers.

MA What approaches or principles do you use that you consider to be Buddhist?

EW Well, let's see, there's a lot of them, starting with dependent co-origination. But to get oriented, my work as a psychotherapist is sort of at the intersections of Buddhist practice and philosophy, psychophysiology, Gestalt therapy, and phenomenology. Influences on my work, which are congruent to Buddhism, are the philosophy of Michael Polanyi and the process philosophers and theologians. Specifically, Polanyi's phenomenology clearly elucidates the structure of dependent co-origination or "emptiness." Polanyi wrote a great little book called *The Tacit Dimension* in which he demonstrates the compound and emergent nature of experience. Let me show you one of his demonstrations. Hold this pen in your fingers. Close your eyes and use the pen as a probe to explore the space around you. You can feel the pen very nicely in your fingers. Now as you use the pen to explore what's around you; where does your mind go?

MA To trying to identify what it is I'm probing.

EW Right, and as you do so the locus of your awareness goes to the end of the probe, and the content of your awareness becomes what is at its distal (far) end. As you're doing this what happens to your awareness of the pen in your hand? (MA has eyes closed and is probing with the pen. EW is using his hand to provide an object for the probe to contact.) Now poke around and see what you find. As you are figuring out what's out there, what happens to your awareness of the pen back here (at the hand)?

MA It disappears.

EW Yes, it disappears. But consider what's happening. We are constructing our experience of "what exists" at the distal tip of the probe, out of the sensations that we must have in our fingers. So in order to construct what's happening out here, you forget the elements out of which it is constructed.

Similarly, when you closely examine anxiety, you will find the elements out of which anxiety is constructed (fantasies of the future, tense shoulders and neck, accelerated heart rate, breath holding, peripheral vasoconstriction, etc.). The experience "anxiety" corresponds to the distal end of the probe while the elements of anxiety correspond to the proximal end of the probe. If one of my clients is anxious, and begins to focus on the elements out of which the anxiety is constructed, what happens to the anxiety? It vanishes. Thus one might hypothesize that there's no such thing as anxiety, just as there's no such thing as an ego. There is an aggregate of experiential elements which coalesce into a newly



emerging experience. *The whole is different than the sum of its parts and the whole is more simple than the sum of its parts.*

I like to train my clients to construct and deconstruct the experiences that are causing them difficulty. This training, done repetitively, engenders a gradual increase of both awareness and skill. This training procedure also led me to one of my favorite hypotheses that *you can't stop doing anything that you don't know how to do.*

Occasionally I may say to a client, you know when you're anxious, and when you're depressed, how do you tell the difference? Of course, nobody knows by what basis they tell the difference, even though they know when they're anxious or depressed. We have all been constructing feelings unconsciously and efficiently all of our lives—living at the distal end of the probe, so to speak.

This unconscious automaticity can lead to difficulty in becoming aware of the elements of any feeling. So I have developed several training aids for my clients. One of these is to map, on an outline drawing of the body, the physical components of feelings; "Body Maps." They map out what is happening and where it is happening. This really helps clients direct their awareness inward and identify what's going on (what the elements are) so we will know what to practice, (construct or deconstruct). Experience is like my fist (EW opens and closes his hand), it can appear and disappear all at once. The question then becomes "If I become anxious what has changed?" (Not why has the change happened; not what caused the change.) What changes? What stays the same? A very Buddhist question.

The fact that feelings change, "anxiety" comes and goes or waxes and wanes, becomes a very powerful tool. What is different in my feeling state now than five minutes ago? What has changed? How do we get from state "A" to state "B" then to "C" and back to "A" again? All of these ways of exploring experience help us bring into conscious awareness some of the elements out of which we construct an experience. Attempting to exaggerate an experience also facilitates this awareness. Most people can make the depression a little worse, or make the anxiety a little worse. As soon as the client can budge the feeling a little bit the client moves to the position of having some (however slight) control. And we know from biofeedback that anything that you can budge a little bit you can learn to budge a lot. I do this often in my practice—playing the scales of a feeling on a ten point scale where 10 is the worst or maximum. I ask clients to go up to 5, down to 3, up to 4.5 and so forth. Getting the idea that circumstances and feeling states are not inexorably interlocked can be empowering.

I use the first noble truth, the ubiquity of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), by illustrating the Law of Large Numbers. Although this is a strictly intellectual approach to dealing with some of my clients' dissatisfaction, it is still effective. The Law of Large Numbers applied to life means essentially that there is always something wrong. It's impossible for there not to be something wrong. For example, if the probability is 90% that something is going to be okay, that's pretty good. Yet, for two things, each with a 90% probability of turning out okay, the probability that they will both be okay is only 81% (the product of their individual probabilities). With 10 90% probable events we are down to 38% that all 10 will turn out OK, and on and on. Since there are a lot of elements in the situations of our life and a lot of elements (genes, biochemistry, etc.) in our bodies, what's the probability that there is going to be something wrong?

MA Pretty high.

EW Actually, it's certain. So if we are waiting to be happy, sort of holding our happiness hostage, until



things get better or are the way we want them to be, we are wasting our effort. It's never going to happen that everything is OK. Not because of any perversity; it is just physically and mathematically impossible for there not to be something wrong. So how can one be happy, and live in a world where there will always be something wrong and the opportunity for dukkha is limitless?

My favorite Buddhist texts are the *Lankavatara Sutra*, which is clearly my all time favorite, and the Surangama Sutra. I use examples from the *Surangama Sutra* to help my meditators (everybody wants to know the right way to meditate). In the Surangama Sutra, there's described a conclave of the bodhisattvas trying to decide which meditation to recommend for ordinary human beings. They all tell how they achieved enlightenment, each exhorting their own experience. An "I did it this way" sort of thing. This implies, of course, that there isn't any one way. Eventually, however, they come up with a recommended approach, which is a listening meditation.

I find listening meditation very useful in observing the transitory nature of experience and as a specific exercise for the problem of judgementalness. A useful feature is that there are several different levels or depths of meditation that can be pursued within the domain of listening. The first is of bare attention to listening, which is listening without labeling. One of the principal elements of judgementalness is labeling and categorizing (in addition to rejection and physical discomfort). So learning how to listen, without labeling, facilitates the dismantling of judgementalness. In addition, learning to employ the "behavior of bare attention" to other experiences can be therapeutic and useful.

**MA** Do you have any thoughts on the use of that style of meditation with somebody who is hearing voices, as in schizophrenia for example?

**EW** The question is, can they attend? The practice of doing a concentration meditation is paradoxical in that concentration involves continuously letting go of extraneous elements in the experiential field and bringing the mind back to the focal point. One might say that concentration is letting go. I don't know whether meditation can facilitate someone with schizophrenia. It would be an interesting thing to explore. Other questions might be can any aspect of the symptomology be brought under the voluntary control of the patient or what makes an internal voice compelling?

Referring back to my client population I seem to find, oddly enough, that those who have the most difficulty with suspending belief in their internal voice are often writers. Writers, who you would think would have an understanding of the flexibility and the relativistic aspects of language, seem to be more tightly attached to the meanings of the words than my other clients. One might reason that if you're really flexible about the use of language and you can write a scenario in various ways, you would tend to be able to suspend belief in whatever scenario you might be spinning for yourself. My observation that it doesn't seem to work that way is curious. I wonder if it is so.

**MA** Do you have any hypotheses from a Buddhist perspective?

**EW** My favorite hypotheses are:

1. Dukkha arises codependently

2. The problem of dukkha really isn't so much with desire as it is with frustration. We seem to have learned that if we don't get what we want we have to feel badly. And I imagine that this comes about developmentally in the following way. We know that when infants are born into this world they display all kinds of discomfort and distress in order to get their needs met. They cry, scream, turn red and squirm



about. For an infant, this behavior has survival significance. It works. It catches a lot of attention and people attempt to provide the infant whatever it needs in order to help it return to a state of quiescence. As the child gets older, having learned that distress displays result in rewards, it may attempt to use these displays to get what it wants. It tries to get what it wants by feeling very badly indeed (The terrible two's in our culture). Occasionally these displays work and the toddler gets what it is after. But not always! And now we are into the machinery of random-partial reinforcement, which works to maintain this behavior even when it is no longer functional. When these overt displays are frowned upon by parents and society they may continue covertly. So now when we don't get what we want and our desires are not met, we automatically make uncomfortable feelings. In fact, we may evaluate the level of our desire or that of others in terms of the level of suffering displayed when the desire is not met.

3. If you are totally relaxed you can't think. If you are thinking there must be tension somewhere.

4. Everybody does their emotional and feeling displays differently than everyone else. One thing I find is that when somebody says that they're anxious, I only know in a general sense what they mean. I don't know exactly what it is that they are doing. In my experience no two people do anxiety the same way. There are usually major features that are similar, but there are a lot of the nuances. Everybody has their own unique ways of making the display. I suppose that this is similar to faces. Everyone has one and they're all different in some way. The critical question for me is, exactly what are you really doing? Are you tightening your esophagus or making a queasy feeling in your gut? Sometimes it's hard for my clients to know just what they are doing and it's important to find out.

5. Congruent feeling states (bodily changes) are what lend the aura of authenticity to fantasies and scenarios.

6. When the body changes, the mind changes; when the mind changes, the body changes.

7. You can't stop doing anything that you don't know how to do.

**MA** How else do you apply Buddhist approaches or principles?

**EW** Well, all my clients are assigned homework which usually includes some form of meditation. And some of them are in one of the meditation groups I conduct. I used to send my clients to various centers around the city, to learn meditation, but this didn't work. Agendas at meditation centers are very different from my own. So I have been doing at least one meditation group for my clients (and for myself) for more than 25 years now. Most of the clients do either a breathing meditation or a listening meditation or some other form of sustained concentration such as watching leaves blow. I may ask them to observe other things such as "How much effort does it take to see the movement of the leaves?"

To illustrate the concept of the unstainability of their buddha nature I use visual kinds of references. For example, I might suggest that they look at the ceiling, then look back at me. I will ask what happens to the ceiling when they look at me, when I appear, and the ceiling disappears. That things appear and disappear in our lives is a normal event. The appropriate function of the mind is to allow things to appear and disappear without a trace. There's no effort involved and, if your vision is functioning properly, when you look at the ceiling and then look back at me, there's no remnant of the ceiling, so your vision is essentially unstained. This experiential example can provide a toehold and some relief for someone who feels like he is stained or imperfect in some sense. This simple demonstration that our awareness is essentially unstainable, regardless of what we have done or experienced, can be useful. Correspondingly we can use this illustration to make another point. If you attempt to hold on to



the ceiling while bring your vision back to me, you will not be able to see me as well. Holding on and letting go - one more exquisite balance.

**MA** What difficulties have you experienced, if any, in applying these techniques and how have you dealt with those?

**EW** Probably the most difficult concept for my clients to get practically is that we all construct our own feelings and emotions. I call this problem the *obsessive external focus (OEF)*. This is exemplified by the incessant process of looking externally for the cause of our own feelings and emotions. "She made me feel bad," for example. When we are focused on others and externals as the source of our feelings, there is no way that we can learn how feelings actually come into existence or disappear.

Looking inward for some of the elements of an experience becomes a way of relaxing the OEF.

Typically, when some other person is not doing things the way that we want them to do, and we experience frustration, we tend to blame them for our feelings. It's difficult for us to let go of that external focus, to turn our awareness around to and see how we construct that experience. It's always he or she or it (out there) that is causing my experience. This, of course, puts externals in control of our feelings. It's a difficult thing for people to learn. However, we can learn to let go of the OEF, turn our awareness around, and observe what we are doing.

There are a number of reasons for hanging on to the OEF. If I persist in creating my discomfort, then I can blame someone else for it. If they change their behavior for me I have power. That's the only power that we get from this illusion. But it may be sufficient. The fear is that if I give up the blame game, I will lose power. Trying to manipulate others by investing in them the illusory power to make me feel bad is not the only thing going on here. We, of course, utilize these feelings to make meanings. My hypothesis is that feelings and emotions (which are displays to myself as well as to others) function as a communication system to both provide meaning and to control behavior. And since, in infancy, distress displays had survival value, we may fear, as adults, that we are giving up something vital if we should relinquish them.

I imagine that this system probably has a confluence of sources. First, external events do have an impact on our lives. However, we still make our own feelings. They are not constructed externally. A second source comes from our relatively universal developmental sequence. From infancy, infants make displays of discomfort in order to get their needs met. Now at about two years old they make displays of discomfort more purposefully. They've found (not consciously of course) that it's effective in getting their needs met, so they start having temper tantrums. I have found that largely, most adults display of frustration or anger are essentially, mini temper tantrums for the effect of getting what they want. These displays, which are uniformly experienced as uncomfortable, are made to a) get something or b) provide meaning, even when they are totally internal and private.

This type of display is really one of the most powerful examples of how we are involved in the construction of an experience. One of the things that I find fascinating is how believable some of our scenarios become. My hypothesis here is that the element that lends the aura of authenticity to a scenario is bodily change. If I have a fantasy—say that I'm going to wind up homeless and out on the street—that's a weird fantasy. But if I make a bodily fear response in conjunction with the fantasy, the fear response lends an aura of reality to the construction. Because the fear response is embodied, it is real in this moment. The fantasy and the bodily change are put together in a compound unit co-dependently arrayed together, disappearing as individual elements, to be taken as a whole. How then



to keep these elements apart?

I think that it's really important to be able to take experiences apart, to be able to observe certain types of construction. Thus I frequently have my clients do what I call "practicing suffering," which is practicing, over and over again, constructing uncomfortable displays, such as guilt. Specifically I ask them to do these displays without any scenarios or memories of events other than the bodily aspects of the display experience. This seems to function to cut the associative links among the other elements of that experience. Homework might be exercises such as "Every time you see a Volkswagon . . . get anxious" or "Every time you see a telephone pole, feel guilt" or "Ten times a day for no reason feel sad" and so forth. On the other hand when they are spontaneously actually experiencing anxiety, they are to focus on the anxiety and exaggerate some element of the aggregate. When you exaggerate an experience, you automatically let go of the obsessive external focus as you shift your awareness inward to find out what you can exaggerate. And as you exaggerate, you take some control. This immediately changes the position of the person (in terms of figure ground) with respect to the experience. Then it's not just happening to them, it becomes "something that I am doing." It's not something that's controlling them, but that they have some control. ***Of course we are never in absolute control but neither are we helpless.*** In addition, consider at this point the process of meditation. Sitting still, with a quiescent body, watching scenarios appear and disappear, will of course result in a different experience of the scenario.

- MA Yes, although when you mentioned that, I thought, oh gee wouldn't that be difficult, to bring on the experience without the content, so momentarily my attention shifted, and I tried it, and it's not hard.
- EW It's not.
- MA But the difficulty is letting that go. So it's not hard to induce the anxiety, as an experience, but then it's hard to actually let it go and then not attach it to something external.
- EW Right, to not attach to it.
- MA I'm interested in how your clients experience that, whether they have difficulty, once they do bring on the anxiety, being able to let it go.
- EW The reason they have difficulty letting it go is, in part, structural: the onset of any uncomfortable display is rapid, while release is pretty slow. So they learn to expect this rapidity of onset, and the slowness of decay. This you can demonstrate easily with any kind of muscle tension. You can tense up much more quickly than you can relax. I would say the biggest difficulty for my clients ***is to acknowledge that they are doing the experience***, or have a part in constructing their experience. Also some people find it very difficult to get oriented to any form of bodily awareness so I will suggest things that might be going on. I've learned that one component of any negative experience is going to be tension or discomfort. So we can always look for the tension. I will help them by inquiring "Where's the tension? You might be tightening your toes in your shoes, or tightening your anus, or your jaw, shoulders, or so forth." I will also give some examples about the development of awareness and skill; for example I may say "See this ear (EW wiggles his ear), it took me two and a half months to learn how to move it. I couldn't find the controlling muscle in my awareness. So it may take you a while to find out what it is you're doing. But if you keep looking, you're going to find it." With my visual artists I might suggest, "When you started learning to draw, your improving skill changed your perception, and conversely your perception changed your skill." So the more you practice, the more you see an improvement in both skill and awareness. I use little tricks like moving my ear to encourage them that what I'm suggesting is a doable.



- MA** Have you ever had people in their meditation practice, clients who have had difficult experiences, hallucinations and so on, and how have you helped them manage those?
- EW** I tell them up front that they can expect hallucinations, and other kinds of unusual experiences. I may also provide them with a theory of how they happen, what this process is. For example, the eyes shake at about ten cycles per second (saccadic motion). This keeps the image moving across the rods and cones so that we can see. If we paralyze the eye, so that it doesn't move, in just a little while the visual image will disappear, unless we rotate the eye or turn the head. All of our experience is that way, we are "difference detectors." Anything that is steady-state (doesn't change) disappears from view. So, if you are sitting very still for a long period of time, what's going to happen? Your mind is going to start processing the random firings of the sensors. Since you aren't doing anything physically in a coordinated manner your brain starts processing the random firings of the sense organs. You know the phrase, "garbage in and garbage out." You can expect to get all kinds of strange consequences. You might feel like your head's under the floor and your leg's out by the street. These experiences are perfectly normal considering the conditions. Eventually your mind figures out "Oh what we're doing is we're meditating," and it doesn't have to worry about things or where body parts are. Perhaps sitting still eventually frees up a lot of computer power that had been used to keep track of everything, to be always prepared to jump up and run out the door, for example. When you can sit in meditation for a long time, it may even take a while for you to "get your body back." So I tell them up front what kinds of unusual experiences to expect, such as the most common one of feeling like falling over backwards.
- MA** Preparing people for it.
- EW** Preparing them for it and having a rationale for it. I can always tell the Zen story about a spider, about a student being frightened by a spider that approached him when he was in meditation. It was a really enormous spider and was getting bigger and bigger each day. One day he was going into the meditation hall and he had a knife with him. The master said "What are you doing?" The student said "I'm going to kill the spider this time, it's not going to terrify me any more. It's bigger than I am now and it's going to kill me." The master replied, "Just wait one more time. Take this brush, and when the spider comes, instead of stabbing, paint an X on its belly." After the meditation session the master asked the student. "Did you do it?" The student replied that he had. The master then asked the student to look at his own stomach and there was the X. To know that almost everyone has these type of experiences, and that they are part and parcel of the process of sitting still is really helpful.
- MA** Could you elaborate more on what happens with awareness as a process, and also what skills are being developed?
- EW** A lot of these psychological processes are more like perceptual and psychomotor skills than intellectual skills. They are more similar to learning how to ride a skateboard or a bicycle or seeing a figure-ground reversal than reason or logic. It's a skill to be able to let go of the external focus and shift your awareness internally; it's a skill to be able to observe without labeling to do bare attention. It's a skill to be able to manipulate various aspects of your own physiology which previously were out of awareness and under automatic control. I think it's really important to **take back control from a process that is dysfunctional**. However, on the other hand, it is very efficient to have most physiological and psychological processes, which are both homeostatic and automatic, out of awareness. There's a whole other story here. But, to stick to the issue, after retraining yourself, allow these processes to go out of awareness back into automatic again. Don't hang your attention on them if it isn't necessary. There



are other things to do. In summary, we have the development of skills, the return to automaticity, the development of a learning set on how to approach problems, and balance.

I frequently use biofeedback devices with clients to provide a learning set for other tasks, gain confidence about their ability to do what I am suggesting and to change some aspects of autonomic balance. Frequently I teach them how to contract and dilate their peripheral blood vessels at will. Most people can learn some skill in one or two sessions. To do this I hook them up to a rapid response thermometer with the active probe on the fleshy part of one finger. Then I instruct them to attend (with bare attention) to whatever experience they may feel in their hands or fingers. The experiences they feel in their hands and fingers thus become the object of focus. They are instructed that whenever their mind wanders away to some other experience to let that experience go and bring their attention back to the feelings in their hands. While they are doing this I am monitoring their skin temperature and I let them know what's happening with that. Invariably, as they learn to attend in this way, their peripheral blood vessels dilate and their hands and fingers warm. This occurs because their autonomic nervous system begins to shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance. For many people, finding out that what they do with their mind has a powerful effect on their body can be a very profound experience. When they get the idea, we're off and running. I give them the little school thermometers to take home with them, to practice; let's see, these are the thermometers (EW pulls out a small thermometer and passes it to MA). Nobody wants to pay twelve hundred dollars for a rapid response thermometer, and so they can sit with the bulb like this (EW holds the end of the thermometer against his finger). This gives them some objective evidence of subtle changes in their physiology. I tell them that they can get that up to 95F in a 70F room but not much more than that. Here, of course, we are developing several kinds of awareness and skills. The obvious ones concern physiological control but they also develop skills in attentional focus and the important issue of passive volition. Passive volition means, in this case, that there is no direct control here. However, we can achieve the desired effect. This is similar to the Zen saying "You can't get there by trying but you can't get there if you don't try."

With temperature biofeedback I also have opportunities to demonstrate the orienting reaction "OR." Let me illustrate the orienting reaction with the following scenario. If you're walking down the trail with a geologist and he sees a rock that's interesting to him and catches his attention, he will make an orienting reaction. You won't. When he makes an "OR" the following things happen simultaneously: the peripheral blood vessels constrict, there is a pause in breathing, a turning toward the object, the blood vessels in the brain dilate, a galvanic skin response is produced, the heart rate slows, and alpha is blocked in the EEG. It happens instantly. My clients are frequently making "OR's" in their life. And sometimes they get stuck there being hypervigilant, maintaining the "OR" with peripheral blood vessels constricted, and holding their breath. With thermal biofeedback we can easily detect the occurrence of an "OR" because the temperature of the fingers drops instantly as the peripheral blood vessels constrict. Once again how we utilize our mind not only changes or controls what we experience, it also changes our body. It is easy to observe that in order to be profoundly relaxed you have to stay alert. If you have your peripheral blood vessels highly dilated and your finger temperature is up around ninety-six degrees Fahrenheit and you lose concentration, your peripheral blood vessels instantly constrict. In order to maintain a profound relaxation, you have to stay alert. For meditators, it's interesting to know that the instant you lose your focus your body changes.

**MA** I've often thought, what sort of techniques would you use, to cue you that your mind is wandering.

**EW** Well, that's a good one. One standard technique with breathing meditation is to count the exhalations



(sub-audibly). When you lose count you know that your mind has gone elsewhere. Another technique is to use the "open circle mudra." Here the hands, nested inside of one another, make an open circle with the tip of the thumbs barely touching each other. When the thumbs drift apart it indicates that the mind is drifting. Thumbs jammed together indicate "pressing too hard" with the meditation, a nice non-electronic feedback device. Using electronics, there are probably EEG signatures that could be employed let you know the occurrence of this event.

MA Often your mind goes off and you don't notice.

EW In a flash. It's really interesting and I think similar to a figure-ground reversal such as the Necker cube illusion. One of my favorite Zen expressions is "From thought instant to thought instant heaven or hell!" This illustrates both the rate and range of this change process. If your mind changes your body changes, and if your body changes your mind changes. How fast can I make five fingers into a fist? How fast can I make any other bodily display?

MA You mentioned Gestalt Therapy, I'm interested in the interplay between Gestalt and the Buddhist approaches. What are the distinctions, and similarities, between the two?

EW I wrote a paper on that topic in 1981, a part of which was published in the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. I had a nice table comparing them in term of

1) Theory of pathology,

2) Desired end state or objective,

3) Method,

4) Theory of healing, and

5) Other Major Concepts. I think that this structure for comparison is still interesting (*see table on page 17*).

In addition to what I wrote in that paper I don't think of Gestalt theory as addressing dependent co-origination or interpenetration. It certainly doesn't have a theory of psychological structure similar to that presented in the Lankavatara sutra. In addition, Gestalt psychotherapy really suffers from the lack of an embedded ethical basis that is a cornerstone of Buddhism. Gestalt therapists who are not Buddhist practitioners don't understand the extensive utility of the eightfold path, for example. Also Gestalt therapists understand projection very well, but I don't think that they have a really good means of communicating the process in a way that is useful to their clients in their lives. For example, I teach my clients to develop the "don't know mind" as a way of dealing with projection. In the "don't know mind" one learns to suspend the process of construction of externals from "self material," thus suspending projection, in favor of collecting more data. So *you allow yourself to not know* what another person is thinking, and *not know* what the other person is feeling, until you ask. One of my clients said one day "I've got it." I said "What?" She replied, "Well, now I just pretend that there's nothing going on behind their eyes." I said, "Yes" and she replied, "The strange thing is, now I have to listen to what they say." Knowing what you know and what you don't know is important. Also I imagine that many therapists have *too good* of an idea of what their clients are experiencing or should be experiencing. But then clear communication is a very rare and perhaps priceless commodity. It's hard for me to generalize because there are so many different therapists. However, the advantages for the therapist from experiencing Buddhist practice would be reduced judgementalness, attentional stability, personal



development and nonattachment. I take nonattachment in Eastern psychology to mean the same as ego strength in Western psychology, or field independence in experimental psychology. To illustrate field independence (FI), look at the framework in this painting back here (EW pointing to a painting hanging on the wall). To measure FI experimentally, I would put you in a pitch black room and at the far end of the room I have a luminous framework (much like the one in the painting), and at your end of the room I would have a luminous rod. The procedure is that we tilt the framework some direction and we tilt the rod some other random direction. Your ability to return the rod to vertical uninfluenced by the position of framework is a measure of your field independence. Being relatively FI and able to course through the world using your own internal compass without undo influence from externals is a worthy objective.

A Zen story about ego strength is the story about the Innkeeper. This is utilized to illustrate “a suggested way” of dealing with mental material or outside events. We are the innkeeper and mental events, phenomena and circumstances are likened to either the guests who check in and out of the inn or the random occurrence of problems such as overflowing toilets, missing luggage, etc. One can take the position of the Innkeeper or identify with the problems of the guests and other circumstances of life or work. The Innkeeper observes sadness checking in, staying for awhile and checking out. An empty bank account appears for a while and then is gone. Frustration, anger, noisy children and the like check into our lives and stay for varying periods until they are replaced by other things. Learning to take the position of the Innkeeper is a useful technique for developing nonattachment (ego strength). Part of the instructions that I use for doing listening meditations are very similar. “Sounds appear, stay for varying durations and disappear, as does all experience.”

- MA** You mentioned ego strength being a function of field independence.
- EW** Ego strength, field independence and nonattachment are, to my mind, essentially synonymous.
- MA** Because there’s a misconception often in people trying to integrate Buddhism into psychotherapy that the objective is to actually get rid of the ego and what you’re saying is it’s a process.
- EW** Yes. You can’t get rid of the ego because ego is a concept. There are a number of psychological processes. However, there isn’t any such thing as an ego. If one has a concept such as “non-ego” and then tries to achieve that by getting rid of the ego it can easily become confusing. All conceptual structures are very much like the “faces/vase illusion.” The line that creates the vase creates the faces at the same time. The objectification of a concept simultaneously creates its opposite.
- MA** So the construction of the ego, exists.
- EW** Right, but the construction exists is a hypothetical construct.
- MA** The ego itself, doesn’t?
- EW** There’s no such thing. Freud knew that when he started. In his early writings he talked about ego functions and id functions. Later on he reified his system and started talking about ids, egos and super egos. Started talking about concepts as though they were things or physical structures rather than processes. I believe this is classically called the error of misplaced concreteness.

One of the things that makes Buddhism very modern and of great utility to therapists is that it’s a process-oriented philosophy and training procedure. Much of Buddhism is more interested in process than states or attributes. The eightfold path certainly describes a process. There are things to do rather than things to fix.



**MA** Can you elaborate on ego strength?

**EW** From what I know of Buddhist training procedures, there's a lot available to facilitate ego strength. Concentration meditation training, learning how not to reify conceptual structures, learning how to detect when we are operating from the strictures of a conceptual structure (koan study), and the whole eightfold path to name but a few. Noting and bare attention facilitate the development of ego strength. Also, letting go of distractions, returning awareness from external events to internal events, being able to fluently shift attentional locus are others. Each facilitate us in taking back our own power (from externals or concepts) and realizing what is being constructed and who is doing the constructing. We learn that we construct our experience from moment to moment, and to know that facilitates ego strength. This doesn't mean that we always have to be consciously in charge of the construction, we can't do that. However, we can be in charge of some of it, when necessary, if we choose to be.

But then there is this idea (perhaps modern idea) that some Buddhists have of "dismantling of the ego" to trip one up. This may have occurred in attempts to translate Buddhism into Western concepts. In addition, the concept of self has been at the core of debate among Buddhists from day one. Nagarjuna and others spent a lot of effort on this debate by thoroughly exploring "emptiness." On the other hand, I think that Buddhist practitioners could gain a lot from understanding more about psychotherapy techniques, specifically in terms of our own internal workings, group processes, and therapeutic approaches to specific hang-ups. To my mind they're not antagonistic at all. Because events that are observable can be observed by Buddhist, therapist or lay observers, given the right instructions and conditions. For me, Buddhist practice has a scientific quality to it.

**MA** What other contributions could psychotherapy make to Buddhist practice?

**EW** Well, some of the things I was telling you about in terms of psychophysiological observations, doing autonomic nervous system training, (you know it takes about four hours to learn to contract and dilate the pupil of your eye, at will). Being able to understand all the things that we can do to steer our way through life is like acquiring a big tool box. So contributions from psychotherapy can provide all kinds of flexibility and augment Buddhist practice, philosophy, and training. The nice thing about having current electronics is that you can train somebody to do in a few hours what it took a yogi years to learn. A yogi has to get really quiet, really still, to be able to detect the peristaltic movements of the gut, but if you have an external monitor to point the way, you can learn these kind of skills in a few hours. However, when it comes to understanding or facilitating enlightenment experiences, I don't think that western psychology has much to offer.

**MA** Do you have any thoughts on the application of Buddhist practices in relation to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder?

**EW** I don't have sufficient experience with schizophrenia or bipolar disorders to offer any useful comments concerning them.

**MA** What do you see as the critical factors in Buddhism and meditation, that make it successful?

**EW** Principally, training in self observation, bare attention and Buddhist ethics.

**MA** What other techniques do you use that you would consider a Buddhist approach?

**EW** Principally in the exploration of dukkha, how dukkha comes into existence, what its principle



characteristics are, and what to do about it. I think that one of the principle ways of inducing dukkha in contemporary lives is by wanting things to be different than they are. We live in a society that highly values comparisons and which facilitates comparisons through sophisticated systems of marketing and advertising. Their functions are to make us dissatisfied with ourselves and/or our situation. If we are not dissatisfied with ourselves or our situation then these systems are not functioning as they were designed to do, to lure us into seeking and buying goods or services. So comparison and judgementalness are rampant and highly valued. Typically a person will take some element that they find desirable in one person's life, add some element from each of several other persons' lives and compare them with their own lives and think they should be able to have all those things and live in all those admirable ways. This, of course, leads to fruitless endeavors. Wanting things to be different than they are is a significant form of dukkha in our society. Actually, however, nobody is allowed to be satisfied, because if you are satisfied, it is judged that there must be something wrong with you. Don't you know that things aren't really that good? I deal with this process pretty much with things that we've talked about: Working with projection, the construction of the fantasies, an introduction to elements of discomfort, and meditation; Meditation to introduce the capacity for "bare attention" and to reduce labeling and judgementalness; Practicing construction and destruction of fantasies, and the feelings that go along with the fantasies which make them appear "real." Understanding that dissatisfaction is a process is also important. Fortunately dissatisfaction is, for most people, essentially only one single process that is done over and over. We can do dissatisfaction about our life, we can do it about our finances. You name it. We virtually always do dissatisfaction the same way just changing the supposed cause. But if we cut off dissatisfaction, stop doing that process, we can free ourselves and just be. Of course dissatisfaction is rampant within Buddhist communities as well. Here people frequently compare themselves with some idea of perfection or enlightenment and justify doing dissatisfaction.

One of the things my clients don't understand is that you can want things to be different without having to be dissatisfied. For example, you can go to the tap to get a glass of water and, if the water is not cool enough, you can let the tap run to cool down. But you don't have to experience dissatisfaction in order to know that you want the cooler water. So it is possible to want things without doing the dissatisfaction. In my mind, there's no problem with desire. The problem arises, however, when people don't get their desires met then do the dukkha of dissatisfaction.

The training in our society is that if you don't get what you want, you're supposed to feel bad. The "bad feeling display" is how we signal to ourselves the meaning of not getting what we wanted and how we manipulate others. We can dismantle this process. "It's unfortunate enough that you don't get what you want without having to make a bad feeling in addition."

People frequently imagine that they'll just become lumps or "couch potatoes" if they're not dissatisfied, which is still part and parcel of the idea of using feelings to provide meanings. Using the whip or goad as a motivator when the lure might suffice.

Feelings are a primitive communication system of displays that all mammals use. If a dog shows its teeth, sticks its ears back, stands his fur up, and tucks his tail between his legs, everybody gets the message. You probably don't even need to have seen a dog before. You see that display, you get the message.

All feelings and emotions are bodily displays, and their function is to communicate meaning to others and to ourselves. If we don't like the meanings that are being communicated, or they're dysfunctional, then we should learn to change our responses. Feelings are a very primitive communication system.



Unfortunately many therapists overvalue this system.

**MA** Can you give me an example of how you would work through that process? Say with someone who had depression.

**EW** I work with people who have depression by using combinations of medication, meditation, observational noting and reframing. One of the difficulties with depression, as well as anxiety, is that people become conditioned to replicate that state and behavior. As an example some get depressed every year at the same time, the season or month when their spouse died, for example (different than SADS—seasonal affective disorders). After some years of treatment, they experience what they call the ghost of the depression. The ghost shows up, okay, but they don't do the full-blown depression any more. This is the direct consequence of both meditation and practicing with the depression. They're aware of some of the elements of that experiential aggregate and have some skill with them. They also become skilled in noting how the experiences occur (the primary physical and mental events). One form of noting is to keep a record of the negative things that they say to themselves. The classification of these kinds of statements is by now a standard approach in the treatment of depression. My depressed clients keep noting down all the negative things that they say to themselves, as they occur, all day long. Tally marks made next to each noted statement helps them observe the repetitive nature of the statements, the relative frequency of each, which statements are only partial statements and so on. With these records in hand we can do all kinds of things with the content. But my all-time favorite is to sing them. Singing "If I'm not perfect I don't deserve to live" is a great reframing technique. In addition, singing requires the transfer of verbal material across the corpus callosum (the connector between the right and left hemispheres of the brain). Furthermore the statements are no longer covert but come out of the mouth and back into the ears. This really changes all kinds of feedback dynamics. (I understand that the right hemisphere can sing the words, but it can't say them, and can only deal with words in melody). My clients go about the city with their list of their negative self statements singing out loud, things like "Oh I'm a lousy father," "I don't do any good," "Nobody loves me," "I'm not the way I should be," "The reason that bad things happen to me is that I'm not worthwhile," and so on. It's fun, and effective.

**MA** What is your response to people who would say meditation is contraindicated for people who have depression?

**EW** What is supposed to be the objection?

**MA** It is suggested that it takes people inwards, to their depression and makes them more depressed.

**EW** But the inward focus that the depressed people are doing involves a lot of mulling over, I mean it's not bare attention to the inward experience. It's a lot of repetitious worry involving hopelessness, that sort of thing. That's what needs to be stopped. And you can't stop if you don't go inward to know what is going on. Perhaps there is some problem with a particular type of meditation that can give rise to that concern. I usually assign my clients a concentration form of meditation such as breathing. The salient features of a breathing meditation, as I instruct it, are: sitting still; focusing on some physical sensation of breathing; following the breath as it is inhaled and exhaled; when the breath stops or disappears just leave your mind right there where the breath was and wait for it to reappear; no attempt is made to control the breathing, just let "it" breathe; when distracted from the breath by thoughts, scenarios, feelings, images, memories etc., let go of the distraction as soon as possible and return awareness of the physical sensation of breathing; no attempt is made to suppress any experience, scenario, feeling, image, memory, etc., whatever comes up is OK, just let it go and return to the breath; making the breath



vivid. The practice really is just “letting go and returning.” Or, once again, one might say concentration is letting go.

I have some ideas about how meditation works psychotherapeutically. For example, if you’re doing a breathing meditation and something comes up, and you let it go to return to your breath, essentially what you’re doing at that moment is making the breath more important than the distraction. Perhaps every time this is done you whittle away at the importance of the distraction. The distraction then eventually has no more valence (to borrow a term from chemistry) than the next breath.

**MA** Could you explain that more.

**EW** Well, let me use another example. I use a meditation technique to erase the memory of past physical pain or nausea from chemotherapy. I ask the individual to remember the pain, and then I’ll ask them to let go of the memory and count their teeth in their upper jaw by using their tongue; then let that go, and remember the pain again, let that go. Now count the teeth in your lower jaw, let that go, now remember the pain again. We shuttle awareness back and forth between the memory of the pain and some ongoing physical experience. After twenty to fifty shuttles, they can’t find the pain. They can’t find the memory. It’s as if we have a really great recording head, and a really lousy erase head. But in a day or two, the memory may come back again. Then it’ll only take ten or fifteen shuttles to erase it, then the next time you know, even fewer shuttles. And then it’s gone forever. It’s a very interesting technique. If, however, the painful memory is part of a more complicated conceptual aggregate, then it’s more difficult to erase. Then you need to see if you can separate the pain from the rest of the aggregate. That’s a more complicated issue than with a simple experientially-based aggregate because of the character and extent of what has to be deconstructed.

**MA** I don’t know EMDR well but I’m curious as to the similarities you see between this shuttling back and EMDR?

**EW** That may be why EMDR works, actually I have something written on that (EW searches for article). I don’t know very much about EMDR.

**MA** Is there anything else you would like to mention regarding Buddhist approaches to Psychotherapy before we finish?

**EW** Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the United States are interested in Buddhist philosophy, because, for most of us it’s a whole new psychology. Really the phenomenological and psychological underpinnings of Buddhism are very comfortable for me; intuitively and experientially truthful. Whereas Freudian and Jungian systems, although fun and meaningful, have always seemed to me to be more sophisticated, intellectual and conceptual edifices. These two systems seem to have been developed by putting the emphasis on attempts to make sense of experiences related by others. Buddhism, however, seems to put the emphasis on making sense out of our own personal experiences and extending the range of those experiences as ways of continuing personal development.

To my mind a Buddhism and Psychotherapy are very compatible. I think that the technology of psychotherapy needs to be integrated into Buddhist practice, as well as the philosophy and ethics of practice of Buddhism into psychotherapy. For example, meditation is a powerful change agent. I think it’s a great two way exchange. But I don’t know of many mainstream Buddhist religious practitioners who are learning and incorporating psychotherapy practices into their understanding or training procedures. I don’t know what the resistance is, but it’s certainly available for them in this culture. In



this country, all of the Jewish and Christian centers, all the seminaries, have psychological training and counselling as part and parcel of their student education. However, I don't know of similar approaches in any Buddhist training facility. It seems as if, from my limited perspective, that the practitioners that have both psychotherapy and Buddhist backgrounds are mostly western, it's not going the other way.

**MA** Who was your strongest influence in your Buddhist practice?

**EW** Ven. Thich Thien An, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master. He died about 10 years ago. He had been imprisoned in Vietnam during the Diem regime. He was freed and exiled to the United States in the late Sixties, about 1967 or so. Karuna Dharma and I (by the way, my Buddhist name is Prajna Dharma - one of the Dharma family) helped him found the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles. Our center, at that time, was a crossroads and temporary home for visiting monks and nuns of every variety of Buddhism. Many teachers got their toehold in the USA using IBMC as their initial base. Then at the end of the Vietnamese war, Thien An spent most of his energy taking care of the problems of thousands of Vietnamese that came to this country. At that time he also started a Vietnamese Buddhist Center, "Chua Vietnam," which still thrives in Los Angeles.

Even though Thien An had a PhD from Waseda University in Japan, he has only written one book in English. It's titled Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice. It's still available. When I first started studying and reading about Zen Buddhism, probably around 1961, I really didn't know what I was reading. Eventually I found, much to my surprise, that I wasn't interested in meeting any Roshis or Buddhist Dharma Masters. I was certain I would be disappointed. I didn't want my own grandiose fantasies destroyed by reality. However, when I finally met Thien Ann I wasn't disappointed; he was the most compassionate person that I've ever met in my life. Quite an amazing person. I learned more from being around him than from anything that he said. Let me give you a little anecdote. One day, at the beginning of my training, I was sitting in the garden during a break in a sesshin. Thien An came by and laughingly said (he was always laughing) "Oh, Dr. Wortz, there is nothing to do." (This from a man who consistently worked 16 hours a day). Needless to say it took some time before I understood what he meant. For 14 years I ran a weekly "drop in" therapy group at IBMC and one year Thien An and I ran the group together. He sat at one end of the room and I at the other with 20 to 30 participants. It was a fine experience. I was really privileged to have known him.

**MA** It just reinforces to me the need to practice, because from the personal practice arises that inspiration, it's in that, the presence these people bring, that is far more valuable than the knowledge.

**EW** That's why I think psychotherapists need some sort of spiritual practice, because they really communicate values, personal processes and meanings by their being.

**MA** I'm starting to see, in the psychoanalytic process, the importance of personal therapy and training before you can actually become a therapist, The concept of, well if you don't understand yourself, if you don't manage your own mind and understand your mind and have that skill, then it can be very difficult to work with others.

**EW** I'm very appreciative of both my Buddhist practice and Gestalt training for facilitating my clinical work and me personally. In terms of my own Buddhist practice there's an advantage to being a psychotherapist. I get a lot of practice, because every hour, in comes a new human being with an entirely different set of experiences, a different communication system, and different ways of suffering than the last. It all keeps being very interesting. 🌸



	<b>Gestalt Therapy</b>	<b>Biofeedback</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>
<b>Theory of Pathology</b>	Boundary disturbances (introjection, projection, confluence self, retroflection) (Perls, 1969), disturbance in contact/withdrawal	Confused physiology	Idea that there is a self, desire; (Rahula 1959)
<b>Desired State (Objective)</b>	Organismic self-regulation, no pathology, no body/mind dualism, no mind/mind dualism, no sense/ intellect dualism, ability to complete gestalts	Self-regulation, no disease, no body/mind dualism	End of Dukkha (Nirvana) End of the round of birth and death, compassion and to wisdom, no dualisms, manifestation of true self
<b>Method</b>	Contact normally-avoided material, concentration, frustration of manipulations, awareness of pathological - processes, re-experience trauma (psycho-dramatically, directing awareness to the obvious (shuttle)	Providing accurate, specific, real-time information about what is going on physiologically, providing new elements to awareness	Cultivation of compassion and wisdom, seeing things as they are (suchness), meditation, study, cessation of conceptual thought, ethical life
<b>Theory of Healing</b>	Paradoxical theory of change, loosening of boundaries, emergence of repressed and unfinished gestalten	Negative feedback loop	Radical shift in consciousness (Suzuki, 1932)
<b>Other Major Concepts</b>	No fixed goals, contact boundary, fantasy	Direct control, indirect control passive volition	Illusion, emptiness, inter-dependence, dualism, conditionality, four noble truths, eightfold path, no fixed way of being.



## Listening to the Dalai Lama

BY AMY KSANTI DHARMA

In the early 70's when so many people were becoming born-again Christians, I lived with a strange fear that the hand of God was going to come out of the sky, knock me upside the head and say, "Poof. You are now a born-again Christian." I didn't want to be one and I worried that it might be out of my control.

Now in the late 90's, as I prepared to spend three days at Pasadena Civic Auditorium listening to HH the Dalai Lama, I started hoping that some universal flash would come and zap me inside my head and give me the gift of full enlightenment. For I wanted it and I worried that it wasn't ever gonna happen to me.

Well it didn't. And I know full well that having enlightenment as a goal is contrary to the practice of Buddhism, since meditation is not goal-oriented. Still, I'm a Western child of the 60's and I can't seem to restrain my desire to have something happen to me as a result of my meditation and spiritual quest. The fact that something has happened to me—I am happier, calmer, less angry, more compassionate, and (most importantly) have a great deal less road rage—seems to have escaped my notice most of the time. As I sat uncomfortably cross-legged in an auditorium seat, watching the Dalai Lama and a stage full of monks and nuns perform ceremonies, sit in comfortable meditation, move their hands to the correct mudras at the correct times, chant and bow, I felt as disconnected from their activities as I did in the Christian church of my childhood.

Back then, before I was twelve (twelve was the magic age wherein my mother allowed us to make our own decision to attend church or not and we all chose 'not'), I would sit in the hard pews and listen to everyone sing songs that I didn't particularly like; they tended to be too sweet and syrupy with melodies that didn't really grab my attention, competing, as they were, with the onslaught of Beatles and Stones. Then the minister spoke for a very long time and never said anything that I was interested in. Occasionally, he would relate a story from the Bible and, as if it were a soap opera, I would perk up and listen, but when the story was over and the lesson explained I sank back into the doldrums.

In my early 20's, I married a lapsed Catholic; we attended one mass when his father died and I was both amazed and annoyed by the intensity of the ceremony at a Catholic Church. There was all this mysterious stuff: dipping into water and making the sign of the cross, wearing a hankie on your head, the priest moving things around at the altar with some significance that entirely escaped me, and all in another language (Spanish, not Latin). As I watched the Dalai Lama in Pasadena, it took me right back to that Catholic Church. What are all these objects that come forward, are blessed and returned? What do these different chants mean and are they translated anywhere in the program guide? Why is it that when HH the Dalai Lama speaks in Tibetan and his words are translated to English, the English version is so much longer than the Tibetan version?

I really didn't feel like a good audience participant. I felt too skeptical. I thoroughly embrace the teachings of the Buddha. I have never been happier since I began reading and practicing the path of Buddhism. I like the fact that you are encouraged to be skeptical, that you are told to ask questions, to experience for yourself, to not take anyone's word for it.

At the beginning of the three day teachings, the Dalai Lama stated (as he often does) that it is best for people to stay with the religion of their culture and their upbringing. I argued with him (in my head) about why my childhood religion had not helped me on a spiritual path, and 'his' Buddhism was beneficial. I argued internally for about a half hour until I realized that it didn't matter what he thought of my path, it only mattered what I thought of it.



So I listened intently to the teachings. It was exhausting. Like grad school, but with all the information first stated in a language completely incomprehensible to the Western ear (I kept trying to hear Spanish words, or French, the only other languages I have a vague familiarity with), and then translated into English by a remarkably able young man whose memory was enormous. His English was marked by his Tibetan accent but most everything was easy to understand. I particularly liked his pronunciation of the word, 'inevitable,' with his accent on the 'vit' syllable rather than the 'nev' syllable. But in day two, as His Holiness began a terribly esoteric part of the teachings about the nature of reality and dependent origination (don't even ask me to explain; I'm borrowing my friend's taped transcript of the event and making my much more logical-thinking husband listen and explain it to me) I was sure he was speaking about the nature of reality and Tibetan origination. Since I didn't really understand the lesson itself, I preoccupied my mind with what Tibetan origination might be and how something so specific to one country made its way into Buddhist dharma.

What else did I do? I watched the Tibetans in the audience around me respond to the Dalai Lama's words long before any of us could. I watched the Tibetan children run up and down the aisles, as bored with all this talk-talk as any four year old child would be. I watched who came late and who had to kick interlopers out of their seats. I watched who fell asleep and who made repeated trips to the bathroom. I watched the State Department security men talking into their cuffs and scanning the crowd with eyes serious and intent as radar beams. (A high point for the security guys came on the final day, when a woman rushed down the aisle with her young child, put him on the edge of the stage and urged him to go to the Dalai Lama and give him a piece of paper. The security guys were beaten to the kid by a very fast monk on stage (who got out of his seated, cross legged position and over to the child much more quickly than the men who were merely standing in the wings). The monk took the boy to the Dalai Lama's throne, held him up to be blessed and deliver his paper, then led him back off the stage to his mother. After that transgression, the security guys moved out from their discreet wall positions and stood right at the ends of every aisle by the stage. An impenetrable barrier was now in force; no more dangerous children could reach His Holiness again.

On the third day, we took vows. We repeated that we took refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, but we did so in Tibetan and it was difficult wrapping my tongue around those very round syllables. We were led through an initiation in which we visualized the Lama Tsong Khapa with three deities, one at his crown, one at his throat and one at his heart. The blue-faced one and the white-faced one we were to imagine sending out blue and white rays of light respectively. But the yellow-faced one on top for some reason sent out red rays of light. It was interesting and rather engulfing to visualize all of this, trying to remember which deity of which color, emanating what light was placed where on this body. But when he called for us to absorb ourselves into the deities and the light and become one with it, I did that visualization and it felt wonderful. Not overpowering. Not enlightenment. Not the blow to the head I have been avoiding/waiting for all my life. Just fulfilling and pleasant.

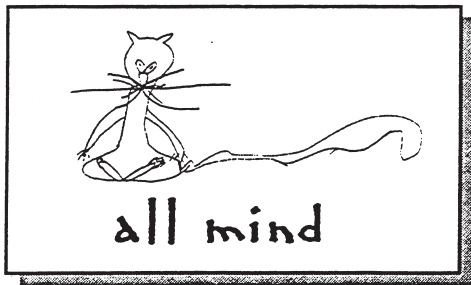
As we neared the end of the teachings, the Dalai Lama said that he hoped when he returned in some later visit, all of us would be farther along our path than we currently are. Can he read the vibrations, the auras, the intensity of the audience? I felt marked, caught, as if I had been cheating on an exam. So I nodded my head and vowed along with the others (the Westerners anyway) that yes, I would continue my practice and be further along the path when he next came our way.

He left. We left. My friends and I had Indian food before returning to our regularly scheduled work worlds. It seemed somehow fitting. That night, another friend called to see what I thought, and my only possible reply was "I'm fried."

However, in the aftermath, I have started to realize the teachings did creep through me. My meditation practice



has improved. My desire to work on some projects that are important to me has returned. I am happy I went through those three days. It was all so mysterious and in most ways, so disconnected from my version of reality. Still the spirit seeped through all the ceremony and strangeness to leave me with the sense that somehow, something did gently come in and touch my spirit. No big whack to the side of the head, no big flash of enlightenment. Just a small, warm openness around my heart and that is, after all, where compassion grows. 🌸



© 2000 e. wortz and energy design studio