



Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

Sponsored by North American Benedictine and Cistercian Monasteries of Men and Women

- [Home](#)
- [About MID](#)
- [Bulletins](#)
- [News](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Support MID](#)
- [Benedict's Dharma](#)
- [Gethsemani I](#)
- [Gethsemani II](#)
- [Gethsemani III](#)
- [Abhishiktananda Society Bulletins](#)

Search MID
[Help](#)

Freedom and Forgiveness: Discussion

Catherine Bielski, Yong Chin Denn, Patrick Henry, Ph.D., Rev. Kusala, Judith Simmer-Brown, Ven. Yifa

from *Benedict's Dharma*, September 2001

[\[Click here for a printer-friendly version of this article\]](#)

Page 2 of 3

Yifa: I'd like to share with you my feelings about what happened in New York. It was Tuesday evening in Taiwan, when it happened. It's in the morning in New York. Around like 9:20, I went back to the nunnery and a Sister rushed out the door and told me, "OK, Yifa, listen. The radio says that the World Trade Center in New York was crashed into by two airplanes." So we immediately turned on the TV and I saw the two towers still there but on fire. I immediately tried to call people in New York but I couldn't get through, and I was talking to friends in Austin watching TV and talking to them over a cellular phone.

I immediately told the friend, "God bless America and Buddha bless America and people in this country need a lot of healing." I said that. Ten minutes later, I remember, I saw one tower collapsing. At that time, I myself felt my heart was collapsing, too. I could imagine myself feeling what it must have been like to be inside the tower and be burned. Or if I were the one forced to jump from the tower. At that time, my heart was so sad. But the next day, I sent an email to my friends in the United States, and my subject was "Don't hate them." Because I feel that if you start to hate them, I think you are not free, because your mind will be trapped by the hatred.

I think the most important thing when you encounter this event is to guard yourself, to guard your spirit, and that's what I said. I was so surprised to hear that the country has started to prepare for war because, this year, I have been involved with the interfaith dialogue and I have heard a lot of voices about peace. We are all talking about peace. The funny thing, at this time, nobody has dared to talk about

Yong Chin Denn is a graduate of Shalem's Spiritual Guidance Program.

[All articles by or about Yong Chin Denn](#)



Patrick Henry, Ph.D., (here on the left with Fr. Patrick Barry) recently retired as executive director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota. He was the editor of *Benedict's Dharma*.

[All articles by or about Patrick Henry, Ph.D.](#)



peace. And the voice is very weak. I sent an email to a friend in the U.S. and the friend warned me not to talk about peace because people might think that I was not patriotic and I might be put in danger. I said, "I believe that the people in this country still love peace inside, and I don't believe the media." They say 90 percent of people support war and I say I don't believe it. I told him we could send out the voice of peace through email. The media may be manipulated by TV or the press but I don't think that people can manipulate the real voice, so we can send it out through email.

The flight on which I came to this conference was the first flight out of Taiwan to New York. A lot of people told me, "Don't go back there. Don't go back to New York." And I said, "I need to go back there. I need to go back to a heartbroken place." I was telling my friends that I need to go back to donate my blood, since, as I am a vegetarian, my blood is pure [laughter]. I wasn't sure if this conference was cancelled or not but I remember the last sentence sent out from my Sister Meg. She said, "Whoever is meant to be here will be here." So, at that time in Taiwan, we had the hurricane. It was the biggest one in 50 years in Taiwan. I have been so sad in the past few days thinking of natural and man-made disasters. I was ready to check in at the airport but the flight was delayed and people said, "Don't go." And I said, "Well, if I am meant to be there, then the plane will take off." So finally the plane took off and I arrived at New York the next day at 1:30 in the early morning and I took another flight here around noon, so I got here was the day before yesterday and I slept twenty hours. When I arrived, I felt at home, that this was a shelter and I slept so peacefully.

I'd like to share with you thoughts on how the Buddha might react to war. There was one time when a neighboring army came to attack the Buddha's home country. The Buddha sat under a tree with no leaves on the way of the route of the army to his country. When a prince of the neighboring country, with his army, saw the Buddha sitting under the tree, he said, "I respect you, but please will you go away?" The Buddha replied, "The shelter of my kingdom, my country, is greater than any other shelter." So the prince retreated, but he still couldn't get rid of his hatred, so he came a second time. The Buddha was still sitting there. The army withdrew again, but the prince came a third time. The Buddha was still there, until the fourth time. Then the Buddha said, "It's karma." Of course, very sadly, the Buddha's country was

Rev. Kusala is a resident Buddhist monk at the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles. His interest in meditation brought him to the IBMC in 1980. In 1994 he took his novice monk vows and in 1996, received full ordination as a Bhikkhu (Monk) with Ven. Dr. Ratanasara and Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma serving as two of the ordaining masters. Kusala Bhikshu is a member of the Buddhist-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Los Angeles, the Wilshire Center Interfaith Council of Los Angeles, and the Interfaith Council of Garden Grove, Stanton and Westminster.

[All articles by or about Rev. Kusala](#)



Judith Simmer-Brown is a professor in the religious studies department at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.

[All articles by or about](#)

destroyed.

Some people, such as my friend, may feel that the Buddha was too passive. My friend asked me, "What do those terrorists want? They want nothing from us." I immediately replied, "They want justice, just like you. Because they feel their country is destroyed." If we know the history of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, it will help us understand. I also, at the same time, was so surprised that nobody asked why the terrorists attacked us. I like to think of it, in a Chinese way, as if our body is a microcosm and the whole world might be a macrocosm. In the West, when we are sick we take a painkiller, whether for headaches, or stomachaches. Before long, however, the painkiller can also a poison, and you never really find the cause of the disease. In the United States, I find that people only want to use a painkiller, to take revenge, and get rid of the enemy and thus make the pain go away.

Perhaps, however, we should be aware that the cause is still there and we are poisoned by the painkiller. As a religious person, I'm afraid that religious groups are divided, such as they are in the Muslim world between pro- and anti-Americans. We need to find out what is the real cause of this divisiveness. For me, the real cause is the people's minds. The hatred is from the mind. The mind brings the action and I think we need to heal our hearts and our minds in this and other countries too. I don't see it as particularly an issue of religion. I think it's more that there are some people for peace and some for violence. I hope that right now we can hear more voices for peace, find a long-term solution, and not just try to take a painkiller. Thank you.

[<< Previous Page](#)

[Next Page >>](#)

Website by **Booklight, Inc.** Copyright © 2010, Monastic Dialogue

Judith Simmer-Brown



Ven. Yifa belongs to Fo Guang Shan and is Dean of Hsi Lai University in Los Angeles. She has a Ph.D. from Yale University. She participated in Gethsemani Encounters I and II, in Benedict's Dharma, and hosted Nuns in the West I and II.

All articles by or about Ven. Yifa

Browse the Archive

- [By Category](#)
- [By Author](#)
- [By Article Title](#)
- [By Bulletin](#)