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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

Stephanie Kaza: Discussion

Suffering Caused by Personal and Structural Violence

Ven. Ajahn Amaro, Professor Ewert Cousins, Sangeetha Ekambaram, Jim Funk, Paul Gailey, Joseph Goldstein, Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, Stephanie Kaza, Fr. Leo Lefebure, John Daido Loori, Archbishop Felix Machado, Sr. Barbara McCracken, OSB, Judith Simmer-Brown, Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D., Fr. James Wiseman, OSB, Danielle Witt, SSND, Fr. Joseph Wong, OSB Cam

from **Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002**

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Ewert Cousins: Concerning the environment, I'd like to ask a question about a resource that many people point to—the consciousness of indigenous people around the world. I've had the opportunity of living with indigenous people, and the most striking thing I've found was that their consciousness is far from the limited consciousness concerning the environment that I brought from my culture to the meeting. I'd like to ask if in your work, Stephanie, you've looked into that, or you feel that this might be a major resource? I'm curious to see what you might see in terms of the consciousness of indigenous people in comparison with the consciousness that is cultivated in Buddhism. I think the Buddhist tradition is very close to the sense of bondedness with nature or being involved in the reality of nature.

Stephanie Kaza: This is quite connected because the first U.S. military offensives were against indigenous peoples in this country. There is a tremendous legacy from the churches, one that requires airing and reclaiming before we can even have a dialogue about indigenous consciousness in a religious context. Environmentalists have very much supported indigenous networks to help them organize and

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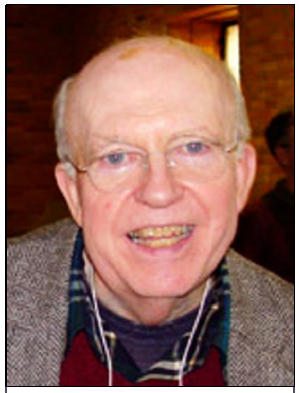
Ven. Ajahn Amaro is a bhikku in the forest-tradition of Buddhism. He lives Abhayagiri Monastery in England. He took part in Gethsemani Encounter II. He is the author of *Silent Rain*.

All articles by or about Ven. Ajahn Amaro



Ewert Cousins, Professor Emeritus of Fordham University, died on May 30, 2009, in Bethlehem CT.

bring those resources forward. Of course, parallel to that, the biotech industries are collecting skin, cheek, and blood samples to so-called perpetuate genetic lineages of individual lines.

There is a lot in common, I would say, with the Buddhist mentality. Gary Snyder, whom I mentioned earlier, said he would have preferred to have been indigenous. However, since he wasn't really born indigenous—a primary requirement to be a Choctaw, Iroquois or whatever—being a Buddhist was the next best thing. What might be interesting—and I'm trying to think of different dialogue partners along the lines Heng Sure mentioned—would be a Christian dialogue mediated by Buddhists, in which there was some effort to talk with indigenous and raise the real reconciliation issues that would have to be aired before we could truly expect them to want to speak freely about this consciousness.

Felix Machado: I would like to come back to what Judith was saying about the inner and the outer approach. Speaking about and reflecting on violence, it's often said, at least in our part of the world, that war is prepared and waged in the heart of the person, and only then does it go out into the world. I think we all have a reason to talk about the root of violence here. The human person is a great work, I think—the Eastern religions especially emphasize that dimension. In my own elementary, high school, and college training the emphasis was always on building the person. Family is very important for this. Bhante G. referred to that, and Jim Funk gave us a little statistic about that. Why do we not speak more of building the family? Have we given up on family, especially in the United States? I say this because I have lived in this country, and a large part of this country is my life, too. I think we should also speak about the family. That's where I think violence is born and is made to grow. The Catholic Church emphasizes the role and importance of the family.

Joseph Goldstein: There was a question raised earlier about possible sources of violence other than hatred, and I'd like to mention one that I think religious practitioners participate in a lot. I'll give an example from my own experience. A source of violence is the belief that our beliefs are the truth. A lot of interreligious violence comes about

Dr. Cousins served for many years as an advisor to Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. He was the chief editorial consultant for the 100 volume Paulist Press series, The Classics of Western Spirituality and was also General Editor of the 25-volume series, World Spiritualit... [**Read full biography**]

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Sangeetha Ekambaram was a religious studies major at Emory University in Atlanta at the time of the 2002 Gethsemani Abbey.

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Paul Gailey is a physicist who works for the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

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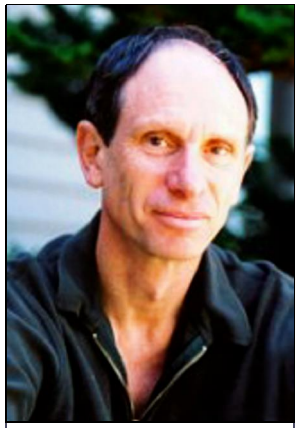

Joseph Goldstein is the

because each side thinks that what they believe is the truth. I had an experience of this, and it was very transforming for me. Having spent twenty years in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, over the last ten years I also studied Tibetan Buddhism. In a rather refined way, they actually say quite different and opposite things about that which is most important to me—the nature of the liberated mind. Each position was presented to me as the truth by people I considered realized masters. It was not just a philosophic discussion.

This was a tormenting koan. Who was right? It felt like my whole spiritual life depended on my answering that question. Which direction was I going to go? Sitting with this koan for months, at a certain point I had what I felt was a real transforming insight that helped me free myself from that potential for violence with competing belief systems. It was the realization, at least for myself, that teachings are not statements of truth, that they are all skillful means. All teachings are methods. If we see teachings as that, then it's possible to hold a wide range of views. We can ask ourselves the question, "How does this teaching or view help me liberate the mind?" That way we are not placing the burden of absolute truth in or on the teaching. We see this a lot in our religious beliefs, but we see it also in the violence in the Middle East. Attachment to view is amazingly powerful.

Paul Gailey: I wanted to add a little bit to what Judith said and Joseph Goldstein said, that was occurring to me as the conversation has gone around the room. In my own life, when I create some sort of problem, there are different ways to approach it. One way would be to blame someone else for the problem that I've created; and, of course, that's a form of violence. But another way, would be to take responsibility and approach it with some sort of self-flagellation or other form of inner violence. That expression, self-flagellation, was something that Thomas Merton used. This is such a critical point for me. One of the great gifts of the contemplative traditions is that when we look at all the problems in the world, we see much complexity. But, in doing the work, I still have to fix the problem in my life. How do I approach that problem? Do I approach that with an inner violence? Do I approach that with a sense that it has to be changed with a force?

co-founder of Insight Meditation Society and The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre, Massachusetts. He was involved in both Gethsemani Encounters.

All articles by or about Joseph Goldstein

Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, is professor of theology at Conception Seminary College and a member of Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri. He contributed to both Gethsemani Encounters.

All articles by or about Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB

Stephanie Kaza is an associate professor, concentrating on environmental ethics, religion and ecology, and ecofeminism at the University of Vermont.

All articles by or about Stephanie Kaza

What I'm talking here is an inner force and attitude toward what has to be done. Even though it's so subtle, and it doesn't seem of a similar magnitude to the things in the world we are looking at, I think those tiny acts of inner violence are very important to the overall picture. The contemplative tradition really can bring out the inner work. But we need to do that inner work in a way that is harmonious and resonant with what we are trying to accomplish.

James Wiseman: As many of you know, a few years ago Pope John Paul II named St. Francis of Assisi the patron saint of the ecological movement, at least within the Catholic Church. I don't at all disagree with that, because in many respects Francis was preeminent in looking upon all creatures and not just his fellow human beings as his brothers and sisters. That leads to a model of friendship or kinship rather than domination for our relationship to the rest of creation. I would also add that about thirty or so years ago there was a French author, Rene Dubois, who in one of his books suggested that St. Benedict should be the patron saint of ecology. I don't think we Benedictines and Cistercians should feel bad that Benedict lost out when the Pope was making his decision, because I think there is good reason to look upon Benedict and Francis as co-patrons.

I'm very pleased, and I hope proud in the right sense, to say that a few months ago when in my own monastic community we were having some meetings on long-range planning, we came rather quickly to a consensus that one thing we wanted to do was to have an environmental assessment of our property. We don't have a lot of ground because we are within the city of Washington, but we have a respectable amount. We had a group, led by a Jesuit and a layperson, who did a very thorough assessment of our grounds and wrote a report. It came the day before I had to leave for here, so I haven't read it yet, but we truly want to be as responsible as we can in the way that we care for our property.

My last remark is to build on that observation. We had a very fine presentation the other day by Father Felix Machado in which he pointed out various kinds of dialogue. Of the four kinds, I suppose we would say what we are most doing here is what is sometimes called the

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All articles by or about Fr. Leo Lefebure

John Daido Loori is the founder and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper, New York.

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dialogue of religious experience or shared experience. To a certain extent you could say that what we are doing is the dialogue of theological discussion. Meetings like this are necessarily rare. It takes so much planning and organization, we are not going to be having this kind of dialogue among this many people very frequently. Let's not forget, however, that another type of dialogue that Father Felix talked about was the dialogue of collaboration—groups and traditions working together on some common project. It seems to me that if we on the Christian side are convinced that Benedict is at least a co-patron of the ecological movement, and we want to be concerned about that, we should not be hesitant about contacting local or even national Buddhist groups to see if in one way or another we can't work together. I wasn't able to absorb all the details of Stephanie's presentation, but I know she mentioned various groups. We should look into that with more care and see what we could do to build the dialogue of collaboration in addition to what we're doing here.

Leo Lefebure: I'd like to come back to the question Joseph Wong asked on why we are hated. I also believe if the modern state of Israel did not exist there would still be a high level of antagonism. I think it comes out of one particular strand of Muslim reading of history. For a thousand years Muslim and Christian warriors marched out to battle periodically. Each side thought God was on its side and celebrated its victories as coming from God. The last great thrust of Islam was 1683 at the second siege of Vienna. For a thousand years, the Muslim world threatened the West. For a hundred years afterwards there are no major struggles. Then Napoleon lands in Egypt 1798 and routes the army of the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of the Pyramids.

This is the symbolic change. The West is now invading traditional Muslim territory. Ever since, the West has been pushing the Islamic world on every front—legal, military, political, technological, scientific, and religious. Islam has responded in a variety of ways. Some Muslims have tried to just keep following the traditional Muslim path. Some have tried to adapt to the West, a development of liberal or modernist Islam. Another side, the revivalists, asked what went wrong in 1798. They decided that, at one level, it was because Muslims were not following the will of God. So they went back to a certain reconstruction

Archbishop Felix Machado served as under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue prior to his appointment as bishop of Nashik (India) on January 16, 2008.

All articles by or about Archbishop Felix Machado

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of early Islam, of sharia, and disagreed among themselves as to what that meant in practice. This movement saw French and the British colonialism throughout the Muslim territories in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the absolute catastrophe.

By 1920, the French and British had divided up most of traditional Muslim lands, and the two lands that were left independent—Iran and Turkey—abolished sharia, implemented Western-style governments, and forbad traditional Muslim dress. It was the complete nadir. At this point there is a more militant turn in the rhetoric and behavior of Islam. The first organized campaign of terrorism is not against Israel and not against the U.S. It's against the government of Egypt in the years after World War II, by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, organized by Hassan Al-Banna. They blew up cinemas, they assassinated Egyptian government officials who were pro-Western, they tried to turn the people against the government, because it was not implementing sharia or Islamic law, in a traditional Muslim land. The U.S. comes on the scene as the heir first to the British and French colonial powers and more distantly to the medieval crusaders.

Even if Israel wasn't there and even if we were not there, there would still be tremendous animus. The other symbolic moment is the Persian Gulf War, when Osama bin Laden wants to continue the Mujihaddeen's war against the Soviets to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, and the Saudi government trusts the U.S. That completely discredits the Saudi government, the Egyptian government, and the Kuwaiti government in bin Laden's mind, and the U.S. more and more is the great Satan. I think it's very important for us to reach out to responsible Muslim leaders and support them, because they, too, have been gunned down in the streets, especially since 1970, by militants.

Danielle Witt: It seems to me that the common denominator in all the sufferings we have talked about is this great resistance to own and to feel our own shame and pain and grasping. During the first week after September 11, the whole country was bonded together, tapping into that deep soft spot within. I was so encouraged by the amount of compassion and courage and empathy. I thought this was such an opportune moment for conversion for our whole nation to look at the

All articles by or about Sr. Barbara McCracken, OSB

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

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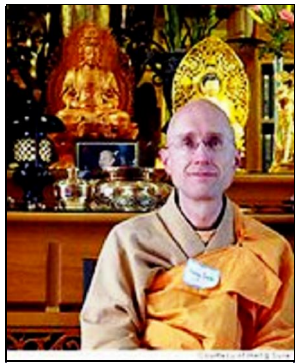


Reverend Heng Sure has been an ordained Buddhist monk in the Chan lineage of China since 1976. He is the director of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

All articles by or about

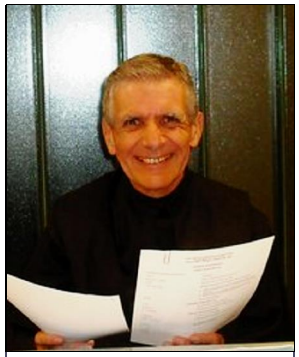
cause, to look within ourselves. Then I was completely defeated when President Bush encouraged us to go out and keep spending and to go to Disneyworld, and then the retaliation began.

Abraham Lincoln had the great gift to enable us as a country to grieve, and to look at the human heart, the suffering on the part of the South and the North. It brought us together as a nation. Individually and corporately we need to help one another be able to stay with that soft spot—to look at it, feel it, and to own it. Then as a nation or as a community, the more that we can stay with that wonderful tender soft spot that is our deepest nature, that's when we will be able to bond as countries and as a universe.

Stephanie Kaza: I think what we're starting to sense across the days of this dialogue is a kind of collective reassessment of contemplative resources in light of today's challenges, and these big scale structural challenges push that conversation the hardest. We know there are tremendous skillful means in teaching, that there is a contemplative heart, and that there are some other very powerful things that we may have even under-assessed. I would ask: Will we from the monastic and the religious traditions be doing triage work—rushing out and picking up pieces here and there as ambulance sirens roll in these various arenas—or will we be doing cultivating work, building a new society? What will be the institutional priorities? How will people within the traditions push their institutions to take stands, and who will be the dialogue partners we will be brave enough to undertake? Could we have a dialogue with the National Rifle Association, for example? Could we have a dialogue with media moguls of Hollywood—an open dialogue, the same format? Could we have a dialogue with anti-globalization activists, impelled by strong ideals and very deep concern? I'm encouraging all of us to, especially the Buddhists, not to leave socially engaged Buddhism on the fringe—it's seen as an "off-the-cushion" activity—but to take positions and be brave about activism in the historical traditions of some of our great leaders. We need to it as institutions so we can have as great an impact as possible on these structural levels of violence that transcend generations.

<< Previous Page

Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D.



Fr. James Wiseman, OSB, is a monk of Saint Anselm's Abbey in Washington, DC, and teaches theology at the Abbey School and at Catholic University. He served as Chair of the Board and President of MID, has been editor of the MID bulletin since 1998, and again serves as a member of the Board of Directors of MID.

All articles by or about Fr. James Wiseman, OSB

Danilele Witt is the director of Bethany Spring, a spiritual retreat in central Kentucky.

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Continued in **Sr. Mary Collins's Presentation (Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002)**

Fr. Joseph Wong, OSB Cam, was elected a member of the Council of the Camaldolese Benedictines in 2005 and lives at the Mother House at Camaldoli, Italy. He was involved in the second Gethsemani Encounter in April 2002.

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