

WINTER - SPRING
2000

Center Voice

The Newsletter of the Center for Sacred Sciences

Special Focus:

Hair in Tradition

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In This Issue . . .

Throughout history, we find accepted cultural traditions relating to hair and other elements of human adornment. If you currently seek information on “hair,” you are inundated with advertisements for products, treatments and stylists. This is a statement on the predominant attitude toward hair in western culture at the time of the millennium change. Somewhat less visibly, within or across cultures, one encounters religious practices, mandated or suggested, monastic or lay, east or west, which provide guidelines for appearance in one’s own tradition.

And, behind individual attempts to obey, one finds the human need to balance culture versus religion, outer versus

inner demands and, ultimately, for a mystic, to find through renunciation the place of selflessness. There is no map or set of directions to find this place and most hair stylists won’t tell you. While following one’s inner guidance on this search, one may encounter harsh reactions from the outer world, blend in with total inconspicuousness, or find innumerable other possibilities. Though this topic may appear frivolous to the uninitiated, we assure you these articles come with no tongue-in-cheek. Everyone has hair—or the lack of it—and is, therefore, able to explore as we have done.

In our lead article, **“Human Hair and Ego Destruction—A Cross-Cultural Approach,”** Tom Kurzka examines contemporary and historical practices, identifying commonalities within the vast inconsistencies in the spiritual realm. This is supplemented by a special guest statement by Ron Leppert on the Rastafarian way of life. Following this, Joel tells an interviewer, in **“Walking Your Talk,”** of his own buzz cuts and the value in doing a hair practice. Dawn Kurzka next describes in **“Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow”** her personal adventures with a renunciation practice utilizing her hair and the benefits forthcoming. And to complete this topic, three Center practitioners of diverse backgrounds share in **“Center Voices”** the issues, and their resolutions, that have arisen regarding personal hair. It could not, however, truly be complete without the incomparable contribution of our own unofficial poet laureate, Karen Fierman, in **“Dis-tressing Dirge of a Nair-do-well.”**

Relating to Center business, we bring you the latest annual **Financial Report**, together with thanks for certain extra offerings of support from Center friends whose help keeps those wheels turning more smoothly. Also, **“The Branching of the Vine”** is the story of a turn in the road of a very familiar Center member and his willingness to follow that road where it leads. In **“Library Corner,”** we mention a twist of fate that brought about another (dare we say it?) MOVE! as well as a review of a relevant new book. Finally, although we have no “Letters to the Editor” column at this time, we print a letter you won’t want to miss. We hope this issue leaves you seeing life—and hair—anew.

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The Center for Sacred Sciences is a non-profit, tax exempt church dedicated to the creation and dissemination of a new worldview based on the wisdom of humanity's great spiritual teachers, but presented in forms appropriate to our present scientific culture. Our programs draw on the teachings of the mystics of all traditions, informed by the Enlightenment or Gnosis of Joel, our Spiritual Director. Among the Center's current offerings are Sunday Programs with meditation and talks by Joel, once-a-month Sunday video presentations, twice-yearly meditation retreats, and a weekly Practitioners Group for committed spiritual seekers. The Center also maintains an extensive lending library of books, tapes and periodicals covering a broad spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and scientific subjects. Joel's teachings are offered freely as a labor of love, and he receives no financial support from the Center. We rely chiefly on volunteer labor to conduct our programs, and on donations and membership dues to meet our operating expenses.



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CENTER NEWS

Palo Alto Retreat

On the weekend of June 3-6, 1999, Joel made his by-now annual trek down to Palo Alto, California, where he was joined by Andrea Pucci to lead a weekend workshop. The subject was "Mysticism's Highest Teachings" and how they relate to the nuts and bolts of daily practice. As usual, there was a lively interaction with about fifteen people, some of whom came all the way from southern California just for the occasion. Thanks again to Sita DeLeeuw, Tom McFarlane, Mora Dewey, and all those who made this event possible. If you want information about future seminars in the Palo Alto area, please contact Sita at (650) 857-1312.

Anacortes Retreat

On September 12-13, 1999, Joel and Jennifer traveled to Anacortes, Washington, where Joel led a weekend workshop titled "An Introduction to Dream Work." (Anyone interested in this subject might want to check out Joel's two-tape set called "Practices of the Night.") Many thanks to David and Lori Cunningham who hosted this fascinating event.

Enlightenment Day Celebration

At this year's Enlightenment potluck dinner, which was held at Mike and Sheila Craven's home on August 11, the celebration was multifaceted. In addition to the usual fare, two special presentations were made. Joel announced the graduation of the first Foundation Studies class (for those in the initial year of the Practitioners Group) taught by Michael Taylor. Those completing this year's course were welcomed into the regular ongoing group.

The other presentation was made by Maggie B. Free, appointed spokesperson for the members and friends of the Center. With beauty and eloquence, Maggie gave a shocked Joel and Jennifer our gift of a cashier's check, together with relevant travel brochures, to enable them to take their abandoned pilgrimage to religious sites in southern Europe, if they so choose. (Their original trip funds had been used to build our new Center. Please see their letter on page 11.)

The ceremonies were followed as usual by some very spontaneous and inspiring music. Gene Gibbs, with his guitar accompaniment, delighted us with more of his unequalled and hilarious songs about life on the spiritual path. Following this, eager singers (all of us) followed the leads of Steve Zorba Frankel on violin, Lou Principe on guitar and Vinnie Principe on piano with vocals, Deanna Cordes on her conga drum, Wayne Leeds on guitar, and many of us on rhythm instruments, singing and, yes, dancing way into the night. We even had a rockin' rendition of "Can't Get No Satisfaction," with spirited drumming by Clivonne Corbett, who proclaimed herself quite satisfied by the end. A richer celebration would be hard to find!

Farewell, Michael

At summer's end, the Center bid a fond farewell to Michael Taylor, a 12-year member whose presence and service have been practically unlimited. Highlights have included service on the Board since 1990, writing for the *Center Voice* since 1992, and serving as Minister since 1995, combined with individual acts too numerous to mention. Michael taught the first official, year-long Foundation Studies class, 1998-99, which prepares people to enter the Practitioners Group; Fred Chambers has taken the reins with this year's F.S. group, assisted by Ani Tsering (see her in Center Voices). Thank you, Michael; we look forward to your visits. (Please see Michael's article on page 15.)

Sheila Craven Elected to Center Board

Sheila Craven was elected to the Board of Directors on September 1, 1999, to replace Michael Taylor. Sheila has been an active member since 1996. She has owned her own business for over 18 years. A company which employs 15 people, it is an information service bureau for high-technology industries. She states, "It's an honor to be on the Board. While I hope to continue Michael's good service, I expect that my experience in business will also be useful."

Andrea in Residence

The Center's Practitioners Group has had an extended opportunity to learn from Andrea Pucci throughout the fall of 1999. Andrea, who increasingly co-leads retreats with Joel, substituted for him (officially, that is, as no one could actually ever substitute for either of them!) by teaching Tong Lin in depth to a captivated audience. Tong Lin, a Tibetan Buddhist practice of compassion, is called "taking and sending" in English. This change of pace gave Joel more time to work toward finishing his new book.

Fall Retreat

Surrender means the sweetness of laying down all resistance as well as the struggle to accept the fact that "you" cannot do that; it can, after all, be done only by Grace. From October 8 to 17, 1999, at Cloud Mountain Retreat Center in southwestern Washington, 24 retreatants explored "Unconditional Surrender" through teachings and meditations introduced by Joel and Andrea. Using the eternal principles of attention, commitment, detachment and surrender, together with a full-range of meditation practices, we found that the most important practice is done with no concern for the results.



RETREATANTS: (Bottom row from left) Diana Taylor, Carol Mizera, Karen Fierman, Jim Zajac, Clivonne Corbett, Rani Herman, Mike Craven, (middle row) Beth Mackenzie, Todd Corbett, Andrea Pucci, Joel, Deanna Cordes, Allen House, Dawn Kurzka, (top row) Shan Ambika, Fred Chambers, Miriam Reinhart, Jim Patterson, Ann Everitt, David Cunningham, Maggie Free, and Rich Marlatt. (Not Shown: Grace Mikesell.)



Human Hair and Ego Destruction— A Cross-cultural Approach

by Thomas A. Kurzka

Tom Kurzka is married and the father of a teenage daughter. Currently, he works in communications for a non-profit Catholic health care organization. He has been coming to the Center for the past two years.

Like the common stream of mystical teachings which exists across religions, similar archetypes of hair symbolism emerge cross-culturally, as well. No single meaning, however, can account for all uses of hair on the spiritual path. Nevertheless, meanings applied to hair can be derived from three basic facts: hair grows continuously and can be cut painlessly and then grow back again; hair growth in the genital and other areas of the body signals sexual maturation; and animals generally have more hair than humans.

Unlike other mammals, we don't go through molting periods because our hair follicles work independently, "being shed and replaced, a few at a time."¹ The life span of a human hair ranges from 2-6 years, each hair growing about 7 inches per year or up to a maximum of about 42 inches.² But even this isn't a set rule. A Hindu ascetic, Swami Paradsma, was found to have hair 26 feet long.³ In other words, the human hair follicle, unlike the follicles of most animals, gives us great flexibility. We can grow our hair long, shave it to the skin, grow it long again, cut it, manipulate it and then dye it to our heart's content. What better way for human culture to express its diversity through time and space? And what better adornment or trapping for ego identification?

While most animals are covered completely by a coat of hair, humans have two predominant places where hair appears: the genital area and head. Hair in the genital region represents physical functions and the realm of nature, which confront social relations, intellectual activities and spiritual aspirations, all symbolized by hair on the head. Unkempt hair becomes a symbol for nature, vitality, sexuality; well-groomed hair represents conformity, dullness and the social order.⁴ Yet at the same time, a carefully spiked, green-dyed head of hair can represent a rebellious attitude, while the wild and unruly hair of an intellectual, Albert Einstein, for instance, can represent the social order. Likewise, the male body is covered with more hair than the female body and hairiness can be associated with masculinity and hairlessness with femininity. Then again, "long head hair appears appropriate to the female sex because it appears soft and rounded, while short hair is

masculine because it is angular and sharp."⁵ We see hair as a symbol of beauty and sexual attraction, yet if we find a strand of hair in our bowl of soup in a restaurant, it becomes something close to excrement. In short, there are no set rules for hair symbolism or for the use of hair on the spiritual path.

The Shaved Look. Hair offers a most convenient sacrifice. Cutting it generates no blood or pain, and unlike any other part of the body, except for the nails, it grows back. The ancient Greeks offered their hair to the gods as sacrifice to gain their own fertility and strength. In addition, the Greeks would shear their hair and sprinkle it onto streams to fertilize the land and their crops. The ancient Romans followed similar customs. "Hair was originally sacrificed as a convenient substitute for life itself."⁶

Jewish and Muslim rituals to this day abound with instances of sacrificing hair. Periodically, Muslims, both men and women, shave their pubic and underarm hair as an act of cleansing and purification for Allah.⁷ Sacrifice of hair also occurs at critical moments of life—birth, onset of puberty, marriage or death. For example, variations of what was initially called the 'aqîqa-sacrifice are still practiced today by both Jews and Muslims.⁸ In these ceremonies an infant's hair is left uncut for several days or several years. The first cutting of the hair, "like the sacrifice of an animal, has the fundamental purpose of redeeming the child from the state of taboo resting upon it from birth." The child then becomes qualified to become a member of the tribe.⁹

Historical and contemporary monastic traditions frequently make use of head shaving as a rite of initiation. Since most monastic traditions are concerned with breaking the bonds of ego attachment, what better way to dispel any sense of vanity than by shaving one's head. "There's no attention or thought supposedly given to how you look. You aren't going to fuss with your hair. You're not going to worry about how you look. So it takes off an avenue of attachment," says Ani Tsering, a Tibetan Buddhist renunciant. (See Center Voices interview on page 14.)

In the Roman Catholic church, tonsure, the cutting of the

hair or shaving of the crown, is “worn by clerics as a distinctive mark of their state.”¹⁰ Tonsure probably originated from the Roman custom of shaving the heads of their slaves. The Romans treated early Christians with the same manner of contempt and disrespect. “To proclaim themselves slaves of Christ” and to dispel the myth of self vanity and break the bonds of attachment to the world, Catholic monastics began shaving their heads at a very early date.¹¹ Even today, as a part of ritual, some priests still have a lock of their hair cut off as a sign that they are turning away from the world.¹²

Removal of head and facial hair, as both a ritual separation from society and an indication of celibacy, is central to rites of initiation into ascetic life for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. Shaving also “symbolizes the return to the sexually and socially undifferentiated status of an infant.”¹³ During one type of Hindu ritual, for example, the shaven ascetic takes off all his clothes. “The naked renouncer is significantly called *jatarupadhara*, which literally means “one who bears the form he had at birth.”¹⁴

And, of course, there is always the option of concealment. Historically, most Roman Catholic nuns covered their hair with what is called a collareum.¹⁵ In medieval Europe, long, flying, loose hair on all women indicated a bad reputation. To be proper, the best thing to do was to keep it covered.¹⁶ This edict was by no means restricted to European Christian women, applying to Jewish and Muslim women as well. Even today, Muslim women are required to keep their hair covered in public because it is considered to be a sexual distraction for men.¹⁷ For similar reasons, Orthodox Jewish women cut off their hair at marriage and then conceal it by using the sheitel, a wig of false hair.¹⁸

The Groomed Look. Modern western civilized hair styles fall into this category. We perm it, we dye it, we cut and shape it and always look into the mirror to make sure our hair is just right. Contemporary culture is obsessed with hair. And when it falls out, turns gray, gets split ends, windblown, or just doesn't curl in the right way, then our sense of ego suffers—we become inferior, not good enough, unattractive, and unwanted. We may even realize our impermanence. Such is the life of the worldly groomed look of hair.

But even in the groomed look there is sacrifice and a way past the bondage of ego. Social convention across all cultures has and still does demand a certain groomed look for each of its participants. Our egos, knowing their fictional nature, want to be able to stand out, look wild, be different, unique and recognizable. What better way than to buck the traditional conventional groomed look by coming up with a completely outrageous hair style? This is not a good idea if the goal is to get past vanity—it might be better to find a practical, low-maintenance haircut, not look in the mirror too much and conform.

The groomed look, however, runs counter to the basic motif that hair is a gift from God and supplies humans with strength and vitality. The Old Testament story of Samson,

who lost his strength when his hair was cut off while he was asleep, clearly equates thick, long hair with power. Cultures outside of the Semitic traditions express this concept as well. For instance, the Masai in Africa, before colonization “believed their chief would lose his power if his chin were shaved, and the Sioux Indians accepted hair so much as the seat of strength that they scalped their enemies to take away their power even in death.”¹⁹

A quandary develops—various religions and cultures have to instruct their members to somehow keep their hair neat and groomed and at the same time let it grow. In Confucian Korea, the traditional culture of this country, it is disgraceful for a person, male or female, to harm oneself by cutting the hair. Uncut, however, does not imply unruly. The long hair is never allowed to hang freely. It is controlled: knotted or braided in particular ways, each style specifying aspects of the wearer's social position.²⁰

The Sikhs are probably the best example of the uncut groomed look. Like the story of Samson in the Bible, the Sikhs believe that hair is a source of strength and vitality and should never be cut. Cutting one's hair is an ego act of self-assertion against God.²¹ Since Sikhs don't practice asceticism and are actively involved in social and married life, they also must keep their unshorn hair and beards well-groomed; hence, the use of turbans, combs and wax for their beards. Throughout history, Sikhs have faced death rather than submit to cutting their hair²²—another form of sacrifice, this time going against conventional norms.

One last interesting practice of the groomed, uncut look is that of Chasidic Jewish men growing out their side-locks (*pe'ot*) and grooming these into fancy curls. Although it does not give a reason for the practice, the Torah prohibits rounding off the hair of the temples. According to traditional Jewish commentators, “rounding the side-growth on the head was a pagan custom. Israel, in contrast, was to be a nation holy to the Lord.”²³ Thus a hairstyle, now considered sacred by its practitioners, originally evolved out of one tribe's desire to distinguish its appearance from the perceived barbarism of neighboring pagan tribes.

Letting it all Grow Out. The Greek god Pan—half goat, full of hair, and half human, no hair except for the head—best characterizes our wild, natural and passionate element juxtaposed against the intellectual, social and spiritual domain. Periodically, Pan has been characterized by Christians as one of the main demons of paganism,²⁴ representing the temptations of the flesh. Hair that is allowed to grow endlessly and ungroomed is therefore considered animalistic, immoral, overtly sensual and out of control. Cultures and religions generally see this as a force of evil and attempt to subdue it by encouraging conventional grooming practices.

But hair from a cultural or religious viewpoint is never entirely evil. The human side of Pan also has hair and, as already stated, hair symbolized God's gift of vitality and

strength to humankind in the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah. Hair in this instance is good, representing the creative juices flowing through us. Without the so-called wildman or wildwoman element we would stagnate and be lifeless spiritually.

The key then, for certain spiritual aspirants, is to use this energy appropriately. India has a long tradition of forest hermits or ascetics. Unlike their shaved monastic brethren, forest ascetics never cut or groom their hair, allowing it to go matted. Their unkempt hair symbolizes physical separation from both social and civilized structures. The ascetics neglect any type of grooming, cutting down on distractions as much as possible, withdrawing from the world to meditate constantly on God.²⁵ Similar to the Hindu forest ascetics, Jews in ancient Israel would take a vow of a Nazarite, “to separate themselves unto the Lord.”²⁶ A Nazarite vow could involve many sacrifices, one of which was to leave the hair uncut and ungroomed until the vow was completed. This practice is still followed in current times by Rastafarians, and by others as well, who vow the vow of a Nazarite by not cutting their hair and letting it matt into dreads. (See Rastafarian article on page 7.) Again, like the forest ascetic, the purpose of the Nazarite vow is to remove oneself from social and physical structures for the purpose of getting beyond the ego-self and knowing God.

Are we wasting our time or is hair really relevant on the spiritual path? Some wear it long, others shave it, and across different religions and cultures no set pattern is followed. The styles change. One moment shaving signifies monasticism, the next, the status of a Roman slave. In contemporary culture Michael Jordan makes the shaved head look cool, buffed waxed head and all, while during the Hitler-induced Jewish holocaust, a shaved head became an image of suffering, humiliation and atrocity. How is one to make sense out of any of this?

And where is the relevance to the spiritual path? In the course of researching this article, a Benedictine nun respondent questioned the purpose of addressing the subject of hair, suggesting that one could better spend time simply focusing on spiritual pursuits. After answering questions about Islamic hair practices, a Muslim’s face changed into a beam of significantly increased enthusiasm as he began sharing the foundations of Islam. And as an encore, when asked about the practice of *pe’ot*, a practicing Jew, noted for his extensive knowledge of this tradition, said in slight disgust: “I really don’t care.”

Yet hair has significant impact. With prime visibility perched on top of the head, complementing the face with enough flexibility for an endless array of styles and cuts, and hinting ever-always at sexuality, hair ranks as one of the ultimate ties to vanity. Unique among trappings, hair is a great little device for the finite sense of self to focus on and say, “That must be me. I sure look good today.” Even the

Benedictine nun, who questioned spending time on a research article on hair, noted that in the early days she wore her collareum during the day, replacing it with a sleeping cap at night. Constantly having her hair covered helped dispel her sense of vanity. Therein lies the secret—the hidden chain many hair practices around the world are trying to break—get past attachment to hair and chances are good several cogs in the wheel of ego will be broken as well.

❖ Tom, Fall 1999

NOTES

1. Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex, Society, Symbolism* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 28.
2. *Ibid.*, 28.
3. *Ibid.*, 28.
4. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. in chief Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), vol. 6, 154.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Cooper, 38.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Anonymous Muslim interview with author, September 15, 1999.
9. Julian Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth, Marriage, Death and Kindred Occasions among the Semites*. (New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1973), 36.
10. *Ibid.*, 47.
11. “Tonsure,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (www.newadvent.org/cathen/).
12. Cooper, 44
13. *Ibid.*, 45.
14. Patrick Olivelle, “Hair and Society: Social significance of Hair in South Asian Traditions,” in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, eds. Alf Hildebeitel and Barbara D. Miller, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 21.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Anonymous Benedictine nun interview with the author, September 20, 1999.
17. Anonymous Muslim interview with the author, September 15, 1999.
18. Cooper, 67.
19. *Ibid.*, 41.
20. Sarah M. Nelson, “Bound Hair and Confucianism in Korea” in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, eds. Alf Hildebeitel and Barbara D. Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 21.
21. S. Gobind Singh Mansukhani, “Introduction to Sikhism,” Section III: Principles (www.photon.bu.edu/~rajwi/sikhism/mansukh).
22. *Ibid.*
23. Julian Jacobs, “Hair” (London: Ealing Synagogue, www.shamash.org/tanuch/tanach/commentary/daf-hashavua/).
24. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. in chief Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. 1987), vol 11, 160.
25. Olivelle, 26.
26. *Numbers* 6:2.



The Rastafarian Way of Life

by Ron Leppert

Ron Leppert is a practicing Rastafarian who lives in Eugene with his wife and dog. He works as a warehouse manager for a local health food store. Ron graciously gave of his time to talk with Center Voice staff about the Rastafarian way of life with special emphasis on hair.

In the Hebraic tradition, YAHWEH gave Moses the opportunity to tell the children of Israel that they could make a vow and separate themselves unto God. The Vow of the Nazarite includes not combing or cutting the hair or beard in addition to other abstentions described in greater detail in the Old Testament (Numbers 6). In response to our questions, Ron prepared the following statement:

The Vow of a Nazarite is a personal thing; a man or a woman can make this choice. It's about consecrating themselves unto the Lord for a certain amount of time—to focus on the intent of God's will in one's life and work to the fulfillment of that for the glory of God. It's not just a hair thing, it's a Heart thing. A vow is something that comes from the Heart; the actual process of growing the hair is an outward sign of inward commitment. When you make the choice and start growing your hair, you find you run up against all sorts of negative attitudes, misconceptions and hard looks. That struggle usually weeds out the weak hearts—those not fully committed to their vow. This is a vow that begins in the Heart and by free will the truest "Dreads" are those who want to thank JAH for what he has done for them. In I [translated "God and I"] love our Creator and so we have enlisted ourselves in His special service. So it really must start in the Heart. It comes from deep within. I feel it; so I Live it.

Locks grow from there and so do JAH works. I want to do something for JAH and I sense myself as a tool in His hands.

Also walking in the Vow of a Nazarite and going through tribulations is purifying. It brings unhealthy things to the surface to be weeded out, like what's exposed in your own person—i.e., how you may react negatively to others' negative reactions. The challenge and discipline that the vow puts you through is how the vow shapes you. In the struggle to work through tribulations, your character becomes greater, your vision becomes sharper, and your Heart becomes fuller—with the spirit of Love. Thus you become a more useful tool in the hand of the Almighty.

The vanity issue with dreadlocks is a two-edged sword. Growing dreads can be giving up vanity or one can have vanity about their dreads. Reggae festivals draw in a lot of young people to a surface life style. Many people are growing their hair for style, and they know they're not Rastas. There's nothing wrong with having these styles, but there's nothing strong about it either. It's just style and style doesn't make a person strong. Commitment to the vow lays a foundation of righteousness within one's self. Thus, a true Dreadlock Rasta is really a person who seeks inwardly for God, and is intent on living in a righteous manner. He or she will put vanity aside.

❖ Ron, Fall 1999



WALKING YOUR TALK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOEL

In August 1999, Center Voice staff talked with Joel about his experience and recommendations concerning hair on the spiritual path. The following is the result.

CV: Those of us around the Center know that every Fourth of July you cut your hair very short. Could you tell us why you do that?

J: I call it my “annual spring shearing,” and I do it partly to commemorate the first time I cut my hair short in 1983.

CV: That was the year you got Enlightened.

J: Yes, but I cut my hair before that. I had already started on my spiritual path, but I was also still pursuing a career in Hollywood. Finally I got to the point where I realized I couldn’t do both at once. I had to make a choice. So I decided to leave Hollywood and travel around the West, visiting various spiritual communities. I called this my *little renunciation*. It was “little” because I wasn’t really renouncing worldly life. All I was renouncing was worldly ambition—the idea that you can become happy through achieving worldly success.

Anyway, the more I thought about my upcoming trip, the more it seemed cutting my hair would be the most practical thing to do. First, because I would be on the road, camping out a lot, and so I wouldn’t have much opportunity to wash my hair, or care for it. Also, I was going to make this trip during the summer, so it would be much more comfortable to have short hair. So, for these reasons it seemed this would be the best thing to do.

But whenever I actually contemplated cutting my hair, it brought up all sorts of attachments, and I realized the real reason I wore it long was for vanity. I’d always gotten a lot of compliments on my hair, especially from women who found it attractive because it was soft and silky, and so forth. So, I was attached to an image of myself, how I looked to other people. I didn’t spend a lot of money having it styled or anything like that, but still I would study it in the mirror every morning to make sure everything was in place, and then I’d catch myself checking on it throughout the day. So cutting my hair turned out to be a much more powerful practice than I had originally thought, because it made me aware of these subtle kinds of attachments I never really knew I had.

CV: Then what happened?

J: Well, I *did* cut my hair, and it turned out to be very freeing. Once I was actually on my trip, all the practical reasons for doing it kicked in. It was wonderful not to have to comb it, or wash it every day, or worry about how I looked anymore. And, basically, I’ve never worried about any of those things since.

CV: You said the reason you cut your hair every spring was *partly* to commemorate that first time. Are there other reasons?

J: Well, it’s become a ritual that’s functional in my life, and I like functional rituals. It continues to be a very practical thing for the same reasons it was in the beginning. In the summertime, when the weather is warm, there’s no reason to have long hair. It’s much easier to wear it short. You don’t have to take care of it, you don’t have to comb it. Then, when winter rolls around, it’s more comfortable to have it long. I have a preference for warmth, and during the winter months my head gets cold, so I just let my hair grow out. Actually, this sort of mirrors what takes place in nature. If you watch animals, they grow longer coats as winter approaches, then shed them in the spring. So I’m really just following nature.

CV: Do you think that’s what rituals are about—following nature?

J: Well, I think all rituals get started for *some* reason. Maybe they’re commemorating some event, or maybe it’s just pragmatic. Personally, I suspect the original reason monks and nuns shaved their heads, was for the same reasons I did. They were going to be homeless, wandering about, and—particularly in the old days—they were in danger of getting lice and all sorts of other things. So, it was probably a very sensible thing to do. Then later, it also became a ritual which outwardly expressed to the world an inner act of renunciation.

CV: Could you talk a little more about how cutting one’s hair is an act of renunciation. It doesn’t seem like such a big deal.

J: Well, in a certain sense it isn’t—especially, if you compare it to other kinds of ceremonies of renunciation, or ascetic practices, such as the Native American Sundance. Compared to them, cutting your hair is not a big deal at all! Because if you’re going to do a Sundance—where you actually have to pierce your flesh, and go out there and hang on a tree for three days—then you’re going to face some really deep attachments. Your ego’s going to say things like, “Oh, I could get infections. This is life threatening,” and so forth—all of which is true! So, there are very good reasons *not* to do it, and in a certain sense that lets you off the hook.

But the very fact that cutting your hair doesn’t do you any physical harm, that it isn’t painful, is what makes it much more accessible to most people. You don’t have those heavy-duty excuses for dismissing it out-of-hand. And if you start to ask

yourself questions like, “Why do I wear my hair in such-and-such a way?”—and you really examine it—all sorts of attachments can come to light.

CV: But you still have to act on that.

J: Yes. If you’re on a spiritual path, it’s very important to express externally what’s happening internally. This is because you can get intellectual insights into your attachments and say, “Oh well, that’s not a problem for me now that I understand it.” But the real test is to actually do something—to walk your talk.

For example, it’s pretty easy on your meditation pillow to understand that vanity is an ego trip. Then you get up from your pillow, and you go and take a shower, and the next thing you know you’re looking in the mirror, checking out your appearance. So, how do you translate that insight you got on your pillow into life as you actually live it?

Now, it may not be possible for you to shave your head because of your job, or because your spouse would flip out, or for whatever reason. But you should always try to find some way to concretely alter your behavior to reflect the insights you get. Otherwise, they’ll just fade away, and nothing will really change. But if you do act on your insights, this builds confidence in your practice. You actually experience the freedom that comes with detachment and so you’re willing to do more to let go, to drop more and more of your egoic baggage.

CV: Okay, but supposing it becomes clear to a person with long hair that they are attached to it—that their hairstyle is based on vanity—so they feel the need to let that go. But, at the same time, it’s also clear that at their workplace they can’t do anything drastic. They can’t get a buzz cut, or shave their head, because they still need to look presentable. Do you have any suggestions as to what they might do instead?

J: Yes. Pick a hairstyle that’s simple, that takes the least amount of fuss, but that’s still acceptable where you work. Choose that style, get your hair done that way, and then stick with it. If you have to get a trim every three months to keep it looking neat, you just do that. You don’t worry about it. You don’t thumb through magazines looking at other hairstyles, wondering if this or that one would look better on you.

Really, the key to whether or not there’s an attachment is how much you worry about something—which translates into how much suffering you have. If you’re not worrying, you’re not suffering. That’s true detachment. And that’s why, from a deluded point of view, all these little acts of renunciation seem like sacrifices. They seem heroic. People say, “Oh, how brave you are!” But from a spiritual point of view, if you’re doing it properly, it’s quite the opposite. They’re really acts of freedom. They’re little acts which actually increase your happiness. And so you start to look at other people, and you see how burdened they are with all that self-concern, and you wonder why everybody doesn’t do this.

CV: Thank you.

J: You’re welcome.

Dis-tressing Dirge of a Nair-do-well

*Whilest I visit my stylist
In my usual mane-ic mood, I brood:
What is the likelihood
Of me getting Enlightened
'ere my hair is gone, or has whitened?
My hair's a worry très hirshute,
A bristly, fuzzy, frivolous pursuit.
Mousse it, gel it, blow it dry—
To dye, or not to dye—Ay,
Where's the shampoo?
To perm, or not to perm—
Pondering impermanence?
'tis not my concern.
Form is emptiness, emptiness form,
Whether I'm bushy or baldily shorn.
Oh, the allure of a coiffure!
Will it cure me on the Path
Of my ignorance, greed, or wrath?
There are Precepts to practice, and
Prayers to say,
Even on a bad-hair day.
My looking-glass
Reflects back to me a mere mirage,
Before which I pause,
To worship at the shrine,
As if on pilgrimahge.
At that altar of the goddess,
Over split-ends, I stress—
Whilst through my tresses darkly,
Shines the Light of Consciousness.*

—Karen Fierman



Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

by M. Dawn Kurzka

Dawn Kurzka is the editor of the Center Voice and has been a member of the Center since 1997. Her barber is the author of the article on page 4. She is increasingly learning to live with beginner's mind and to avoid men with clippers.

One fateful day in August, 1998, while looking at a book by Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron, I had what can only be called an encounter with her image on the back cover. What particularly captivated me was her very short hair. This was not the first time by far that I'd seen her picture, but in this instant there was an inner knowing that I would someday have that kind of haircut on my own head.

Having waist-long hair, to sustain some level of comfort, I immediately invalidated my perception: "Of course, I wouldn't really do that!" But the image persisted and by spring it was strikingly obvious that 1999 was to be the year. At that point, it became a bargaining fest: "Well, maybe a nice flattering haircut of about two inches long." Having had attractive short hairstyles in the past, this idea maintained my morale for awhile longer. And, being a wimp about comfort, it was clear that it would need to be summer before such an event took place. This plan added more relief.

Various things happened throughout the debate stage. First, a friend who'd had very long hair, seemingly forever, showed up at my door with the very two inch long haircut of my imagination and announced that she had a braid at home. Ah. There it was—the perfect way to let go and still hold on! Yes, this *could* happen.

Next, the identity need for long hair fell away. Having considered myself a dancer for much of this life, the long straight hair had helped prolong this attachment way after the knees and feet began to announce their disenchantment with continuing this kind of behavior. The dancer identity somehow became obsolete, along with several other personas, and long hair began to seem unnecessary.

Combined with this, the problems associated with it became more obvious: having it pulled in bed by lying on it or my husband lying on it, taking hours to dry after a washing, and finding escaped long hairs everywhere. The final straw was

when I baked a splendid long hair into a pie for a Center potluck on July 4th. Fortunately, there are people far more advanced than me at the Center who happily ate the section containing the hair, even after I warned them!

Finally, there was the belief that somehow all this flowing hair covered up physical defects. It framed the face, distracting from imperfections that lurked in the shadows. It has been many years (perhaps decades) since I've focused very actively on my appearance, but on a more subtle level, negotiation was always going on. And, as the body has aged and more parts fallen into mediocrity, the hair had increasingly become the saving grace.

This final issue could not be released and simply followed me to and through the shearing. On Friday, July 9, the rain had transformed to sun and heat. It was clearly *the* time and I'd run out of excuses. A close friend had arrived from out of state and was eager to be a part of this event. What greater joy and horror can there be than this: to feel one's long braid cut off by a trusted friend (with a gleeful look on her face!) and then to face the clippers (set at 3/8 inch and wielded by one's husband), with said friend chanting an accompaniment throughout while one's teenaged daughter and friend (adorned with long, flowing hair of their own) stand in rapt attention in the bathroom door, exhibiting combined looks of amusement and stark terror. Clearly this was no ordinary ritual of deep spiritual renunciation, but a pure moment of life living itself through me, laughing all the way, in spite of my feeble wish to control.

As hair fell to the ground and chanting continued in the background, the face lost its frame, visual distraction dissolved, and what remained in the mirror was the face of a kid in Little League baseball. Thus began a new series of temporary identities and an urgent search by the ego for ways to replace the feminine image I believed had been contained

in the hair. The mind created an immediate solution in makeup and earrings and, following periodic mental battles, these were repeatedly rejected. The point of this whole endeavor was, after all, to allow what *is* to *be*. Clothes, on the other hand, could be manipulated somewhat, and I clung to wearing skirts for the first few days.

Remarkably, I found it quite nonthreatening to carry on my regular business in the world. In the first place, unless looking in a mirror, or having my head rubbed (which seemed to happen constantly), I felt no different. Behind the phenomenon of the body there truly is no difference. Awareness comes from the same place no matter how you think your body looks or what happens to your hair. This has been steadily reassuring.

Second, experiencing people's reactions in the moment has always proven to be fresh and new; it is truly living with beginner's mind. Some of the more memorable comments have been: "Boy, are you brave!" "Whad'ja do *that* for?" "Cool." "You should put on some makeup for more definition" (i.e., the frame is gone, so let's make the picture more precise.) "Whatever possessed you!?" "What's new?" "Was this a ritual?" "Did you take renunciation vows?" "What happened to your hair!!!!?" "This is great, and now you just need long, dangling earrings." How right *that* felt. And how hard I tried to find the explanation for why I had done this—for most truly, I had not actually done or decided anything.

Two weeks after The Cut, when I indeed no longer felt a need to feminize my appearance, I wore dangling earrings and a long, flowing dress as an experiment. It felt like a costume, and certain fashion-conscious friends offered a thumbs-up response. Hair and clothes are now just part of phenomena arising. I never know what I'll see in the mirror. The hair does what it does day by day. Frequently, I hardly notice what clothes I wear. It's all a costume. It arises and eventually dissolves—like people's reactions. Most people again appear to see me just as Dawn, whoever that is. The clipped braid lies forgotten in a pile of clutter. And the wearer of the costumes never changes.



❖ Dawn, Fall 1999

Letter to the Editor



For more details about the circumstances leading up to the following letter, please refer to The Center News article titled *Enlightenment Day Celebration* on page 2.

Joel Morwood
Jennifer Knight
1571 Buck Street
Eugene, OR 97402

September 5, 1999

Dear Editor:

Jennifer and I would like to take this opportunity to express our admiration for all you conspirators out there who contributed to the "Joel Fund." You were extremely clever. By stipulating that we must spend the money on ourselves, you made it impossible for us to use the money for a Center project, or some other charitable purpose. By donating anonymously, you made it impossible for us to return the money to you. It seems, then, the only honorable course of action open is to submit to your wishes and actually spend the money on ourselves. So be it.

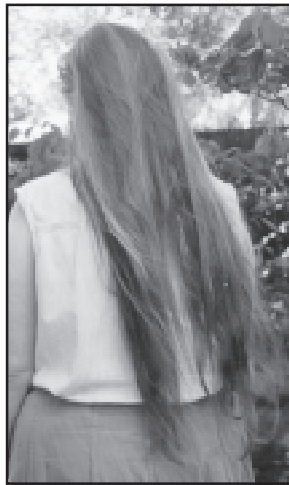
Although our plans are still tentative, we are contemplating a seven day trip next fall. Our destination is uncertain. Spain and Turkey are high on our list, but we've also talked about going to Marrakech or Damascus. We'll let you know what happens in a future newsletter. In the meantime—and in all seriousness—we are quite overwhelmed by both your generosity and your concern for our happiness. May it all come back to you a thousand-fold.

Thank you, and Love,

Joel & Jennifer

HOW DOES YOUR HAIR FIT INTO YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE?

We asked three members of the Center for Sacred Sciences about the role of their hair in their spiritual life. They spoke about issues relating to attachment, cultural expectations, and their struggles with the practices of specific traditions. How do, or could, their experiences relate to your own relationship to your hair?



Jennifer Knight is married and works as a bookkeeper at Lane Community College. She likes to garden and read in her spare time. She has little of that because of her many responsibilities at the Center, where she has been a member for twelve years.

I work in a business-oriented office. Sometimes I have to do reception, so I've thought about what to do with my hair, because I didn't like fooling around with it. I've had it shorter, and it just sits flat on my head and I don't like how it looks. So then I was spending money and time fooling around with it when I could be doing other stuff. And I thought about either shaving my hair off, or just letting it grow and grow and grow until I wouldn't have to perm and curl it anymore. Part of the decision was because I felt I had to have hair appropri-

ate for work. So I went with long. I feel it taps into my stewardship practice. Not getting into all those chemicals and not wasting the money on something temporary and changing, like hair, and not wasting time.

I don't always like how it looks long. So sometimes it's detachment from how it looks. By detachment, I meant not getting caught up in wanting some more fashionable style. If it seems fine, and I can wear it to work, and no one's complained about it, I'm just detaching from having the latest style. It doesn't bother me as it did when it was short. I'm not sure that anyone's ever happy with their hair, in a vain context anyway.

Most of the time I like it. I wash it. I don't even own a blow dryer. If I still own a curling iron, it's tucked away somewhere. I don't own hot rollers. I haven't paid for a perm in 4 years. If I don't want it in my face, I put it up in a bun. Gives me an excuse, since I'm not spending money on styling and cuts and perms, I can buy little ornamental barrettes for my hair, which I do occasionally.

I forget to look at it. Sometimes I get dressed for work, and I get in the car, and I've brushed my teeth and everything, but I'd never put on makeup or really combed my hair. I have to go back inside and do that. I'm not sure that's a good thing. Maybe I'm becoming more slovenly. I don't know. Or maybe it's detachment. Or maybe it's both, I don't know.



Vip Short is the father of two teen-aged daughters. He works as a holistic physician and has a private practice in Eugene. For thirty years, he's had an avocation as a peace activist and a non-violence trainer. He first checked out the Center several years ago but began coming regularly in February 1999.

I have a visible chin again after almost 3 years of never shaving or cutting any of my hair one bit. That transformation took place in August on vacation. Originally, when I prepared to go on this trip, I was gonna remove all my facial hair and get a buzz cut—really do the radical thing. My traveling companion convinced me to take it one step at a time.

The background on it is that 3 years ago I married my high school sweetheart after almost a 30-year gap in time, with the big wrinkle being that she had converted to Sikhism. One thing you may know about Sikhs is that they have their five spiritual observances. One is never cutting any of their hair. I did not convert to Sikhism, but I went along with my wife's [hair] preference. She would have preferred that I would have taken the vows, although it was never a demand. When I did ask her to marry me, she wanted us to get an okay from her spiritual teacher. His main message was: don't try to dress him up or to change him into something that he's not; he's already in great shape spiritually. Which just felt wonderful to me.

That's part of the background. The other part of it was—you could call it a mid-life crisis—here's an invitation to become a "long-hair" again. During my life span, certainly for me, hair has been a huge symbol. I was reminded of a lot of cultural baggage that I'd forgotten—how people can sometimes get labeled in certain ways for how they look. Along the way, when I felt I was being judged on the basis of my appearance, on occasion I would feel offended or misunderstood. I would feel, "they never asked me why I looked the way I did." There was that little thing that I could choose to go through—being reactive and offended. But in a way I felt like that was a little bit of an indulgence that I didn't deserve to do.

I had a few problems with carrying this appearance over these years. I was not really enfolded as a Sikh; I was not really a white-collar professional. Here I just made this set of choices trying to straddle a couple of worlds. My wife felt most comfortable with me looking the way I did, but everyone else around me felt somewhat uncomfortable. I have the highest regard for that spiritual path and those who choose it. But knowing in the back of my mind all the time that I would never make a full commitment, I think, were also the seeds of the failure of my marriage, because she was so fully immersed in—not only her path—but the trappings of that path. That little crack in the wall led to a larger and larger split—a gradual realization that we were on different roads. When we finally agreed that that was the case, I realized I'd better continue my own transformation back into who I really am—increasingly doubting whether there really is a me in there worth preserving at all, which feels just fine. It's all just kind of a dance, this illusion of our appearance.

How did my family and friends deal with this whole episode? My kids are both teenagers, both girls. I imagine I was putting them through quite the challenge by having this appearance. A theme that my kids, relatives and other close friends had pounded on during the time I had the beard was, "But you'd look so much younger if you didn't have that." The message that did come through was they would all be so much more comfortable, something I could do for them, just in the same manner as I grew the beard for my wife.

I feel lighter. I feel happy. I was full of trepidation when I went to shave it off. As it turned out, I felt very much at peace and decided to honor the whole process by doing a ceremony and a prayer around it. I don't have any regrets. I also feel less heavy in the sense of carrying around a sense of self—that's somehow lighter. And it's fun to make the sudden big alteration in your appearance, and then find out what it's like to be this way. We are, after all, actors on the stage of life. Every now and then it's good to do a major costume change.

In a strange way, had it not been for my journey through the spiritual trappings—the beard being part of all the Sikh stuff held so important by my wife—I perhaps wouldn't be part of the Center. I think I was finally able to "see" Joel precisely because I was ready to see past certain layers of spiritual materialism that had dominated my life up to that point.



Ani Tsering, aka Martha Hamilton, is a Buddhist nun in the Tibetan tradition. After nearly two decades of monastic life, she now resides in an apartment in Eugene and works part-time as a travel agent. As a nun, she continues to hold classes and retreats, including assisting in the teaching of this year's Foundation Studies class. She joined the Center in Spring 1999.

In 1981 I decided to do a long retreat. I went to India and found out that one takes vows when they do a long retreat. I was in Tso Pema in northern India with my teacher and all the Lamas of my lineage for a meeting and took the vows there with all of them. I did not think about the ramifications. After I took my vows, Lama Jorphel took me to an Indian stand by the lake. I'm in this little shack and he's shaving my head. I'm going through an enormous amount of feelings. One, that this is so familiar and it's happened many times before. Another one equally as strong is "Oh my God, how am I ever going to get out of this chair?" When it was over, Lama Jorphel paraded me around the lake three times.

The reasons for having your head shaved are because of the attachment we have to how we look. We have to realize that for an Asian, having the hair cut is simply an accepted part of becoming a monk or nun. It's just traditional. It becomes an issue for some Westerners. If you have a center or nunnery that you can live in, then I'm sure it's much easier. But for most of the Western monastics, we're all on our own. If people don't know, they see you in robes and with the shaved head, all they see is fault.

I personally had a great deal of problem with having my head shaved. One of the problems was that I've got very strong features. With my head shaved and everything else, I was always mistaken for a man. That may have been attachment, but I found that very uncomfortable. I kept my head shaved for about two years. After that I let it grow out to about an inch. For somebody who always wanted to be in the background, I stood out wherever I went. For me that was

not comfortable. When I was traveling with my teacher, and my hair got too long, like an inch, he would start making comments and noises. I would have it cut, not shaved—always try to keep something that would keep me looking feminine. When I came back to this country, it was more difficult. Walking down the street in an American city in robes and with your head shaved brought stares and comments.

There are many reasons people become monks and nuns. Some of them are spiritual. Some of them think it will be easier not having to deal in the world. I found after 18 years I had traveled with my teacher and lived all over the world...it could have been a misperception, but I didn't feel like I was growing and expanding anymore. I felt also that there were many things I hadn't resolved and, by becoming a nun, had avoided ... those things needed to be resolved and that could not happen hiding behind robes. In the past few years, even though there was fear, I've come out more into the world and my hair's gotten longer. I'm experiencing a peace now that I have never felt before.

I feel that here in the west, by not wearing the robes [and haircut] all the time, I have had much better contact with people—especially older people and people who don't know about being a Buddhist monk or nun. This is my personal feeling. If we're going to spend a lot of years in growing and finding a sense of peace or presence inside—and my purpose is to not only benefit me but benefit others—then I have to be in a place where I can interact and intermingle freely without alienating anyone. I could not do that before.

To become a monk or nun doesn't make one's spiritual path any easier or any more difficult. I really believe a lay practitioner, with good motivation, who practices, has a much better opportunity to become realized than a monk or nun who isn't dealing with many aspects of who they are. Trying to be spiritual is not being spiritual. Being spiritual comes from within. The potential for this presence is with us at every moment. Putting on robes, shaving your head, doing this to be spiritual, it's all another delusion.

❖ All interviews conducted Fall, 1999



The Branching of the Vine

by Michael Taylor

Dear Friends,

In the final installment of “Postcards from the Path,” written two years ago, I wrote that the Divine seemed “intent on dissolving my barriers [and] opening my heart ever more to God’s love.” At that time I sensed that “my life is in the process of changing in ways that I can’t predict.” In hindsight, I can now say that this was more true than I could have ever imagined.

Extraordinary inner changes have grown from my earnest and heartfelt prayer. They brought with them their own mechanism for deepening, in the form of my own inner guidance, as well as a partner and living source of an ongoing Divine Revelation known to us as “The HP Writings” (Higher Power). This growth I have been guided in has been, essentially, all about opening my heart to the love of the Divine—a love which is constantly showering down upon each of us, if we will but accept it. And now these changes have brought me to a fork in the road.

Teaching our “Foundation Studies” group this last year brought these changes into focus. It is such a joy and privilege to accompany others on their spiritual quest. But I feel that along with this joy comes a deep responsibility—the spiritual responsibility to share the best of what I have to offer. I came to see that the best I had to offer was no longer strictly traditional Center teachings. My own experience and my own inner guidance, assisted greatly by “The HP Writings,” had deepened and broadened my understanding, and it was this that called out to be shared. But in class I was representing the Center, teaching Center fundamentals, and I became keenly aware of my conflicting responsibilities.

The scope of the Center’s teachings is specified in our bylaws. It includes Joel’s teachings, as well as teachings and practices adapted from the classical mystical traditions. Although Center teaching has never held that the Divine is limited to historical forms, teachings based on contemporary revelation, such as “The HP Writings,” though compatible

with the testimony of the mystics, do not fall within our stated mission.

But I have been Called—to share with others what has been given to me, which very much includes “The HP Writings”. While eleven years of Joel’s superb teachings and guidance have been the perfect preparation for this new work, both Joel and I agree that it is best not to confuse the stated mission of the Center by offering non-Traditional teachings. And so it is that I have come to this fork in the road. With Joel’s blessing, I have embarked upon my new life’s work, resigning my official duties at the Center so as to devote all my energies to this labor of love.

As I spread my wings and fly, I wish to express my deep gratitude and appreciation for Joel—his teachings and his friendship. He is a most extraordinary teacher, and was the first exemplar in my life of that selfless Love that calls me ever onward. He freely offers to us the Truth that he is, and his personal example of selflessness and non-attachment have inspired the very best in me. Even as I am called to blaze a new trail, my support for the work Joel and the Center are doing remains strong as ever.

I am tremendously excited about the work that has already begun through me. The direct communication of the Divine, in the form of “The HP Writings,” and the inner guidance it leads us to, is a profoundly beautiful thing. It has built a “stronghold of faith and trust” in my heart, and has been guiding me on an amazing journey to the Heart of Truth itself. It is truly a blessing to share it with others.

For information about classes on HP teachings, including the spiritual text, “The Seed in the Heart,” or for personal HP consultations, call Michael at (541) 345-0131.

❖ Michael, Fall, 1999



LIBRARY CORNER

CSS Library Hours:

**Tuesday evenings
5:30 - 8:30 p.m.**

During the Enlightenment Day Celebration on August 8, following a truly inspired Sunday talk by Joel, mysterious phantoms moved around the darkened library with mops and buckets, finally positioning a large trash can under a leak that threatened to become another Niagara Falls. Although the implications at that point were clouded by an atmosphere of good will and feasting, the more emphatic result was that our beautifully finished, accessible, and popular library had to be packed up—lock, stock, and bookshelf—and moved out so the ceiling could be replaced due to the effects of a rain damaged roof. A little opportunity for spiritual practice there? Yes, but in the end, the space boasts more height and daylight to enjoy.

The following is a review of one of the great new books in the library. The author even addresses hair in her tradition.

I Give You My Life: the Autobiography of a Western Buddhist Nun

by *Ayya Khema*

(Boston & London: Shambhala, 1998; 220 pages)

Reviewed by *Karen Fierman*

Ay yi yi, Ayya Khema! Whadda life! She did it/had it “all” before becoming, at age 58, the first Western woman to be ordained as a Theravadan Buddhist nun. Born Ilse Kussel into a prosperous Berlin Jewish family in 1923, she had to flee the Nazis at age 15. She traveled the world over, having myriad adventures and experiences, until, in her words: “I had more or less tried everything. What did the

world still have to offer me? The world does not bring one inner peace and inner happiness, because everything that happens in the world is impermanent.”

About her ordination, she says: “Before I went to the temple to be ordained, my hair was cut by older nuns. At this time I had long, very full, black hair. The ceremony calls one to hold in one’s hand the first tuft of hair that falls when one’s head is being shaved. One is supposed to look at the hair in one’s hand and think that just seconds ago this hair was ‘mine.’ And now it is no more than something to be thrown in the waste basket. I still remember clearly that I felt nothing about this. No regret, nothing.”

Fascinating woman! Wonderful teacher! Great spiritual autobiography! Now, where did I put my Lady Schick razor? Hmmmm...

THANK YOU ❖ THANK YOU ❖ THANK YOU

The Center for Sacred Sciences has always depended on the generosity and volunteer labor of its members and friends to sustain it. We would like to take this opportunity to thank some of our friends for their gifts and contributions above and beyond their membership pledges.

For extra support of the retreat scholarship fund, we thank **David Cunningham** and **Dawn and Tom Kurzka**. And for a special donation to the general fund of the Center, we wish to express our appreciation to **Anita Runyan**. Thanks to everyone for gifts great and small!

The many volunteer jobs done over a year are too numerous to mention, but special acknowledgements go to the following people for the ongoing responsibilities they’ve accepted. We wish to thank **Karen Fierman** for handling

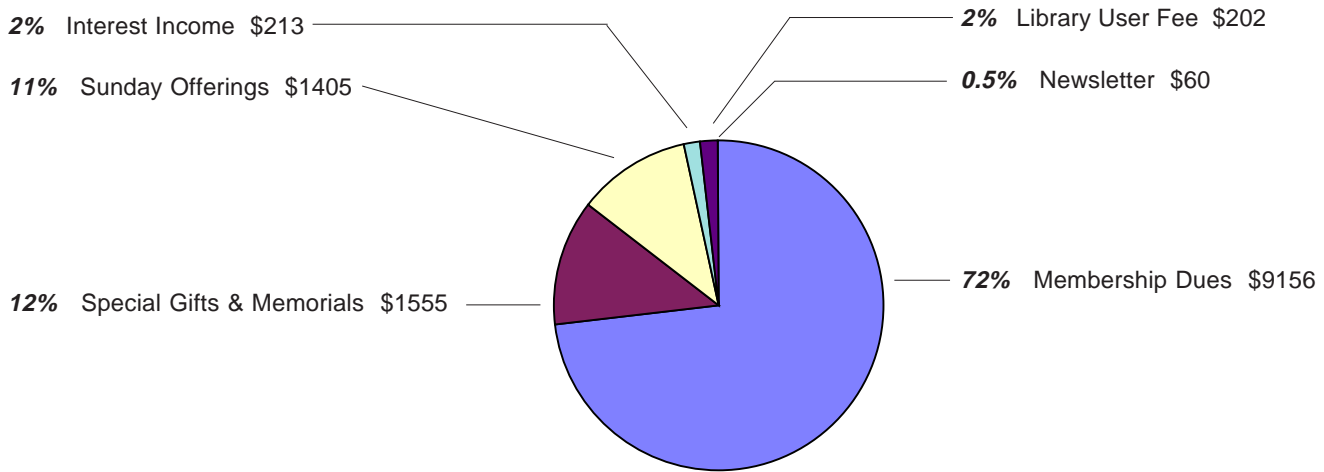
book orders for the 1998-1999 Foundation Studies Group. A special, ongoing thank you goes to **Sheila Craven** for transcribing the tapes of recorded interviews for the newsletter for three years now. **Therese Engelmann** has been keeping tea in stock in the kitchen for thirsty Center-goers for more years now than memory can serve. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to you, **Therese**, and to **Miriam Reinhart** who has recently taken over this job. Finally, many thanks go to **Mike Craven** and **Jim Zajac** for the innumerable handy-man jobs they’ve performed to help keep the Center going.

When we look at all these things and add the generosity of support shown through membership pledges and Sunday offerings, is it any wonder our Center thrives as the place of spiritual nourishment that it is?

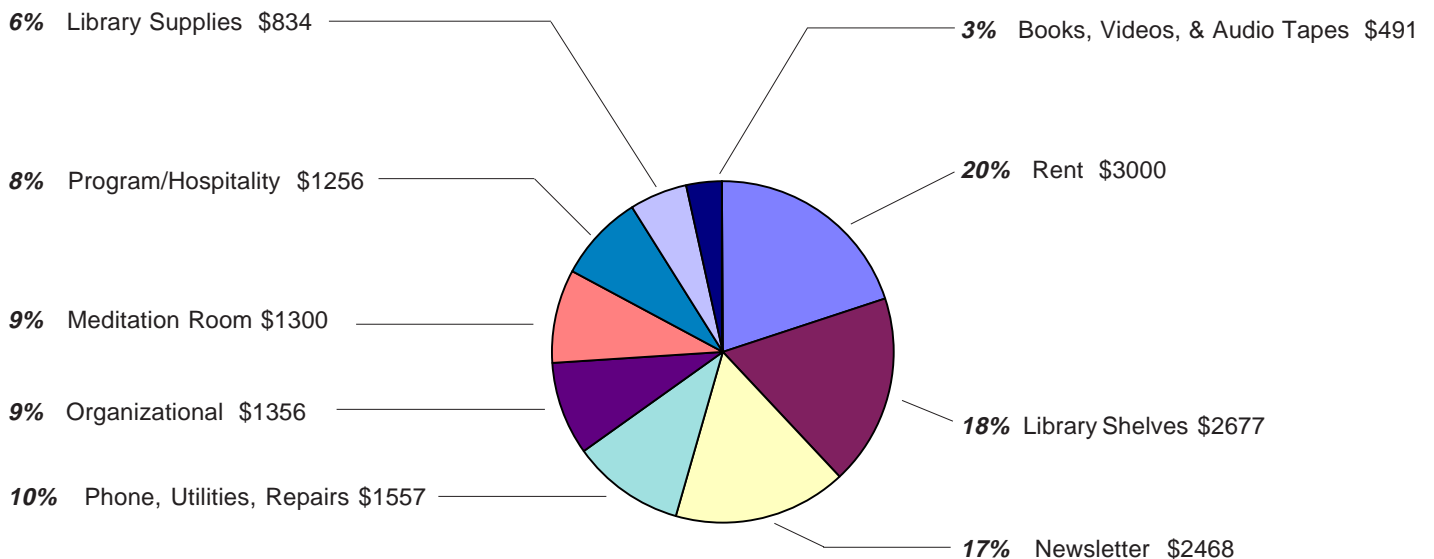
FINANCIAL REPORT: Fiscal Year ending 8/31/99

From its inception the Center has been run as a labor of love by all those who work to bring you the teachings. Other than small stipends for our bookkeeper and newsletter editor, the Center has no paid staff. This past year, the Center acquired miscellaneous one-time expenditures for various anticipated furnishings, including library bookcases and storage cabinets, additional chairs to accommodate the growing attendance, ceiling fan, screen door, and coffee urn, together with a reprint of program literature. Although we did dip into cash reserves for around \$2300 to accommodate these additions, we are still in good shape for the coming year due to a continuing policy of fiscal conservatism by the Board and the ongoing generous support of our members and friends. We now look toward publishing Joel's new book when it is ready and to accommodating the ongoing growth of our Center community. We hope that the charts below are self-explanatory, but if you have any questions, please feel free to ask our Treasurer, Jennifer Knight.

INCOME \$12,591



EXPENSES \$14,939



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