

A black and white photograph of a tree trunk and branches, with the text overlaid on a grid pattern. The grid is composed of thin, light-colored lines that create a subtle background for the text. The tree's trunk is the most prominent feature, running vertically down the right side of the frame. Several branches extend from the trunk, some crossing the frame horizontally and others diagonally. The lighting is soft, creating a range of gray tones from deep blacks to light grays.

Dharma Life

**The Dharma of
Simplicity**

Edited by Kuryo Claire Schosser

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Introduction

by Kuryo Claire Schosser

Our teacher Rosan Yoshida says that the three pillars of our practice are zazen, voluntary simplicity, and the Global Ethic. We practice zazen at the Zen Center or at home, when we sit and when we are able to take the mind of zazen into our everyday activities. We know that the *Declaration toward a Global Ethic*, proclaimed by the 2nd Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993, sets forth four principles for living: no killing, no stealing, no lying, and equal partnership between men and women. These two pillars seem reasonably clear in concept though, at least in my own experience, often difficult to practice. The third pillar, voluntary simplicity, seems less well-defined, thus even harder to put into practice.

Most of the simplicity literature I've seen is either explicitly Christian or secular in its approach. What does voluntary simplicity mean to us as Buddhists? In what ways is simplicity a Buddhist practice and a living expression of the Dharma? This booklet explores these questions.

A classic way to begin a writing on any subject is to quote its dictionary definition. Often important clues to the subject and to its application can be found within the definition or from the etymology of the word. So I looked up *simplicity* in my copy of *New Webster's Dictionary*. It says that simplicity means "the state or quality of being simple, uncompounded, or uncomplex; plainness or freedom from ornament, luxury, ostentation, or the like; artlessness, candor, or absence of deceit, cunning, or guile; sincerity or unaffectedness; deficiency of mental acuteness, subtlety, or good sense."

The mindfulness aspect of sincerity, candor, and the absence of deceit is an important part of the dictionary

definition of simplicity. This brings to mind our precept, and the Global Ethic principle, of no lying. In this sense living simply means living truthfully, both speaking the truth and being willing to face truth squarely and live from that awareness. But this aspect does not seem to be stressed in books, articles, and media reports on simplicity. The material aspect — reducing clutter, buying fewer but higher-quality goods, buying used goods or trashpicking them — seems to receive more attention. While this does fit part of the dictionary criteria for simplicity, it leaves out the mindful, truthful aspect. It doesn't consider the ways in which the mindful and material aspects interact, which I think is what Rosan has in mind when he calls simplicity one of the three pillars of our practice.

In the 1980s Duane Elgin's now-classic book *Voluntary Simplicity* was published. Based on his research of people who lived simply Elgin developed a definition of voluntary simplicity that offers insight into simplicity as Dharma practice. Elgin looks at each word, voluntary and simplicity, separately. He says that to live more voluntarily is to live more deliberately, intentionally and purposefully. In Buddhist terms living more voluntarily could be understood as living more wakefully, living with full awareness. We know that our small selves, our ideas about "me" and "mine", cloud our awareness and cut us off from the possibility of waking up. So a Buddhist practice of voluntary simplicity begins with the practice of awareness, of freeing ourselves from karmic conditioning, of waking up — meditation, zazen. When we sit zazen, we begin to release ourselves from our karmic conditioning, from the unconscious, habitual reactions that otherwise control our response to the moment-to-moment flow of life. As we awaken, we can become aware of the flow of life and can choose a wise, compassionate response to it. We are living voluntarily instead of being controlled by unconscious defensive patterns. Part

1 of this book features essays from our teacher Rosan, from Venerable Thubten Chodron, abbess of Sravasti Abbey, and from our dharma brother Ando “Mac” McMaster that together help to flesh out a Buddhist approach to practicing voluntary simplicity. The essay by Diane Wills describes her observation that living simply can arise out of a long-term Buddhist meditation practice. Our dharma brother Eriku Eric von Schrader discusses silence as a simplicity practice.

Elgin defines living more simply as living with a minimum of clutter and of needless distraction; of unburdening ourselves. When we live simply, we clear the clutter not just from our material spaces, but from our mental and emotional spaces as well. We divest ourselves of possessions we don’t need, don’t use, and that drain us of money and energy for no benefit. We drop unnecessary activities, those that take up our time but offer no benefits to ourselves and others, such as mindless shopping or TV watching. We drop possessions and activities that burden the living system we call Earth to leave space for what we and the living Earth system really need: clean air and water, well-functioning ecosystems, appropriate shelter, and family relationships, friendships, and spiritual practices. Living more simply in Buddhist terms might be thought of as stepping off the hundred-foot pole, of putting into action the clear awareness we have awakened to through zazen. We face the truth of our lives — that we will die — and the truth of our times — that we humans have created artificial systems that are causing serious harm to the living Earth system and to ourselves and the other beings who are part of it. When we face these truths fully, we do our best to reorder our lives so that we may live by them. We have many possible ways to do this. We can reduce the size of our living spaces, reduce our use of fossil fuels, keep our possessions to a minimum, seek out those goods we need which have been produced in ways that

are in tune with the Earth's processes and which offer full benefits to the people who have produced them. We can try to practice right livelihood and support others in doing so. We can slow down, take time to fully enjoy whatever we are doing, reduce the number of activities we participate in so that we have time to just be. We can take in the painful knowledge of the destructiveness of the society we live in and work with others to change social and cultural patterns to ones which fully support awakened life. Part 2 of this booklet features articles and tips from sangha members about the ways in which they attempt to live more simply, in the middle of a social and cultural matrix which requires an ever-increasing complexity to continue to function. It ends with an essay on what makes simplicity difficult for us to practice and how we might tie our attempts to live more simply to attempts to change the larger-scales structures that are causing so much harm to ourselves and all beings.

The Resources section includes organizations, books, websites, and other tools that I have found to be helpful when putting together my personal path to living more simply.

I hope that this booklet will prove useful in your efforts to practice voluntary simplicity.



PART ONE:
Buddhist Perspectives on Simplicity

SYSTEM AND SIMPLICITY

by Rosan Daido

Preface:

In the journal *Nature* researchers of Britain's leading universities predict average global warming of 11°C, double the highest rise predicted by the International Panel on Climate Change (Higher, if the prediction is at the mid-21st century.): London would be under water and winters banished to history as average temperatures in the UK soar up to 20°C higher than at present. It also said the predicted change is unprecedented in geological history. Ecosystem will collapse to cause mass extinction through the actions of homo sapiens, only one out of 30 million species.

Problems:

Homo sapiens took the hegemony of the global life system creating the global problematique (all intertwined problems of wars, poverty, pollution, resource depletion, species extinction, ecology deterioration, etc.) throughout natural, ecological, social and individual systems (all air-water-earth systems, plant-animal-habitat systems, production-social-spiritual systems, psycho-somatic systems disordered, degraded, depleted). The human civilization system has been causing cancer in the natural life system, now in critical and terminal state. Civilization (=urbanization) started five millennia ago with the typical pyramidal structure with five calamities of (ego-) delusion, bondage, discrimination, exploitation and extermination. All ancient civilizations died, but modern civilizations are expanding them with five leading institutions of nations, corporations, religions, media and education institutions. The modern human civilization pursuing matter and power is now manipulated by money buying not only matter and power, but also now

mind and life which culture enhances. Those deluded by power and possessed by money are shortsighted and short-circuited ignoring the wider and deeper global problematique.

Causes:

Those in power especially in empire building, poor in insight and action, misrepresent and misuse these institutions for their selfish purposes. Masses of people are submitting to or abandoning such situations. Most people are in the rat race, running desperately on the treadmill so as not to fall behind and to catch up with individual, family, national interests, not global, ecological, natural interests. All fallacies are the fallacy of taking a part as the whole. All sufferings are slavery to a part (limited power and matter, not limitless life and mind). The cause of our problematique is seeing trees, but not the forest, thus straying in it.

Solution:

Species, societies, nations and nature can survive only by returning to the wholesome whole of the global life system. Because humans remain selfish ignoring the whole system, all in the system must suffer with the five calamities. Only when we become holy (wholesome whole) can we survive, sustain and even enhance the global life system with the five blisses of truth, freedom, equality, love and peace. Religion means re-uniting to the holy. It is the path of purification from ego to eco, from a selfish way of life to the holy way to life.

All ancient civilizations died due to their civilization cancer, system cysts (egos and pseudo-egos), losing self-cleansing either environmental or social. Often this was corrected or conquered by the challenge and response processes among civilizations. However, the single global civilization has no challenger from outside. Therefore, it must learn from the lesson of the tragedy of

of Easter Island, where all trees were devoured with “business as usual” eventually to devour human flesh. Simplicity is the path of purification, to the holy, wholesome whole, eventually egoless entirety. Hence, purity is peace: simplicity is satisfaction.

Thanks to the modern sciences, we now know how the universe and life system have been interdependently evolving these billions of years. All living forms have been living for four billion years from the same root sharing the same gene patterns. Life is interdependent, interchanging and interpenetrating each other limitlessly. It is illustrated with the Indra-net covering the universe whose crystal balls on each knot reflect each other endlessly. Light and shadow, joy and sorrow reflect infinitely. Thus, secular selves are like bubbles appearing and disappearing in the great ocean of life. We are one and equal in this limitless ocean of life, but only human concepts and civilizations discriminate, deprive and destroy the other.



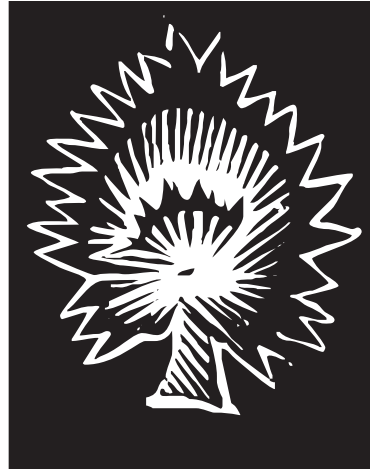
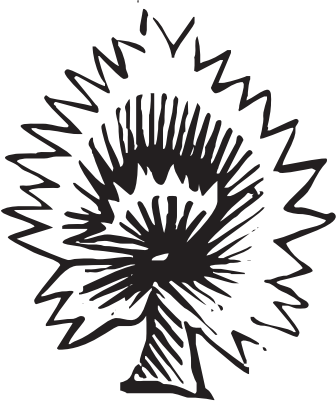
Method:

It is essential, therefore, that we know the truth of the total system and act according to the ethic of enhancing it or at least sustaining it, never damaging or destroying it. The global life system has evolved wholesomely, but has been damaged by human civilization recently in human scale (0.1%, 5 millennia in 5 million years) or in the last instant of the cosmic calendar (5 millennia in 15 billion years). Ecological problems are quite recent, but quite precipitous. Thus, we need the principles to keep the global life system as wholesome whole:

Global System(5Ss)	Global Ethic(5Ls)
1. Systemic	1. Law
2. Sustainable	2. Life
3. Saving	3. Love
4. Safe	4. Liberation
5. Simple	5. Lielessness

The 5 Ls are the law of Dependent Origination (or causality) plus the four irrevocable directives in the *Declaration toward the Global Ethic* (issued by the *Parliament of the World's Religions* in Chicago in 1993). The 5 Ss are given in correspondence to the 5 Ls.

Our lies to or deviations from the natural life system are creating the global problematique. Civilization is the human artifice (Chinese letter *lie* is made of *man* plus *doing* and Taoism calls human artifice "the great lie" to *Nature* or *Tao*.) counteracting nature. Human artifice causes all civilization complications. Thus we need to purify and simplify our modern life style. Thus only can we enjoy the pure joy of a lily's life, not the false pomp of power. This essence of religion is what Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi, *et al.* told and treaded. Ryokan said, "Eventless



is the noble." Possession is possessed, defiled, polluting and destroying. Saving matter is saving life. The holy system must be a sustainable, safe, simple and smooth flow of material and information:

Material Flow

1. Reduce
2. Reuse
3. Recycle
4. Rearrange
5. Restore

Information Flow

1. Access
2. Assess
3. Agree
4. Act
5. Advise

The artificial pyramidal systems with hegemony, monopoly, dogma, demagogy, dictatorship, etc. must be deconstructed and eventually avoided. The natural cyclical system with communities of centerless centers (Indra-net-like internet, glocal society, NGO, NPO, etc.) must be reconstructed and soon achieved. The tax/redistribution system supporting the pyramidal scheme must be reformed and removed to replace with the gift/share system supporting the link of limitless life, light, liberation and love.

Conclusion:

The recent (December 2004) tsunami disaster showed the damage of limited civilization life and the merit of limitless natural life. Elephants, mangroves, tsunami tradition wisdom, etc. saved life, but resorts, developments, webbing sight ignorance didn't. We must shift from small and short sight to great and far wisdom, from small mind to great mind, from small personality to great personhood. Shakespeare said: "Brevity is the essence of beauty." Simplicity is the essence of system. Simplicity saves all and sanctifies all. Dogen said: "There is limitless luck, if there is no limited mind." The Buddha said:

The path to deathless is awareness.

The path to death is unawareness.

The unawakened are like the dead.

The awakened would not be dead.



Dhammapada

Simplifying Our Lives

By Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron

Many people talk of simplifying their lives, but find it hard to do. Not only are we conditioned by the society around us, but we have also bought into this conditioning at some level. This gives rise to fear of not being happy, successful, loved, or financially secure. By observing our mind in meditation, we become aware of the external conditioning and our internal fears as well as the civil war that occurs in our minds and lives when we try to simplify. One part of our mind says, "Simplicity is the way to go. It will help the environment and lead to more equitable distribution of resources on the planet." and another part says, "Are you crazy? What will other people think?" or "You won't be secure in your old age!" or "My kids won't have what all the other kids do and won't fit in with their peers."

One way to overcome this civil war is simply to identify it as civil war and press the mental pause button, breathe, and return to our compassionate motivation. Another is to remember the benefits of simplifying our lives. Here are a few advantages to contemplate:

Simplicity involves letting go of life's complications and learning to appreciate what is in front of us at any particular moment. Instead of longing for what we don't have or craving for what we think we should have, we turn our attention to what is here at the moment. Thus we begin to connect at a deeper level with the people we live and work with. We have time to have a good conversation with them; we have time to become friends with ourselves. We are able to experience spring's crisp air and summer's feeling of abundance, to see the full moon in autumn and the snow in winter. We find beauty where we hadn't noticed it before.

Don't think simplifying your life entails forfeiting pleasure and security and condemning yourself to a life of sacrifice. Instead, think of the contentment that will arise in

your mind, the freedom from craving and dissatisfaction that you will experience. After all, discontent arises not from lacking what we want but from the strong craving to have it.

Simplicity brings less worry, not more. We don't have to worry about having what others have, maintaining knowledge of the latest digital gadgetry, or wearing the latest style glasses. We are at peace inside ourselves. We know that the people who are our friends like us for our qualities, not because we exemplify a certain image (whatever the image of our social group happens to be at that time).

Simplicity brings more security, not less. We cease being afraid of our things being stolen or our reputation being trashed. We know that no one ever has enough money to feel completely secure, and so we are content with what we have.

By living simply, we regain our freedom to think for ourselves. Instead of allowing ourselves to be manipulated by the media into thinking we need this and that or believing that we should become what we aren't, we are free to set our own values and live by them.

We also become free from the complications of having so many choices. We usually think that having a variety of choices is freedom, but if we observe, we find that it actually brings confusion. We go into the market for a minute but get stuck in front of the apples. There are so many varieties, which do we choose? The same thing happens when we go to the isle with crackers or noodles. When we buy a new appliance, tool, or gadget, we can't just sit down and use it. First we have to spend hours selecting and programming all our preferences. We could be using our minds to follow the path to enlightenment, but instead our attention is enmeshed in choosing minute details that supposedly give us happiness, but in fact make us more confused.

Living simply, we no longer need a checklist. Have you noticed how glued we are to our daily checklists of things to do? We think the items on our lists are crucial and

scurry around trying to finish these tasks. But the more we do, the more we have to do and our list doubles. The sad thing is that our lists seem to lack really important items such as,

- Look my children in the eyes with love and listen to how their day went,
- Tell my friends how much I appreciate their good qualities,
- Be generous to those who are destitute or ill,
- Sit down and be peaceful inside my own heart,
- Meditate on the great kindness of all.

Living simply frees up time and energy. Consider how much you need to buy just to have the job you have. Let's say you work in an office—you need to have certain clothes, drive a particular type of car, and see the movies your colleagues see. All these things cost money. So you work hard to get the things you need to maintain your job. Quite a vicious circle. But the mental state involved with simplicity lacks the neurotic caring about what others think of us.

Living simply doesn't mean just simplifying our environment and possessions. It really entails simplifying our ideas, opinions, and preferences. We become aware of our judgmental mind that puts others down. We notice how attached we are to our preferences and how unhappy we become when we don't get our way. We recognize how many opinions we have about so many different topics. Slowly we let go of these and close down the internal opinion factory. The resulting silence in our minds is blissful.

Initially it may take some self-discipline to remove ourselves from the wheel of complications and desires and to overcome the fear of doing so, but when we stick to it, the joy of simplicity will gradually blossom in our lives.

[Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron is founder of Sravasti Abbey. See www.sravastiabbey.org and www.thubtenchodron.org]

Simplicity: Freedom from Desire

by Ando

Simplicity is one of the cornerstones of spiritual awakening and harmonious living. These passages from Taoist texts demonstrate the importance that followers of the Way placed on simplicity. Their influence is seen in the Chan that developed in China and later as Zen in Japan.

I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world.

—Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 67

If you take up things that are not appropriate, this damages your intellectual power. If you strive for what is beyond you, this wears out your body. If you are psychologically and physically uneasy, how can you reach the Way?

For this reason, nothing is better for people who cultivate the Way than to resolutely simplify things. Discern whether they are inessential or essential, assess whether they are trivial or serious, distinguish whether to eliminate them or take to them. Whatever is not essential and serious should be abandoned.

—Sima Chengzhen, *Treatise on Sitting Forgetting*
Translated by Thomas Cleary

The Tao in its regular course does nothing (for the sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which it does not do.

If princes and kings were able to maintain it, all things would of themselves be transformed by them.

If this transformation became to me an object of desire, I would express the desire by the nameless simplicity.

Simplicity without a name
Is free from all external aim.
With no desire, at rest and still,
All things go right as of their will.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* 37

The natural and simple life, without contrivance and complexity, is the life free from desire, the cause of suffering.

Mindfulness Meditation and Simplicity

by Diane Wills

[The following article appeared on an e-mail list associated with the Your Money or Your Life program in December 2004. Diane has given her permission to reprint it. — Kuryo]

I haven't had much time until now to participate in this discussion due to a busy work schedule and also the holiday season. But now that I'm off for a week, I have some ideas to contribute.

I have taken up "mindfulness meditation" since around June. This is a type of meditation that is spreading in our society and has some medical studies showing benefits. It is non-religious (although it does come from Buddhism and Buddhist principles).

I have made the observation that the meditation instructor I took this from, plus others I have met who have long-term mindfulness meditation practices, almost without exception, live very simply. Somehow how meditation changes their lives seems to make them see much less of a need for material possessions and engenders in them a desire to work less and have less need of stuff. These are people that, as far as I know, have not had any association with the Your Money Or Your Life program. For instance the mediation instructor drives a very old Honda (but it is very well maintained), she doesn't fly, and she takes her cross-country trips by driving in this old car. Another guy I met with a long-time practice also drives a very old car. Also the meditation instructor was a tenured professor at an Ivy League university, but after meditating about 7 years, had the desire to leave it (before she was eligible for "official" retirement) and has been essentially financially independent (albeit living simply since she didn't accumulate enough savings to live a lavish lifestyle after quitting). I find this observation pretty interesting.

So there may be some association between spirituality and simple living.

Silence & Simplicity

by Eriku

One of the things I like best about going to sesshins or other multi-day meditation retreats is silence. Not just experiencing silence—which is great—but being silent. Maintaining “noble silence.”

At first I thought it would be difficult for me. I’m a talkative person who likes conversations about a wide range of subjects. Ideas, opinions and jokes come out easily. So the idea of being silent for days at a time was a little scary. Would I have to stifle my urges to speak? Would they become a distraction? Would I feel deprived and limited by someone else’s rules?

On the first morning of the first retreat I attended under the rule of noble silence my attitude changed completely. Being silent removed a pressure that I had always lived with, but rarely been aware of: the pressure to get attention, to impress others with my knowledge, insight, humor, blah, blah, blah. Silence allowed me to let go of that desire (at least for a little while). I didn’t have to worry about what I was going to say or what people thought of me. I could just be myself, with my own thoughts, and not be concerned with how I fit in with the structure of the group.

I saw that I used words to define myself with other people. Many of us do this. We want to “have something to say” and “be interesting” in order to “be somebody.” We use the stories we tell about ourselves to build a sense of identity. We try to be who we say we are.

For me, silence became a wonderful opportunity to cultivate a simpler outlook. I can be with my thoughts and actions with less concern about what others are thinking about me—without the idea that I need to say something to get a reaction. This outlook is in the same spirit as other forms of simplicity. Just as we are in the habit of using words to define ourselves and impress others, so too do we use possessions to define ourselves and impress others.

So instead of fearing deprivation or loss of identity when I let go of my possessions, I remember the sense of release and freedom I gain when I let go of my words.

PART TWO:
Tips for Living More Simply

Reducing Unwanted Communications

by Kuryo

One of the hallmarks of our age is the proliferation of advertisements that enter our homes via postal mail, telephone calls, and email. Unwanted communications like these take time to sort through, recycle or delete; space to store junk mail for recycling and junk email till it can be deleted; and they can offer a crook a means to steal our identity through pre-approved credit card offers removed from our mailboxes. One way that many people wish to simplify is through lessening unwanted communications. Below are the strategies by which Meiku Mike Gaillard and I have reduced the amount of junk communications that enter our home to nearly zero. Following all the steps below will take time. But eventually the time gained through handling less junk mail, calls, and email will surpass the time taken to follow the steps below.

Unwanted credit card and insurance solicitations

With one phone call, you can instruct all three of the credit reporting agencies to prohibit information contained in your file from being used in any credit or insurance transaction that you did not initiate. This will stop the mailing of most pre-approved credit card and insurance offers, reducing the probability of your being subject to identity theft. The phone number to call is 1-888-567-8688. Follow the instructions and request that information-sharing be prohibited for the longest time possible. If you have moved recently, make separate calls to stop offers from going to both your old and new addresses.

Meiku and I still receive occasional pre-approved credit card and insurance offers through the alumni associations of my undergraduate and graduate schools and from credit unions with which we maintain accounts.

If this occurs try writing to the president of the offending institution with a request to avoid sending this material, and check communications from them for an opt-out procedure which they may have in place.

Other sources of junk communications of this type are companies that have financial information about you on file, such as insurance companies. When you receive bills from them, look through the communications on terms and conditions which you receive. Apparently they are now required to offer you a way to opt out of information-sharing with other companies. Follow directions to opt-out of this potential source of junk communications. Usually this will be a toll-free phone number to call, or it may be a check-off on a form to mail.

Junk paper mail

One source of revenue for mail-order companies and nonprofit corporations is the sale of their customer lists to other mail-order companies and nonprofit corporations. Then our mailboxes become cluttered with catalogs and donation requests we don't want. To reduce this source of advertising, write to the address below, including all versions of your name and address that are used on the catalogs and donation requests you receive, and request them to prohibit the use of each name and address combination by direct mailers.

Mail Preference Service
c/o Direct Marketing Association
P. O. Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

The key to making this work is to include ALL combinations of your name and address that you find on the various unwanted catalogs and donation requests you receive. For me this was about a dozen different variations of name plus street address, all of which I included in one letter to the DMA at the address above. If you have re-

cently moved, you can also request to the address above that the various name and address combinations of the former residents be prohibited from use (use a separate letter for this stating that the person no longer lives at that address and you, as current resident, request that their name and address be prohibited from use by direct mailers). Within six months you should notice a reduction in new catalogs and donation requests.

While this will end the sale of your contact information to new retailers and nonprofit corporations, retailers from whom you've made a purchase and nonprofits to whom you've made a donation or from whom you've requested information may continue to use your name and address for their own communications. If you wish stop receiving communications from any of these sources, contact them directly and ask that they remove all your contact information from all databases they maintain. You'll have to do the same for those who send information addressed to former occupants. It may take a few months for your request to take effect.

This will not stop the annoying ad circulars that are addressed to Occupant. About a year ago I learned of a way that might stop those from being delivered. To stop ad circulars addressed to Occupant, try sending your name and address with your request to stop this mail to the following addresses:

Metro Mail Corporation
901 West Bond
Lincoln, NE 68521

Hill-Donnelly Marketing
P. O. Box 14417
Tampa, FL 33690

Let me know your results!

Another source of junk mailings are address lists harvested from the "warranty" cards that are often included in new goods. It is not necessary to fill these out for any warranty or guarantee to remain effective, no matter what the card says. A copy of the receipt is suffi-

cient. Avoid filling out and returning these cards.

Junk phone calls

The Missouri and national Do Not Call lists have given sweet relief to many millions of people who no longer receive most junk phone calls. The easiest way to sign up for this service is to go directly to their websites, given below. To report a company not in the exempt class who calls after you have been on the registry for one month, also proceed to these websites. Many companies have paid fines for calling people on the Do Not Call list!

Missouri: www.moago.org
No Call button on right side
Missouri residents only
National: www.donotcall.gov
(you can register both landlines
and cell phones here)

Three categories of businesses may still call anyone despite their being on the Do Not Call list: phone, insurance, and finance companies. Like myself and Meiku, you may find that following all the steps above nearly eliminates these junk callers as well. Opting-out of information sharing (see above) may be critical to our success at this. If you receive calls from these exempt businesses, ask the caller to remove your name from the call list. When you make that request, by law they may not call you again for six months.

Junk email

Junk email has become an enormous problem as computer use has spread throughout the world. You can reduce some of it by going to the Direct Marketing Association's website for reducing email advertisements:

www.e-mps.org

Follow the directions for registering your email addresses. Registration is good for two years. There are also

links to online forms to reduce junk paper mail and phone calls available from this website.

Much junk email seems to come from people or organizations that harvest email addresses off websites, including website petitions. To reduce this, don't sign petitions which display their results on websites.

If you maintain your own website and wish to have an email address on it, try using a Yahoo! email address for this purpose, which you can get for free from www.yahoo.com. Yahoo! seems to be very effective at dumping junk mail directly into a Bulk folder instead of your inbox. Emails in the Bulk folder are automatically deleted after 30 days. Alternatively, you can make it more difficult for spyders and robots to harvest your e-mail addresses fairly readily by breaking up the text of your e-mail address (these things look for text strings with an "@" in the middle somewhere) using some simple JavaScript. Or you can encode the characters themselves...or a combination of both methods. For more information, see www.missourizencenter.org/Simplicity.html.

If you receive too many emails from nonprofit groups, or you no longer wish to remain on a listserve, follow the directions in the email to allow you to unsubscribe your address. Generally you will find them at the bottom of the email. If you respond to an email requesting that you send a letter to a decision maker, look for a checkbox near the bottom of the page expressing your wish to receive future mailings from them. Many organizations have this box checked by default. You can uncheck it before sending the requested communication. If you are not already on their email list, this should keep you off it.

A systemic problem

While you can greatly reduce the junk communications you receive by going through the steps above, the fact that corporations have claimed a right to send you junk unless you take active steps to opt-out indicates that

NON SEQUITUR

by WILEY

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this is a systemic problem. If the interests of living beings rather than corporations were being served, the default would be to receive no communications from any corporation unless a person were to specifically request to receive them. Because corporations receive the same legal protections as living beings, the right of free speech, including the sending of unwanted ads, is assumed to be theirs. To stop the problem at its source will require that people regain the control over corporations that they enjoyed in the early 1800s. For more information and action strategies, see the Program on Corporations, Law, and Democracy in the Resources section.

Simplicity Tips

by Shaaron Benjamin

I find wonderful and meaningful gifts for those closest to me at antique malls!

There are hardly any people in them, they don't blast music at you, and you can save a lot of money while quietly and peacefully hunting for hidden treasure. Most of all, it is recycling at it's best.

This year I found beautiful, never messed up, dolls my family never could have afforded when they were new. Treasures!

Last year I got my sister a "cow doll." It is very cute and it sits proudly on top of all the pillows on her bed!

This year I found a coat with tag still on it. Original tag was over \$500. For me it was \$30. It is in perfect condition, will fit mom perfectly and she will love it.

by Lori Allen

I keep a journal—a visual journal—of my hopes and dreams and the life I want to create. It keeps me focused and on target. I cut out ads, articles, make drawings, etc. all about simple living ideas: maybe a protest ad about low-mpg autos, a how-to article on green remodeling, a ad for a Prius, an article about Portland, OR, and their renewable energy program. I write why these images and words are important to me, what meaning I get from them. It is my source of encouragement and focus to remind me that I really can create the life I desire and that I am not the only one with these values.

I also have eliminated shopping trips to regular stores as much as possible by ordering more and more

through our buying group. This reduces the number of times one of us has to run to the store because we are out of something and reduces the amount of impulse shopping. We also tend to eat simpler because we have to use what is on hand. So what if we have soup and salad three times a week? Variety may be the spice of life, but spice is best in moderation.

by Jien Jane Seelig

In simplifying life, at work with no money in our budget I try to figure out how to get it for free. Often staff has extra materials, art, etc. in their stockpile. I have been giving stuff that I have extra of to those whom I find need it. When I am done using it furniture, supplies, and lots of packaging materials go to work before being recycled so they have several lives. I put a vision out into the world of what I need and sometimes it comes to me in unexpected ways. Perhaps the idea of waiting for it has somehow missed many in our culture. Timing and waiting on the universe to provide what is needed helps get me through. Going to the ReStore [ed. note: Habitat for Humanity's retail outlet for unused and reused building materials; 3763 Forest Park Parkway, St. Louis] for stuff other people don't need and giving them stuff I don't need. The money goes to Habitat for Humanity's houses for people, which is a great cause. Sharing the resources we have can benefit a lot of people. With no budget this year in terms of art supplies I have managed to continue the art program. But I am always on the lookout. I found some hinges in the alley the other day to finish my cabinet project, so now we have doors on our cabinets so the critters can't get into them. That felt like quite an accomplishment, since the ones I bought from the hardware store didn't fit and have to be returned. Staying out of stores also really helps and going with a list, because I am easily stimulated by all the products available.

Simplicity Awareness Tool: *Your Money or Your Life*

by Kuryo

Awareness is the key to simplicity as it is to living wholesomely in general. Just as meditation develops awareness of our mind and body processes and hence helps us to choose more wholesome ways to live, recording what we spend our money on and what effect our spending has on ourselves and on others develops awareness of the complexity of our lives and how we can simplify them. The biggest aid to increasing my simplicity awareness and practice has been the 9 step program developed by Joe Dominguez. It's available in CD format, titled *Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*, a tape of one of the seminars Joe Dominguez presented on this topic. It's also available as a book, *Your Money or Your Life: Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*, by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin. Both versions will be hereafter referred to as YMOYL. Both the recording (in audiotape format) and the book are available at the Zen Center's library and in public libraries. The book can be found in or ordered from any bookstore. The CD will be available for purchase in July 2005.

The steps involved in the program are as follows:

1. Making peace with the past: determining your lifetime earnings and your net worth;
2. Being in the present through tracking your life energy (figuring out your true hourly wage and tracking every penny that comes into and goes out of your life);
3. Doing a monthly tabulation of all income and all expenses, and categorizing expenses into categories

that reflect your life's realities;

4. Answering the 3 questions of each spending category on your monthly tabulation (was it fulfilling, was it in line with your values, and how might it change if you didn't have to work for pay);

5. Creating a Wall Chart of income and expenses, and updating it each month;

6. Valuing your life energy by minimizing spending;

7. Valuing your life energy by maximizing income (in particular, your real hourly wage);

8. Determining your Crossover Point (the point at which monthly income from investments equals total monthly expenses); and

9. Managing your finances (setting up a financial plan that offers you freedom to do your life's real work).

Many of these steps are familiar to us. What makes YMOYL different is the way in which the steps are presented (both the audio version and the book employ humor to suddenly open our minds to truth) and the way in which all the steps done together interact to increase financial intelligence and integrity. When we do the steps, we bring to our awareness our financial past and present. We may not have been taught how to work effectively with the energy money represents. We may be trying to avoid full awareness because we fear what we'll find out. We may be going on cultural autopilot, never having looked deeply into our spending because ... well ... who has time when they have to work for a living? We tend to sleepwalk through life unless and until we develop a practice to promote awakening, such as meditation practice. We need a meditative money practice to awaken in this area, to help us begin to know where we can simplify our lives. YMOYL, for me and many other people, is it. Within the framework of the 9 steps an infinite number of ways to live simply are pos-

sible. Step 5 especially will help you to develop the simplicity practice that is right for you.

A comment about the last three steps may be in order. Step 7, maximizing your income, needs to be understood within the context of the program's recognition that money equals life energy. Consider that in paid employment you are actually trading hours of your life for money (an income). As we say in Buddhist practice: death is certain, the time of death is uncertain. We know we'll die, thus we have a finite number of hours to enjoy being alive on our beautiful Earth. The hours we spend at paid employment are hours not available for other important aspects of living. While this may not be a problem if we truly love our jobs and we are certain our paid employment benefits all beings, few of us may be in this fortunate situation. Step 7 posits that maximizing income, consistent with our values, allows us to spend the least amount of time trading life energy for money and thus have the most time available for other activities we value. Maximizing income doesn't necessarily mean choosing a job with a higher nominal hourly wage or salary, however. The concept of a real hourly wage is developed in Step 2. It begins with your official hourly wage, or your salary divided by your nominal working hours. However, to keep your job you almost always have to spend more time in job-related activities than your nominal working hours, and spend some of your earned income on things and activities you wouldn't choose to buy or engage in if you didn't have that job. For instance, most of us commute to and from our jobs; you need to add the number of hours you spend commuting each week to your weekly hours worked. Commuting costs money (gasoline, bus fares, the new car you bought because you have a high-level job and can't be seen driving an old clunker), which needs to be deducted from your weekly paycheck. Once you've added up all the extra hours required to keep your job

(including “hidden” hours like the 3 hours of TV you watch each evening because you’re so exhausted from working you can’t do anything else) and all the extra money you spend to keep your job or recover from it (including “hidden” costs like the big-screen TV you bought because “you deserve it” from working so hard), you divide the reduced pay by the increased hours to get your real hourly wage. Sometimes a lower paying job actually has a higher real hourly wage if it requires fewer extra hours and induces fewer extra costs. This was true for Meiku when he changed jobs from mechanic to meter reader at Missouri American Water in the mid 1990s. Changing from your current job to a job with a higher real hourly wage is one way to maximize your income in the Step 7 sense.

Another way to approach Step 7 is to look closely at the extra hours and extra spending you are doing to keep your present job and consider if there are ways to reduce those. Perhaps taking a half hour to hour long walk could replace some or all of your 3 hours of TV watching after work. You may find that after the walk you feel less exhausted ... so much so that you want to spend time with your children, or on an activity which you find very satisfying, rather than on TV watching. Now you’ve gained several hours a week for fulfilling activities in line with your values and increased your real hourly wage proportionally. Suppose that the walk improves your health as well ... you lose weight, have more energy, don’t get sick as much, reduce doctor visits and medications. You’ve further reduced hours associated with your job and reduced costs as well, and your real hourly wage goes up again. Since you’re not watching TV so much, you decide to avoid the next TV upgrade ... maybe you even sell the big-screen TV. You’re not so soaked in ads, so you find it less appealing to shop, further reducing your spending and increasing your real hourly wage. Try looking creatively at the obvious and

“hidden” costs of maintaining your job. Perhaps you’ll find some easy changes to make that can immediately reduce hours and costs. Maybe some more far-reaching changes, like moving to a smaller, cheaper place closer to your job, will be needed.

Steps 8 and 9 refer to the possibility of achieving the authors’ version of financial independence. They describe financial independence as a safe income stream, independent of paid employment, sufficient to fund one’s basic needs for the remainder of one’s life. This may or may not be your goal or a possibility for you, and the perspective on investments in Step 9 may or may not be in line with your beliefs or values. If you’ve worked through the first 7 steps, by the time you get to Steps 8 and 9 you will be able to take from them what you need, if anything, and discard the rest.

The 9 step program can be likened to the raft metaphor of our Buddhist practice. In that metaphor, faced with a swift stream we need to cross, we’re much more likely to be successful if there is a raft nearby we can use to cross the stream. Once across, however, carrying the raft only weighs us down. YMOYL offers us a financial raft to use to cross the complexity of modern life to the other side of simplicity. Use it when and where it’s useful; leave what isn’t useful behind.



Why is Simplicity so Difficult to Practice?

by Kuryo

[Ed. note: this essay originally appeared in the June-July 2005 issue of the Missouri Zen Center's newsletter Sangha Life.]

Anyone who has tried practicing voluntary simplicity, whether it be in limiting consumption of goods or in limiting work hours or other activities, quickly comes to realize that despite its name, voluntary simplicity is not simple to practice. What makes simplicity so difficult?

Recently Rachel's Environment and Health News, an online newsletter covering environmental and health issues, published a two part series called The Structure of Harm (www.rachel.org, #817 and #818). The author, Skip Spitzer, describes interlocking structures developed by and useful to corporations. He explains how this large-scale structure acts to frustrate efforts to control damage caused by corporate practices and particularly efforts to make fundamental changes that would prevent damaging practices from continuing.

What relevance does this have for voluntary simplicity? Often simplicity is thought of as a purely personal practice, something entirely under the control of the person who decides to practice it. The individualism necessary to the large-scale structure of harm contributes to the popularity of the individualistic approach to simplicity. For instance, if someone is working so many hours that he or she has no time for other aspects of life considered as or more important, the solution offered by many advocates of simplicity is to work fewer hours. They suggest finding a new job with better hours, negotiating with your supervisor to lessen or otherwise change your working hours, and so forth. But they ignore the

structural aspects that make it very difficult to reduce working hours: at-will employment for all but some union members, few good part-time jobs and those coming without benefits, the need to drive profits higher by reducing labor costs, mergers and outsourcing leading to fewer jobs, and so on. We are enmeshed in social, economic, and cultural forces that are mostly not of our making and that are very resistant to change. Rosan often reminds us that karma is habit energy: actions that we engage in without awareness of what causes those actions and the effects those actions have on ourselves and other beings. Karma seems to operate on a societal level as well. Corporate karma pushes us to consume ever more, and to work ever longer hours, because that is what maximizes profit for corporations. Corporate managers must continually seek to increase profits, otherwise they will be fired and managers hired who will put profit above all else. Mainstream media presents all this as normal, in fact needed in order for corporations to remain competitive. The culture moves to its current state, where working hours continue to grow and workers remain subject to their workplaces even at home through the use of email, cell phones, and similar technologies that enable far-reaching corporate control of our lives.

This is not to suggest that we should give up on attempts to live more simply. On the contrary, we can seek to understand how we get caught in corporate karma as well as our individual karma and awaken from both. Where we can make efforts to reduce overconsumption and direct that which remains to products made in more socially just and environmentally benign ways, we can do so. We can seek to reduce work hours when possible and resist the tendency to overschedule ourselves and other family members, especially children. Spitzer suggests that we also seek to connect our personal struggles to the larger structures of harm. One way to do this is to read analyses such as Spitzer's, so that

we understand the large-scale structures that constrict our actions. Then, when we discuss our choices with family and friends, we can explain what we are doing and why it is so difficult, for ourselves and others. When we act in concert with others to stop an immediate harm, we can connect what we are doing to the networks of power that helped to create the harm and support people and organizations who are working to dismantle the structure of harm. If possible, we can devote some of our own activism to longer-term projects to deconstruct those structures. In so doing, we can practice simplicity to the extent possible, serve as an inspiration to family members, friends, and colleagues, and also change the large-scale structures that make it so difficult for all of us to live simple, sane, joyful lives.



RESOURCES

[Ed. note: the resources listed here are those I use and have found especially helpful or provocative. Simple Living Network is the best place to find these resources, and many more besides. — Kuryo]

Voluntary simplicity: general

Elgin, Duane, *Voluntary Simplicity*. 1993 (revised). The classic text on voluntary simplicity, including an excellent definition that I've quoted in the introduction.

Merkel, Jim, *Radical Simplicity: Small Footprints on a Finite Earth*. 2003 (New Society Publishers). How to use less of the planet and live more in tune with it. Not so much a list of tips as a framework for making decisions. YMOYL is one of the tools he uses, and he includes an introduction to its use in the book.

Segal, Jerome, *Graceful Simplicity: Toward a Philosophy and Politics of Simple Living*. 1999 (Henry Holt). He discusses the difficulty of living simply in modern society and proposes changes that could make it easier for more people to live simply.

Feldman, Christina, *The Buddhist Path to Simplicity: Spiritual Practice for Everyday Life*. 2001 (Thorsons). The only book I know of on living simply within the context of a Buddhist practice. She focuses more on the mental and emotional aspects rather than the material aspects of simplicity.

Anderson, Dorothy M., ed., *Downwardly Mobile for Conscience Sake*. 1995 (Tom Paine Institute). Ten sketches of people who have chosen to live simply, why they did so, and what has happened to them along the way.

Savage, Scott, ed., *The Plain Reader: Essays on Making a*

Simple Life. 1998 (Ballantine). Another book focusing on the stories of people who have chosen to live more simply. A selection of works published originally in *Plain*, described by Savage, its editor, as an Amish/Quaker/Luddite publication.

de Graff, John, producer, *Affluenza: A PBS Special* (video)

de Graff, John, and Vivia Boe, producers, *Escape from Affluenza: Living Better on Less* (video)

de Graff, John, et al, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (book)

Two videos, made for PBS, on the disease of overconsumption (“affluenza”), its symptoms and pathology, and its cure (living simply). The book is based on the videos.

Simple Living Network, www.simpleliving.net. The comprehensive Web resource on voluntary simplicity. Includes a library of information and offers many books, videos, and audio resources on simplicity, including most of the ones listed here.

Voluntary simplicity: group practice

Several types of support groups focussed on living more simply have been developed. They include the following.

Discussion Course on Voluntary Simplicity. Northwest Earth Institute, 1997. An eight-week group discussion course developed by the Northwest Earth Institute, Portland, OR, www.nwei.org. Meets once a week. Topics include: meaning of simplicity, do you have the time, how much is enough, and five more. NWEI has developed several other group discussion courses as well.

Andrews, Cecile, *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the*

Good Life. 1997 (HarperCollins). This book includes a general discussion on simplicity and outlines a ten week group discussion course to help make the concepts come alive. The course includes personal research, individual reflection, and group discussion.

Your Money or Your Life: A Study Guide for Groups. An eight-session workbook based on the book of the same title. It's designed to help participants (singly or as a group) go through Steps 1 through 5 of the YMOYL program. Several different versions are available. See www.simpleliving.net/ymoyl for more info or to order the study guide.

MZC Simplicity Circle. A Yahoo group of sangha members interested in simplicity practice. Has offered Cecile Andrew's simplicity circle online and offered Unplug the Christmas Machine in November 2004. May offer Joe Dominguez' YMOYL seminar audiotape in fall 2005. To join, contact Kuryo.

Voluntary simplicity: guides

Dominguez, Joe and Vicki Robin, *Your Money or Your Life: Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*. 1992 (Penguin). See the article in Part Two.

Dominguez, Joe, *Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence* (CD). A recording of one of Joe's seminars on this topic, the gist of which eventually became the book above.

Dacyczyn, Amy, *The Tightwad Gazette*, *The Tightwad Gazette II*, and *The Tightwad Gazette III* (Villard). Now available as a single book. Based on Amy's newsletter of the same name, published from 1990 through 1996. A treasure trove of both specific tips and more general strategies for practicing simplicity in the material world. She publishes examples from her own life and from the

many thousands of people who subscribed to her newsletter over the years. Her research is meticulous and trustworthy.

Longacre, Doris Janzen, *Living More With Less*. 1980 (Herald Press). Practical tips on living better with less from members of the Mennonite Church. A companion study/action guide for groups is also available.

Luhrs, Janet, *The Simple Living Guide: A Sourcebook for Less Stressful, More Joyful Living*. (Broadway Books). Luhrs' book deals with a wide range of topics, including some not discussed in the books above, like traveling while living simply and living simply with children.

Sherlock, Marie, *Living Simply with Children*. (Three Rivers Press). A whole book on living simply with children ... it can be done, and she describes how.

Robinson, Jo and Jean Coppock Staeheli, *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back Into the Season*. 1991 (revised, William Morrow). For many of us, simplicity is hardest to practice at the year-end holidays. This book includes a history of how it got to be so crazy, a process to help readers create a more-satisfying holiday season for themselves, and specific tips.

Allan, Jonathan and Lynne Cantwell, *Live Simply in the City*. 2003 (Ardea Press). Many people equate living simply with rural, on-farm, subsistence lifestyles. The authors prove that simple living works for city-dwellers as well. Many examples and tips are drawn from their lives and those of others who have done the YMOYL program. (Full disclosure: Kuryo is one of the people quoted in the book.)

Alvord, Katie, *Divorce Your Car! Ending the Love Affair with the Automobile*. 2000 (New Society Publishers). Transportation is one of the hardest areas to sim-

plify. Alvord's book offers good reasons to keep trying in this area and lots of tips on reducing car use and making better use of alternatives such as walking, bicycling, and public transport. It's a great read, too!

Heede, Richard, *Homemade Money: How to Save Energy and Dollars in Your Home*. 1995 (Brick House). Developed by the Rocky Mountain Institute, www.rmi.org, this book offers strategies for minimizing energy consumption in your home or apartment. Their website has some tools for this purpose as well.

Hemenway, Toby, *Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture*. 2001 (Chelsea Green). If your simplicity practice includes growing some of your own food, this is an essential book. Hemenway describes how to use permaculture methods to grow food in ways that are ecologically sound. By creating a garden which uses nature's own fertilizing and pest control properties, the gardener can grow better food with less work.

Related resources

Center for a New American Dream, www.newdream.org.
A nonprofit group with resources for individuals, families, and children on resisting the tide of over-consumption.

Program on Corporations, Law, and Democracy, www.poclاد.org. A nonprofit group focussing on the ways in which corporations control our personal, economic, cultural, legal, and political lives. Many readings and resources on understanding the problem, "decolonizing our minds", and regaining the control over corporations that citizens enjoyed in the early 1800s.

Adbusters, www.adbusters.org. They call themselves "culture jammers" and delight in using art to deconstruct advertising and other sacred cows of conventional culture. They publish a magazine,

develop “uncommercials” and try to get them broadcasted, and sponsor Buy Nothing Day around the world.

Schumacher, E. F., *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. 1973 (Harper and Row). A classic text on why small-scale economic practices work better for people and for the Earth.

Gray, Charles, *Toward a Nonviolent Economics*. 1994. A self-published extended essay on Gray’s years of living on what he calculated as his fair share of world income (about \$140/month in 1993). Why he did it, how he did it, and work for the future. Radical in vision and action.

Princen, Thomas, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca, *Confronting Consumption*. 2002 (The MIT Press). This book addresses the “consumption problem”: the ways in which overconsumption has led to worsening quality of life, the fact that the current economic and political forces continue to promote and profit from overconsumption, and how an individual might respond to all this. Some of the essays are highly academic in tone, others much more accessible. Includes an excellent chapter on the voluntary simplicity movement, its problems and promise.

Glendinning, Chellis, *“My Name is Chellis and I’m in Recovery from Western Civilization.”* 1994 (Shambala). Glendinning explains why civilization is dysfunctional and how we can live as fully human beings.

Heinberg, Richard, *The Party’s Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies*. 2003 (New Society Publishers; a revised edition is now available). One of a number of books to appear in recent years on the phenomenon and likely results of Peak Oil: the

point at which the oil supply no longer increases every year. The extent of our dependence on oil is so deep that extremely far-reaching and dire effects will occur as the world reaches and then passes the point at which less oil is available per capita each year, a point that is likely to be reached within the next few years if it has not already. Heinberg explains why this is so, why no other energy source can take oil's place, what some of the likely consequences of Peak Oil will be, and how individuals can best respond. Living simply is one of the appropriate, even necessary, responses to Peak Oil.

Macy, Joanna, and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*. 1998 (New Society Publishers). Macy, a Buddhist, has spent years developing practices to help people face squarely the truth of our life-denying culture without closing down or deadening our hearts. While many of the activities described in the book are for group use, others are easily done by individuals and families. Doing them can help reconnect us to life and breathe fresh life into our activist work.

Missouri Zen Center
220 Spring Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119
(314) 961-6138

