

THE AMERICAN STORY OF BUDDHISM

Swans at the Lake



A PANORAMIC DOCUMENTARY FILM SERIES

This is the first television series to explore the American encounter with Buddhism—with all of its rich and diverse traditions, challenges, and contradictions.

The historic hallmark of Buddhist traditions in America has been the transfer of authority from Asian men to American-born men and women.



These are tumultuous and challenging times on every front, with an urgent need for solutions and change for both individuals and society. The worldwide pandemic heightened and deepened these challenges.

For the past fifty years there has been an unprecedented flowering of Buddhist traditions in this country in two interwoven streams: Asian immigrants and motivated Americans—moving from exoticism to Mindfulness, and from the margins to the mainstream. Buddhist teachings speak to the concerns of a very distracted contemporary culture. At the same time, these traditions continue to evolve dynamically, directly addressing the most pressing issues of our day: care for the planet and all living things—care for others.



Buddhist ideas, teachings and practices comprise the fastest growing spiritual tradition in America. This 2500 year-old philosophy has been called a “science of mind,” and its hallmarks of wisdom and compassion have been at the heart of America’s literary and intellectual spirit since the early days of the nation.

These wisdom traditions that now inspire and inform many of America’s leading technologists, psychologists, educators, environmentalists, artists, and even some members of Congress, are explored for the first time in a major national television series, *The American Story of Buddhism*.

**The core focus of
Buddhism
is universal:
an end to suffering.**



cover: Hsi Lai Temple, Hacienda Heights, CA

overleaf: young monks doing *dana* rounds in Los Angeles

top, left to right: Taizan Maezumi Roshi at Zen Mountain Monastery (NY) for Daido Loori Roshi's mountain seat ceremony; angel Kyodo Williams at Hollyhock

above: Himansu Rai as the Buddha in the 1925 film *Light of Asia*

THE SERIES

This panoramic film series will journalistically explore key issues through the powerful personal stories of our participants and by examining important events, major books, and artistic expression through the years. Depending on the presenting platform, the series is designed to be either 2x120' or 4x60' episodes.

We witness remarkable teachings and gatherings at several of the most important Buddhist centers in America, some never before seen on television. We journey with leading teachers, artists and critics in the arena today, and share compelling stories of awakening, transformation, and compassion. There's humor as well...

CONTEMPORARY FIGURES

The stories of a wide range of participants will be examined, including

TEACHERS:

Jack Kornfield, Thich Nhat Hanh, Joan Halifax, the Dalai Lama, Sharon Salzberg, Heng Sure, Ajahn Amaro, Tenzin Wangyal, Wendy Nakao, Stephen Batchelor, Trudy Goodman, Bhante Gunaratana, Khyentse Norbu, Anam Thubten, Robert Thurman, angel Kyodo Williams, Jan Willis, Tara Brach, Yongey Mingyur, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, and others...

And **CREATIVE CULTURE BEARERS**—writers, film personalities, musicians, sports professionals, and artists—including:

Laurie Anderson, Richard Gere, Eric Ripert, Jane Hirshfield, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Daniel Goleman, Ruth Ozeki, Philip Glass, Alan Ball, Phil Jackson, k.d. lang, George Saunders, Martin Scorsese, Maxine Hong Kingston, Herbie Hancock, Joanna Macy, Charles Johnson, Tina Turner, Gary Snyder, Alice Walker, Bill Porter, and others (including *King of the Hill*'s Bobby and *The Simpson*'s Lisa)...

And even **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS**: Rep. Tim Ryan and Sen. Mazie Hirono

"Thoreau . . . forecast an American Buddhism by the nature of his contemplation . . . he was perhaps the first American to explore the nontheistic mode of contemplation which is the distinguishing mark of Buddhism."

— RICK FIELDS, *HOW THE SWANS CAME TO THE LAKE*



IN THE BEGINNING . . .

From nearly the very start of the American experiment, Buddhist currents already flowed in the heart of the most revered literary and political establishment . . .

It was 1844. Just before he abandoned a vibrant life in the cosmopolitan nineteenth century New England world of ideas and letters for his famous adventure in contemplation at Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau published the first English translation of an authentic Buddhist text—an excerpt from the Lotus Sutra—in the *Dial*, a magazine started by the eminent scholar and author Ralph Waldo Emerson. The translation was by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, one of the leading intellectuals of the day.

HISTORIC FIGURES

Key roles have been played by many men and women, both famous and overlooked including **INITIATORS** and **FACILITATORS**:

Mary Farkas, Edwin Arnold, Henry Cabot Lodge, Ernest and Mary Fenollosa, Paul Carus, Henry Steele Olcott, Isabella Gardner, Gene Smith, Erich Fromm, Georgia O'Keefe, Mark Rothko, and others . . .

And **PRACTITIONERS** and **TEACHERS**:

Peter Matthiessen, Shunryu Suzuki, Theos Bernard, Julius Goldwater, Chogyam Trungpa, D.T. Suzuki, Ruth Fuller Everett, Thomas Merton, John Cage, Kanmo and Jane Imamura, Joshu Sasaki, Gelek Rinpoche, Jack Kerouac, Hsuan Hua, Ruth Denison, Alan Watts, Tetsugen Glassman, Yvonne Rand, Geshe Wangyal, Allen Ginsberg, Maurine Stuart, Taizan Maezumi, Steve Jobs, Diane di Prima, W.S. Merwin, Leonard Cohen, and others . . .



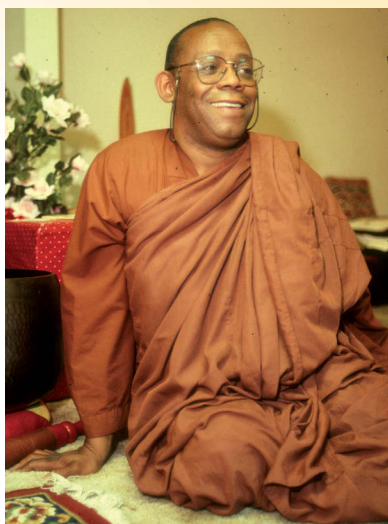
top: Thich Nhat Hanh at the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial (DC)

above; top to bottom: cover of *Time* magazine, 2014; Mattieu Ricard being measured for brain activity during meditation



"The seventh century Chinese monk Xuanzang walked across deserts and mountains all the way to India, spent ten years learning Sanskrit and collecting Buddhist texts, then made his way home to translate everything into Chinese. Today, a student of Buddhism can find what she needs right here in the USA, perhaps taught by an American-born teacher, with texts, practices and temples possibly right in her neighborhood. And even more, almost all the teachings from every Buddhist tradition are found on the internet, in fifty languages including English. This is a new era for Buddhism, for America, for the West."

— JACK KORNFELD



...AND TODAY

Over a century and a half later we can ask:

- What's a Zen master doing at Google?
- How is meditation good medicine?
- Who jump-started the revival of Buddhism in Asia?
- Who's meditating in Congress?
- How has Zen helped make NBA champions?
- What are Tibetan monks doing in MRI labs?
- Which popular television cartoon characters know their Buddhism?
- How are war veterans healing their hidden wounds?
- How is the widely embraced mindfulness movement connected?
- Can meditation make a difference for children and schools today?



top, left to right: Zen teachers entering
Greenhaven, NY prison to work with prisoners

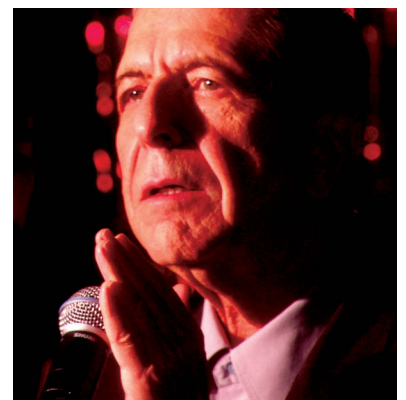
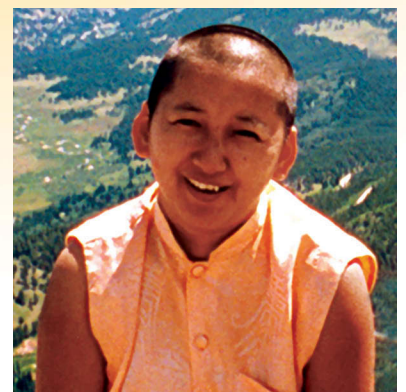
above, top to bottom: Ven. Suhita Dharma;
Sharon Salzberg

**Fourteen states, including California,
the most populous, cite Buddhism as the number
two religious identity of their residents today,
second only to all Christian denominations.
(There are more Buddhists than Episcopalians....)**



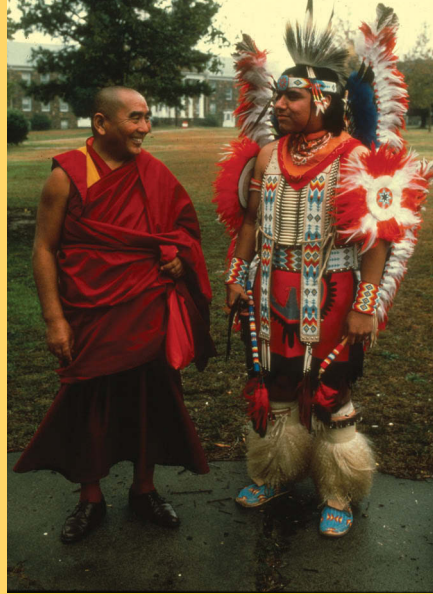
QUESTIONS EXPLORED

- What's the attraction? What do Buddhists believe/practice?
- Is this religion? philosophy? psychology? aesthetic? lifestyle? yoga?
- What do Buddhist traditions offer now in the face of world conflicts and challenges?
- Who were the key men and women in American Buddhism over the years? Who are they today?
- What has been the place of Buddhism in American culture?
- What has been the experience and role of women in Buddhism here?
- What about race? Class? Immigrant/convert issues?
- How do neuroscience, psychedelics, sex and power, care for the dying, prison outreach, modern art, music, literature, media, psychology, climate change, and the web converge with Buddhist traditions here?
- How have Buddhist literary, music, and art contributors influenced the American experience?
- What effect, if any, is all this activity here having on Buddhism around the world? Has our egalitarian/individualistic ethos affected Buddhist cultures elsewhere?



top, left to right: Tetsugen Bernie Glassman leading a street retreat in New York City; nuns at Disneyland (CA)

above, top to bottom: H.E. Mindrolling Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche; Leonard Cohen



Some of our key participants are in their 80s, and we must move ahead immediately with filming interviews.

Several foundations have generously made initial grants to support research and writing for the crucial development phase. Your contribution now will enable us to start filming and will make a big difference in getting this historic story told in a timely way.

Please join us in this very important project.



There is
Buddhism
in America.

Is there an
American
Buddhism?

PRODUCER / CO-DIRECTOR

Lyn Goldfarb is an Academy Award®-nominated filmmaker specializing in historical and social issue documentaries, with 18 feature documentaries broadcast nationally on PBS and major cable. Her most recent film, *Eddy's World*, a *New Yorker Magazine* video feature, has been streamed by nearly one million viewers worldwide. She is a producer, director, and writer whose work has been honored with two Emmys, a Peabody, and two DuPont Columbia Awards. Her national primetime television credits include: *Bridging the Divide: Tom Bradley and the Politics of Race*; *The New Los Angeles*; *With Babies and Banners*; and *Danger: Kids at Work*. She is a creator, producer, and director for the PBS mini-series *Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire* and *The Roman Empire in the First Century*, both now streaming on Amazon Prime. She was an executive producer of the PBS series *California and the American Dream*, and was producer, director, and writer for episodes of *The Great War*, *The Great Depression*, and *People in Motion* series. She has been the recipient of major grants from the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and California Humanities.



top, left to right: Taizan Maezumi and Rick Fields; Tibetan lama meets Native American; Daido Loori officiating at Zen Mountain Monastery; Meredith Monk in performance

above, top to bottom: Martin Scorsese on the set of his film *Kundun*; Herbie Hancock

PRODUCER / CO-DIRECTOR

Gaetano Kazuo Maida is a filmmaker whose credits as director and/or producer include *Peace Is Every Step: The Life and Work of Thich Nhat Hanh*, *The Simple Life*, *Milarepa*, *Rock Soup*, *On the Luce*, *Robert Bly: A Thousand Years of Joy*, and *Touching Peace*. He has served as executive director and chief programmer of the independent nonprofit Buddhist Film Foundation (BFF) since its founding in 2000. BFF has presented its International Buddhist Film Festival in eight countries to date; operates Festival Media, a home video distribution service; has facilitated several theatrical releases and commercial distribution deals in the U.S.; and is preparing to launch a streaming platform, BuddhistFilmChannel.com to serve as an accessible archive of Buddhist and mindfulness cinema. Maida was a founding director (with Philip Glass, Rudy Wurlitzer, and others) of *Tricycle* magazine, the leading independent U.S. Buddhist quarterly, and has guest-edited *Kyoto Journal* magazine (Japan). He and his wife Ayelet package books through their A/M Studios.

Americans have
been instrumental
in the continuing
development
of Buddhist
traditions for over
150 years.

PRODUCTION ADVISORS

Jason Cohn is a writer, producer, and director who has worked in print, radio, television, and film. He is the Peabody Award-winning writer and co-director of American Masters presentation *EAMES: The Architect and the Painter*, writer-director of *The First Angry Man* (PBS), and a producer of the American Masters feature *The Worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin*. He and his wife, filmmaker Camille Servan-Schreiber, own Bread and Butter Films based in Berkeley, California. breadandbutterfilms.com

Ashley James is an award-winning filmmaker whose many credits as director and/or cinematographer include: *And Then They Came for Us*, *Barbara Lee: Truth to Power*, *Dharma Rebel*, *The Nine Lives of Barbara Dane*, *Blacks & Jews*, *Street Soldiers*, *Crumb*, and *Isadora Duncan—Movement From The Soul*. Other films include: the Academy Award-nominated *The Barber of Birmingham*, *We Love You Like A Rock—The Dixie Hummingbirds*, *Zen Brush Mind*, and *Kazuaki Tanahashi—Painting Peace* for BodhiTV (Netherlands). He has served as three-term president and 15-year board member of the Film Arts Foundation, and is a past governor of NATAS, Northern California chapter. searchlightfilms.org

Anayansi Prado is a documentary director, producer, and educator with over 20 years of award-winning filmmaking. Her feature films have been broadcast nationally on PBS and abroad including *Maid in America*, *Children in No Man's Land*, *Paraiso for Sale*, and *The Unafraid*. She is a Rockefeller Media Fellow and a Creative Capital Artist. She has taught at UCLA's Film School Graduate Program, Chapman University's Film School, and Cal State Northridge's Journalism Department. Since 2009, she has served as Film Expert for the State Department's film diplomacy program The American Film Showcase, and has taught documentary filmmaking workshops in several countries around the world. anayansiprado.com

Jed Riffe is an award-winning independent filmmaker and new media producer, best known as producer/director of *Ishi, the Last Yahi*, a PBS American Experience presentation. With Lyn Goldfarb and Paul Espinosa, he produced *California and the American Dream*, a four-part PBS Series. His most recent producer credits include *A Dangerous Idea: Eugenics, Genetics, and the American Dream*; *The Long Shadow*; and the forthcoming *Pleistocene Park* and *The Nine Lives of Barbara Dane*. Other documentaries he's produced and directed include *Waiting to Inhale: Marijuana, Medicine and the Law*; *Who Owns the Past?*; and *Roots of Beauty*. jedriffefilms.com

Rick Tejada-Flores is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose works have appeared on PBS on American Masters, Independent Lens, and as stand-alone specials, and broadcast by the Sundance Channel, History en Español, YLE Finland, and Channel Four (UK). Among his credits are *Si Se Puede!*; *Rivera In America*; *Jasper Johns, Ideas in Paint*; *The Fight in the Fields—Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Struggle*; *The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It*; *Orozco: Man of Fire*; and *My Bolivia*. alturasfilm.com

PARTICIPATING SCHOLARS (partial list)

Jacquelynn Baas **BERKELEY ART MUSEUM** Founding director of the Hood Museum of Art and director emerita of the Berkeley Art Museum, she is the author/co-author of several books, including *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* and *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today*.

Robert Buswell **UCLA** Distinguished Professor of Buddhist Studies and founding director of the Center for Buddhist Studies, he is the author/co-author of *The Zen Monastic Experience*, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, *Cultivating Original Enlightenment*.

Janet Gyatso **HARVARD** The Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies, she is the author of several books, including *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*; *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*; and *Women of Tibet*.

Paul G. Hackett **COLUMBIA** He serves as the Chair of the Tibetan Information Technology Panel of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, and is the author of several books and papers, most notably *Theos Bernard*, *The White Lama: Tibet, Yoga and the American Religious Life*.

Donald Lopez **MICHIGAN** Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, he is author/co-author of many books including *From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha*, *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, and *The Story of Buddhism*.

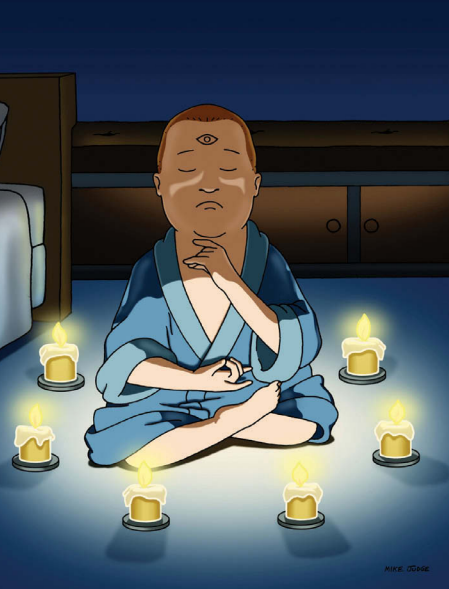
Robert Sharf **BERKELEY** The D.H. Chen Distinguished Professor of Buddhist Studies and Chair of the Center for Buddhist Studies, he is the author of *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* and the forthcoming *Thinking About Not Thinking: Buddhist Struggles with Mindfulness, Insentience and Nirvana*.

Thomas Tweed **NOTRE DAME** Holds the Harold and Martha Welch Endowed Chair in American Studies and has a concurrent appointment in History; author of *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture*; has served as the president of the American Society for the Study of Religion, currently president of the American Academy of Religion.

Duncan Ryuken Williams **USC** Chair of the School of Religion and Co-Director of the USC Center for Japanese Religions and Culture, he is the author of *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Soto Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* and the forthcoming *Camp Dharma: Buddhism and the Japanese-American Incarceration During WWII*; co-editor of several volumes including *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, *American Buddhism*, and *Buddhism and Ecology*.

Jan Willis **WESLEYAN** Professor of Religion and author of *Dreaming Me: An African American Woman's Spiritual Journey*, *The Diamond Light: An Introduction to Tibetan Buddhist Meditation*, and *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*.

80% of Buddhists
in the U.S. are
Asian immigrants.



FISCAL SPONSOR

Buddhist Film Foundation, Inc. (BFF) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization based in Oakland, CA. Founded in 2000, BFF is the world's leading resource for Buddhist cinema, presenting its International Buddhist Film Festivals (in ten cities on three continents to date), distributing films through its Festival Media service, and launching Buddhist Film Channel, a video streaming archival resource. BFF is currently fiscal sponsor to over a dozen film projects in various stages of production.

THE MEDIA INITIATIVE

This film series is the core of a comprehensive film/book/web media initiative. Rights to Rick Fields' book *How the Swans Came to the Lake—A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Shambhala/Random House) have been secured. A new edition will be published in 2021, and this groundbreaking classic remains the primary general audience reference on the subject today. Timed with the series' release, a photographic companion book will be published, and an immersive, interactive online platform will be launched. Study guides for high school and college classroom use will be part of an educational outreach program, with targeted collaborative efforts with Asian American and African American communities.

CONTACT

Gaetano Kazuo Maida
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 510-381-6054

top, left to right: Bobby Hill meditating, from *King of the Hill*; gathering of Buddhist teachers at the inauguration of Dai Bosatsu Zendo, July 4, 1976

above, top to bottom: Joan Halifax; Thien-An; Jan Willis

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