“You can connect with the mind of nowness at any moment”

Pema Chödrön’s 4 Keys to Waking Up

Rise Up!
bell hooks & Eve Ensler

GPS for the Mind
Sylvia Boorstein

Thanks to Yoko
Lisa Carver
bell hooks is a woman of many call numbers. If you search for her in the library, you’ll find her lurking all over the place: feminist studies, African-American studies, education, health, film, children’s books, and more. Waiting there to pounce, like a curious cat, she is likely to jump out at you from any of these shelves and strike you with a flurry of provocative ideas—about race, gender, class, domination, and liberation, to name a few.

But if you do go searching for her in the library, try to find her on videotape or DVD, because while bell hooks articulates beautifully in print, she really shines when you see her face and hear her voice embodying what she thinks and feels and sees. They say she is an “outspoken social critic, a visionary, a public intellectual,” but what comes across most if you spend some time around her is love. She loves to be herself and be by herself—without the need to be defined by others—but she also loves to love others and to communicate: about herself and to herself and to others, but above all with others. She loves dialogue. She’s a great interviewer. And should you ever have the pleasure of speaking with her, beware. She will probably interview you, to find out what’s going on inside and whether you’re ready and willing to talk about it. To bell hooks, an idea is like a basketball. She doesn’t want to hold it up to be admired. She says she wants to “throw it to you and let you experience it for yourself.”

For bell hooks, fighting oppression doesn’t require anger or conflict—just opening our hearts and speaking the truth fearlessly. Barry Boyce tells the story of this renowned feminist and social critic, and how she came to embrace activism without enemies and a visionary kind of love.
When I tell a friend I’m going to interview bell hooks, she says, “lower case, right?” By taking a pen name that honors her maternal great-grandmother—and writing it in lower case—hooks hoped to decrease ego-investment and create some distance between herself and her work. Twenty-five books or so later, “bell hooks” has become a brand and an icon. But when I try to find the buzzer for her apartment in Greenwich Village, there is no bell. In spite of all I have read by her and about her, in that small moment I find myself wondering who “bell hooks” really is.

Born Gloria Jean Watkins in 1952, she grew up in the southwest corner of Kentucky, in the small city of Hopkinsville, in tobacco country about an hour and half drive north of Nashville, Tennessee. And when I make my way up to her apartment, that’s the first thing she wants to talk about: her return to the rural south, to home. She spent more than thirty years mostly in cities and big universities; she earned her B.A. at Stanford, her master’s at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and her Ph.D. at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She’s been on the faculties of Yale, Oberlin, and City College. But in the fall of 2004, hooks returned to Kentucky to take a position as Distinguished Professor in Residence at Berea College. Located in a small town just south of Louisville, Berea was founded in 1855 as the first interracial and co-educational college in the South. Its aim, the college says, is to promote “understanding and kinship among all people, service to communities in Appalachia and beyond, and sustainable living practices which set an example of new ways to conserve our limited natural resources.” It’s also smack-dab in the middle of the Bible Belt.

hooks refers to her modest Greenwich Village place, which she purchased when she taught at City College and returns to from time to time, as a pied a terre. But she makes very clear that her feet are now deeply planted in the terra firma of Kentucky. “It has been really sublime for me to return home,” she says. “to that Kentucky landscape, to a world of nature that I grew up in, where I was able to roam, and where I felt formed and very free.” hooks says she has also returned to the place that she escaped from, a difficult place of “dysfunction, madness, and trauma,” and a place where Buddhism is thought of as demonic by many, and where people ask fewer questions because the big questions have already been answered.

bell hooks 101 begins there, in Kentucky, where she struggled to find herself in the impoverished home she shared with her brother and five sisters, and in a racist world that had little to no room for a black girl who wanted to think critically and write for a living. Bone Black, hooks’ chronicle of girlhood, as she likes to call it, is chantlike and elegiac. It proceeds in simple cadences and short chapters that do not try to lay out a Master Narrative. And there is no sense searching for one, or trying to tease it out of hooks. Her life is an open book—several dozen in fact—but she has no interest in putting it all together into something neat. What emerges is a series of vignettes and impressions, in no particular order, like real memory, and the picture they paint can make you laugh and cry.

“I must sell tickets to a Tomb Thumb wedding, one of the school shows,” she writes. “It isn’t any fun for children. We get to dress up in paper wedding clothes and go through a ceremony for the entertainment of the adults. The whole thing makes me sick but no one cares. Like every other girl I want to be the bride but I am not chosen. It has always to do with money. The important roles go to the children whose parents have money to give…” I am lucky to be a bridesmaid, to wear a red crepe paper dress made just for me. I am not thrilled with such luck. I would rather not wear a dress, not be in a make-believe wedding. They tell me that I am lucky to be lighter skinned, not black black, not dark brown, lucky to have hair that is almost straight, otherwise I might not be in the wedding at all, otherwise I might not be so lucky.

Although she has not made a career of poetry, hooks has commmunicated with poetry and written poetry from a young age, and much of her writing reads poetically. It sings and it breaks with convention. Her poetic tone in Bone Black enables her to present an agonizing tale without bitterness. Rhythmically, with underlying strains of empathy, she presents the tale of her oppressors. “We are not able to punish grown-ups for their lies,” she writes. “We are not even allowed to tell them they are lying. Once when I said, not thinking, not watching—my seven-year-old, that so-and-so sure was a liar I was hit across the mouth. Some- times the grown-ups could be heard talking about the preach- ers and how they stand right up there in the pulpit and lie. This makes the grown-ups laugh. It confuses us since we know that god loves truth. We do not understand why the good men of god who stand and lie are not struck down by a bolt of lightning or some other heaven-sent magic. It is confusing, strange and crazy making. Despite the confusion we try to be true.”

hooks often refers to the child she writes about in Bone Black as the third person, which she says is one of her modes of remembering. When her parents decide to move her to a more isolated room because of her strange and ungainly ways, she writes, “She is to live in exile. They are glad to see her go, they feel as if something had died that they had long waited to be rid of but were not free to throw away. Like in church, they excommunicate her.”

hooks’ girlhood is not unrelentingly bleak. She finds love in the gaps in people’s defenses, and she will build on that love later in life, when she champions a type of feminism—and liberation from oppression altogether—that does not need to demonize and create enemies. She also finds people to admire and emulate, older people who are connected to the land and to folkways that are not defined by what she will come to call, at the height of her critical powers, “imperialist, white suprema- cist, capitalist patriarchy.” These people do not buy into “dominator culture.” They define for themselves who they are. Prime among them is Sara, her grand- mother. She writes, “Now that [Sara] is old she talks often to me about god. She tells me that believing in god is something to do with going to church. I love to hear her talk about the way she went to church and found that people were more concerned with talking about what you were wearing and who you were with and decided never to go again. She is a woman of spirit, a woman of strong language, a fighter. She tells me that she has inherited this fighting spirit from her mother, and that I may have a little of it but it is too early to tell.”

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, where hooks enrolled at age eighteen, was about as far from her “backwoods Kentucky life” as she could go. She does not feel that she was a rebel: she was pursu- ing an education, which was something her parents placed a high value on, despite their disapproval of her obsessive desire to read. It was at Stanford that she discovered the “open field” of the mind.

“The life of the intellectual was so exciting,” she tells me, “because it was a world of openness, radical openness, whereas my life growing up in a fundamentalist Christian home was a very narrow, confining life.” But, as she recounts in Wounds of Pas- sion, the story of her intellectual coming of age, she was often very lonely at Stanford, where “there are not many black girls” and people had no understanding of the South, which was just an object of ridicule for sophisticates. At times, she wrote, “Sad- ness seaks my body like that moment when you are caught un- expectedly in a rain shower and are wet through and through.”

hooks’ moment of truth came in a feminist literature class, where her fellow students were “annoyed that I don’t seem to deal ‘just’ with gender.” She proclaimed that the world where only gender mattered didn’t exist. “The moment anybody black moves out into the world somewhere, away from seg- regation,” she writes in Wounds of Passion, “we always have to think about the ways that race matters, sometimes more than
gender, sometimes the same as gender, but always in conver-
genre and collusion.”

The interrelationship of different forms of oppression, all
of which she subsumes under the label of “dominator cul-
ture,” would become a thread running through hooks’ work.
She would always look at race, gender, sexual, economic, and
political domination not as separate topics for seminars, but as
an interwoven web of influences that affect the behavior and
thinking of everyone in a culture. Although she would write
against the worst argument she had as an influence, she was
determined that her own admission, is difficult to
understand outside of the academy, the bulk of her attention
would be on reaching the popular and helping them see
the bonds that hold them and what they can do about it. She
wanted to marry theory and practice, and when they started to slide toward
divorce, as they are wont to do, she
would bring them back together.

IN TIME, hooks’ thought flowered and
matured and branched in many differ-
cent directions—became multi-dimen-
sional—but she began her life as a pub-
lc intellectual with a focused, searing
critique of current feminist theory. Ain’t
I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,
a book she first drafted when she was nineteen. In her classes, she
had become exasperated with white feminists who “romanticize”
the black female experience with someone with a negative im-
pact of that oppression.” Conversely, she noted that black women of the day “did not join together to fight for women’s rights be-
cause we did not see ‘womanhood’ as an important aspect of our
identity.” She found that black womanhood had been left out of the
Venn diagram and almost all statements about women were
about white women and all statements about blacks were about
black men. For example, feminists frequently spoke about women
needing to be empowered by entering the world of work, when in
hooks’ observation, “Black women have always worked.”

Ain’t I a Woman takes its name from a refrain intended by
black feminist Sojourner Truth during a speech she gave at the
second annual convention of the women’s rights movement
in 1852. Truth stood up to present herself as living proof that
women were the equals of men. hooks’ first book bristles with
passion, but it is not a jeremiad. In 200 pages, she carefully
outlines a history of black women, first under slavery, then un-
der continuing conditions of patriarchy and racism. She ends
with a call to revive the black feminist movement that emerged
in the nineteenth century—not only for its own sake but also to
sustain our efforts. But if we see it as a continual process of
awakening, we can go forward.”

“We know from Buddhism,” hooks says, “that if we look for
an end we will despair and not
sustain our efforts. But if we see it as a continual process of
awakening, we can go forward.”

For feminism to move from outward gains to real spiritual
gains, hooks believes, men and women alike need to understand
how they are both bound and dominated by the structures of a
culture of dominator and dominated. Each is trapped. But the
difficulty seems to lie in the need to have an enemy for suste-
nance, which leads you away from discovering a deeper sustain-
ing power. “Great moments for social justice have occurred, in
civil rights, in women’s rights, and so on, but these movements have
also been deeply flawed, in that they could not sustain
themselves,” she tells me. “In the beginning, people push against
an outward enemy, but once that push is over, things became
like flat soda. What’s needed is a buddha-like process of self-
actualizing that spreads into the political world. Then you don’t
have to fall into an abyss of despair, saying, ‘We failed. We didn’t
achieve racial justice. Feminism didn’t complete itself.’ As we
know from Buddhism, if we look for the end, we will despair

No other movement for social justice has been as
so, sixteen years (and about as many books) after
Ain’t I a Woman, which
was attacked as a continual process of
awakening, we can go forward.”

Before Yale and during her time there, she began to develop a
reputation as a key contributor to feminism’s way of thinking
about itself. She is proud of what she calls “feminist movement”
(declining to precede the phrase with the “the” that would iden-
tify it as a unitary institution rather than a phenomenon) for its
thoughtfulness. “No other movement for social justice has been as
able to set down a map to how we live, how we work, how we love.”
And yet she acknowledged that “most people have never
spoken to an actual feminist, so they have no clue about vision-
ary feminism. They have a one-dimensional view learned from
TV and the movies,” where it is commonplace to “trash femi-

Nis.” As a result, no “sustained feminist revolution” has oc-
curred, which places feminism’s gains in jeopardy. hooks feels,
as she states in Feminism Is for Everybody, that feminism, the
movement to end sexual exploitation and dominance, is “alive
and well,” but it is not the mass movement that hooks has al-
ways felt we need it to be.
Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love

The practice of love, says bell hooks, is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination. She traces her thirty-year meditation on love, power, and Buddhism, and concludes it is only love that transforms our personal relationships and heals the wounds of oppression.

At a conference on women and Buddhism that took place in spring last year, I was upset because most of the speakers were giving their talks in this serene, beautiful chapel, a place evoking a sense of the divine, a sacred place for the word to be spoken and heard, yet my talk was to take place on a Friday night in an unappealing, cavernous auditorium. Lamenting my exclusion from the realm of the sacred, I complained that I was exiled because I was not seen as a “real” Buddhist—no long time with a teacher, no journey to India or Tibet, never present at important retreats—definitely someone engaged in buddhadharma without credentials. The two companions who had joined me at the conference listened with compassion to my whining. Why did I have to speak in a huge auditorium? Why did I have to speak on a Friday night? Yes, I told them, lots of people might want to hear bell hooks speak on feminist theory and cultural criticism, but that’s not the same as a talk about Buddhism.

Yet when the time came the seats were filled. And it was all about Buddhism. It was a truly awesome night. Sacred presence was there, a spirit of love and compassion like spring mist covered us, and loving-kindness embraced me and my words. This is always the measure of mindful practice—whether we can create the conditions for love and peace in circumstances that are difficult, whether we can stop resisting and surrender, working with what we have, where we are.

Fundamentally, the practice of love begins with acceptance—the recognition that wherever we are is the appropriate place to practice, that the present moment is the appropriate time. But for so many of us our longing to love and be loved has always been about a time to come, a space in the future when it will just happen, when our hungry hearts will finally be fed, when we will find love.
No doubt divine providence was at work in the universe when Martin Luther King, Jr., and a little-known Vietnamese Buddhist monk named Thich Nhat Hanh found themselves walking the same path, engaged in a practice of love.

More than thirty years ago, when I first began to think about Buddhism, there was little or no talk about Buddhism and love. Being a Buddhist was akin to being a leftist; it was all about the intellect, the philosophical mind. It was faith for the thinking “man” and love was nowhere to be found in the popular Buddhist literature at that time. D.T. Suzuki’s collection on Buddhism published in the late forties and throughout the fifties had nothing to say about love. Shunryu Suzuki’s Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind was the Buddhist manifesto of the early seventies, and it did not speak to us of love.

Even though Christmas Humphreys would tell readers in his fifties publication Buddhism: An Introduction and Guide that “Buddhism is as much a religion of love as any on earth,” Westerners looking to Buddhism in those days were not looking for love. In fact Humphreys was talking back to folks who had designated Buddhism a “cold religion.” To prove that love was important to Buddhists, he quoted from the Sutta Pitaka: “All the means that can be used as bases for right action are not worth the sixteenth part of the emancipation of the heart through love. This takes all others up into itself, outshining them in glory.” Yet twenty years after this publication, there was still little talk of Buddhism and love. In circles where an individual would dare to speak of love, they would be told that Buddhists were more concerned with the issue of compassion. It was as though love was just not a relevant, serious subject for Buddhists.

During the turbulent sixties and seventies the topic of love made its way to the political forefront. Peace activists were telling us to “make love not war.” And the great preacher Martin Luther King, Jr., elevated the call to love from the hidden longing of the solitary heart to a public cry: He proclaimed love to be the only effective way to end injustice and bring peace, declaring that “Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace.” If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

There could not have been a more perfect historical dharma moment for spiritual leaders to speak out on the issue of love. No doubt divine providence was at work in the universe when Martin Luther King, Jr., and a little-known Vietnamese Buddhist monk named Thich Nhat Hanh found themselves walking the same path—walking toward one another—engaged in a practice of love. Young men whose hearts were awakening, they created in mystical moments of sacred encounter a symbolic sangha. They affirmed one another’s work. In the loneliness of the midnight hour, King would fall on his knees and ask himself the question, “How can I say I worship a god of love and support war?” Thich Nhat Hanh, knowing by heart all the bonds of human connection that war severs, challenged the world to think peace, declaring in the wake of the Vietnam war that he “thought it was quite plain that if you have to choose between Buddhism and peace, then you must choose peace.” Linking Buddhism with social engagement, Thich Nhat Hanh’s work attracted Westerners (myself included) precisely because he offered a spiritual vision of the universe that promoted working for peace and justice.

In Essential Buddhism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs and Practices, Jack Maguire sees Buddhism’s emphasis on nonviolence as one of the central features that attracts Westerners. He writes: “Already large numbers of people concerned about such violence have been drawn to Buddhism as a spiritual path that addresses the problem directly. Besides offering them a means of committing themselves more actively to the cause of universal peace, it gives them a context for becoming more intimate with others who are like-minded. It therefore helps realize their hope that people can live together in harmony.”

Significantly, Buddhism began to attract many more Western followers because it linked the struggle for world peace with the desire of each individual to be engaged in meaningful spiritual practice. Coming out of a time when it had been cool for smart people to be agnostic or atheist, people wanted permission to seek spiritual connection. Introducing the collection of essays entitled Engaged Buddhism in the West, editor Christopher Queen calls attention to the fact that socially engaged Buddhism “has emerged in the context of a global conversation on human rights, distributive justice, and social progress....As a style of ethical practice engaged Buddhism may be seen as a new paradigm of Buddhist liberation.” In the late eighties and nineties Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings on engaged Buddhism practice spoke directly to concerned citizens in the United States who had been working on behalf of peace and justice, especially for an end to domination based on racial, gender, and sexual practice, but who had begun to feel hopelessness and despair. The assassination of visionary leaders, the inability to end racism and create a just society, the failure of contemporary feminism, which, rather than healing the split between men and women, actually led to further gender warfare—all of this engendered a collective feeling of hopelessness. Buddhist teachers addressed this suffering directly.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche was one of the first Buddhist teachers in the West offering the insight that this profound hopelessness could be the groundwork for spiritual practice. Certainly I came to Buddhism searching for a way out of suffering and despair. Thich Nhat Hanh spoke to my struggle to connect spiritual practice with social engagement. Yet at the time, his Buddhism often seemed rigid, and like many other seekers I turned to the teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche to confront the longings of my heart and find a way to embrace a passionate life. For many Western seekers, the feeling that we had failed to create a culture of peace and justice led us back to an introspective search of our intimate relations, which more often than not were messy and full of strife, suffering, and pain. How could any of us truly believe that we could create world peace when we could not make peace in our intimate relationships with family, partners, friends, and neighbors? Responding to this collective anguish of spirit, visionary teachers (like King, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, Sharon Salzberg) were moved by practical necessity to speak more directly about the practice of love. Proclaiming transformation in our consciousness engendered by a focus on love, Thich Nhat Hanh declared in the poem “The Fruit of Love,”

lucky star, 2004, tapestry, 68 x 79 inches.
Awareness Is Ripe: when I know how to love the doors of my heart opened wide before the wind. / Reality was calling out for revolution. That spirit of revolution, that call to practice transformative love captured my critical imagination and merged with my longing to find a loving partner.

To work for peace and justice we begin with the individual practice of love, because it is there that we can experience firsthand love's transformative power.

When I began, years ago now, to focus on the power of love as a healing force, no one really disagreed with me. Yet what they continue to accept in their daily life is lovelessness, because doing the work of love requires resisting the status quo. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s most recent treatise on the subject, True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart, he reminds us that “to love, in the context of Buddhism, is above all to be there.” He then raises the question of whether or not we have time for love. Right now there is such a profound collective cultural awareness that we need to practice love if we are to heal ourselves and the planet. The task awaiting us is to move from awareness to action. The practice of love requires that we make time, that we embrace change.

Fundamentally, to begin the practice of love we must slow down and be still enough to bear witness in the present moment. If we accept that love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we can then be guided by this understanding. We can use these skillful means as a map in our daily life to determine action. When we cultivate the mind of love, we are, as Sharon Salzberg says, “cultivating the good,” and that means “recovering the incandescent power of love that is present as a potential in all of us” and using “the tools of spiritual practice to sustain our real, moment-to-moment experience of that vision.” To be transformed by the practice of love is to be born again, to experience spiritual renewal. What I witness daily is the longing for that renewal and the fear that our lives will be changed utterly if we choose love. That fear paralyzes. It leaves us stuck in the place of suffering.

When we commit to love in our daily life, habits are shatter ed. We are necessarily working to end domination. Because we no longer are playing by the safe rules of the status quo, rules that if we obey guarantee us a specific outcome, love moves us to a new ground of being. This movement is what most people fear. If we are to galvanize the collective longing for spiritual well-being that is found in the practice of love, we must be more willing to identify the forms that longing will take in daily life. Folks need to know the ways we change and are changed when we love. It is only by bearing concrete witness to love’s transformative power in our daily lives that we can assure those who are fearful that commitment to love will be redemptive, a way to experience salvation. Lots of people listen and affirm the words of visionary teachers who speak on the necessity of love. Yet they feel in their everyday lives that they simply do not know how to link theory and practice. When Thich Nhat Hanh tells in Transformation and Healing that “understanding is the very foundation of love and compassion,” that “if love and compassion are in our hearts, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle,” we are moved. We may even feel a powerful surge of awareness and possibility.

Then we go home and find ourselves uncertain about how to realize true love. I remember talking deeply with Thich Nhat Hanh about a love relationship in which I felt I was suffering. In his presence I was ashamed to confess the depths of my anguish and the intensity of my anger toward the man in my life. Speaking with such tenderness he told me, “Hold on to your anger and use it as compost for your garden.” Listening to these wise words I felt as though a thousand rays of light were shining throughout my being. I was certain I could go home, let my light shine, and everything would be better; I would find the promised happy ending. The reality was that communication was still difficult. Finding ways to express true love required vigilance, patience, a will to let go, and the creative use of the imagination to invent new ways of relating. Thich Nhat Hanh had told me to see the practice of love in this tumultuous relationship as spiritual practice, to find in the mind of
Bell hooks continued from page 9

and give up and not sustain our efforts. But if we see it as a continual process of awakening, we can go forward.

When hooks began to teach at Yale in 1985, she already had found a stimulating atmosphere in academia, but she now discovered a love for teaching. At Yale, she has written, she found students who, like her, were "deeply committed to learning, to excelling academically, to doing rigorous work," who were "enormously passionate." Despite her appreciation for "her Yales," and the African-American studies department's desire to retain her, she felt isolated in the ivory tower amid the "shock and her newfound love of teaching atmosphere for hooks, and during her Oberlin seemed to provide a nourishment of New York, at 138th street and Convent. She began to think of the world as a place of hope and possibility. "The agrarian roots of black people can be traced to "self-invention" and not be measured by the academic lack of self-esteem and a propensity for self-sabotage: fear of failure was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Her prescription, laid out in books like Killing Rage: Ending Racism and Salvation: Black People and Love, is to find a place where teaching and learning could be practiced outside the norm. "A leave of absence is not the solution; you have to "self-invent," to define who we are from within. The same kind of thinking runs through her work on black men and masculinity, We Real Cool. "One of the big failures for black men," she tells me, "is that love is not possible when we are locked into their roles as silent and jobless."

Our friends at Saint Mary's College of Maryland have commended her to "reflect on the restorative aspects of our nature." She has taken a strong interest in deep ecology, and the work of Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, and Vedana Shiva. She is taken with the healing power of the land and the fact that "the agrarian roots of black people can be traced to self-invention does not preclude where we discover ourselves. Our foundation, "she says. "For us, that means finding the ground of our being, the place where we discover ourselves. Our foundation of self-invention does not preclude where we discover ourselves. Our foundation of the dharma. I seem to be able to talk with anger, when it may just be speech to stop giving a true account of what they see. And blunt speech becomes associated with anger, when it may just be speech that isn't opaque." Her taking up children's books coincided with her discovery of the need to put out her "playfulness" more. It became important to her that she enjoy life and also be seen by students as enjoying life. Other than Buddhism, hooks has a strong interest in deep ecology, and the work of Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, and Vedana Shiva. She is taken with the healing power of the land and the fact that "the agrarian roots of black people can be traced to self-invention does not preclude movement. If you feel that you can really think you could change the world? And guess what? When you're fucked-up and you lead the revolution, you are probably going to get a pretty fucked-up revolution."

Hooks loves houses. She likes to renovate them and make them beautiful, and when it comes to summing up what she's about, that's the image she chooses. "For a house that is not about mind and body and soul and spirit and integrating Buddhist and the other way around," she says, "For us, that means finding the ground of our being, the place where we discover ourselves. Our foundation of self-invention does not preclude where we discover ourselves. Our foundation of the dharma. I seem to be able to talk with anger, when it may just be speech that isn't opaque." Her taking up children's books coincided with her discovery of the need to put out her "playfulness" more. It became important to her that she enjoy life and also be seen by students as enjoying life. Other than Buddhism, hooks has a strong interest in deep ecology, and the work of Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, and Vedana Shiva. She is taken with the healing power of the land and the fact that "the agrarian roots of black people can be traced to self-invention does not preclude movement. If you feel that you can really think you could change the world? And guess what? When you're fucked-up and you lead the revolution, you are probably going to get a pretty fucked-up revolution."
love a way to understanding, forgiveness, and peace. Of course this was all work. Just as cultivating a garden requires turning over the ground, pulling weeds, planting, and watering, doing the work of love is all about taking action.

Whenever anyone asks me how they can begin the practice of love I tell them giving is the place to start. In *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen offers this testimony: “Every time I take a step in the direction of generosity I know that I am moving from fear to love.” Salzberg sees giving as a way to purify the mind: “Giving is an inward state, a generosity of the spirit that extends to ourselves as well as to others.” Through giving we develop the mind of gratitude. Giving enables us to experience the fullness of abundance—not only the abundance we have, but the abundance in sharing. In sharing all that we have we become more. We awaken the heart of love.

Dominator thinking and practice relies for its maintenance on the constant production of a feeling of lack, of the need to grasp. Giving love offers us a way to end this suffering—loving ourselves, extending that love to everything beyond the self, we experience wholeness. We are healed. The Buddha taught that we can create a love so strong that, as Salzberg states, our “minds become like a pure, flowing river that cannot be burned.” Such love is the foundation of spiritual awakening.

If we are to create a worldwide culture of love then we need enlightened teachers to guide us. We need concrete strategies for practicing love in the midst of domination. Imagine all that would change for the better if every community in our nation had a center (a sangha) that would focus on the practice of love, of loving-kindness. All the great religious traditions share the belief that love is our reason for being. This shared understanding of love helps connect Buddhist traditions with Christian practice. Those coming to Buddhism from Christian traditions appreciate the work that Thich Nhat Hanh has done to create a bridge connecting these spiritual paths. In *Living Buddha, Living Christ* he offers a vision of inclusiveness, reminding us that both Jesus and Buddha are doors we can walk through to find true love. He explains: “In Buddhism such a special door is deeply appreciated because that door allows us to enter the realm of mindfulness, loving-kindness, peace, and joy.” Sharing the truism that there are many doors of teaching he states: “Each of us, by our practice and our loving-kindness, is capable of opening new dharma doors.”

All of us who work toward creating a culture of love seek to share a real body of teaching that can reach everyone where we are. That was the lesson I learned at the conference last May—to be broad, to extend the circle of love beyond boundaries, bringing together people from different backgrounds and traditions, and feeling together the way love connects us.
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