

# Pacifica Journal

A bi-annual newsletter published by the Anthroposophical Society in Hawai'i  
Number 34, 2008-2

## An Invitation

### Asia Pacific Anthroposophical Conference

Southeast Asian Ministry of Education  
Regional Center for Educational Innovation and  
Technology

Quezon City, Philippines.  
May 2 to 4, 2009

**What is the role of modern technology in child  
development?**

**What does a wholistic approach to child  
education entail?**

This conference welcomes participants from all walks of  
life who have burning questions concerning the relationship

between technology and modern education. Together, we will  
discuss how community involvement, economic orientation  
and ecological initiatives affect the way we deal with modern  
technology and the education of our children.

Christof Wiechert, leader of the Pedagogical Section at  
the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, will be the keynote  
speaker. Conference facilitators from different countries will  
share their experiences in education, economy, ecology and  
related fields.

Registration fee is P6,000 inclusive of materials, lunch,  
dinner, morning and afternoon snacks. Deadline for registra-  
tion is on January 31, 2009. A conference website will soon  
be available. You may call or leave your message for Estela  
(02) 285 9016, Grace (02) 375 3724 (7:00 - 8:30 pm), or Pony  
(02) 895 8421. Emails to the AGP Registrar may be sent to:  
[agpanouncements@gmail.com](mailto:agpanouncements@gmail.com)

### The Third Asia Waldorf Teacher's Conference

May 2 to 8, 2009

The third AWTC will run concurrently with the APAC  
and will share keynote speakers but will have its own discus-  
sion groups and artistic workshops for active teachers. It will  
run several days longer and will explore the current trends in  
technology and their impact on child development. Sharing  
of day-to-day curriculum, teaching approaches, Asian experi-  
ences from K-12, artistic workshops and discussions of other  
related topics including country reports and cultural evenings  
will also be a part of this conference.

The AWTC is for active Waldorf kindergarten and school  
teachers only since it is not an introduction to Steiner education  
but a deepening of classroom practice and of understanding  
this education which embraces diverse cultural contexts.

Christof Wiechert, a Steiner school graduate and leader  
of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum in Dornach,  
Switzerland, will be the keynote speaker. Conference facilita-  
tors from different countries will share their experience in  
education and related fields.

The theme of the 2009 Asia Waldorf Teacher's  
Conference (AWTC) and the Asia-Pacific Anthroposophi-



cal Conference (APAC) is: **“The Foundation of Human Experience and the Challenges of Modern Life on Children’s Development and Education.”**

The Anthroposophical Group in the Philippines and the Manila Waldorf School will host these conferences which will be held at the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education, Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEMEAO INNOTECH) in Quezon City, Philippines.

A conference website with further details will soon be available. Emails to the AGP Registrar may be sent to:

[agpanouncements@gmail.com](mailto:agpanouncements@gmail.com)

For further information see <http://www.rstep.org.ph> - the official site of Rudolf Steiner Education in the Philippines (RStEP).



## Travel Journal of an American Waldorf Teacher on Sabbatical (ch4)

*Meg Gorman, San Francisco, California*

Thailand

Since the weather was cloudy, I slept on the plane from Guangzhou, China to Thailand. As we taxied in, I knew I was in another world. The new Bangkok airport seems to be a string of elegant, white circus tents, their edges lifted like skirts in a curtsy. As I had experienced nine years ago, I was greeted by praying hands pointing into the center of foreheads and a respectful bow of the head.

Nam-oi Saihoo was waiting for me. An art history professor, she and a group of parents are starting a high school for their children. (This begins in Thailand at grade seven and then moves into another stage at grade ten.) We chatted as our language restrictions allowed, while we worked our way through the infamous city traffic.

The city, 95 degrees F and humid, was awash in bright yellow shirts to honor two benchmarks for the king: his 60 years of reign and his 80th birthday. The king is beloved by all Thai people and is the moral leader of the nation. Every Thai person I met spoke about him with reverence and gratitude.

I was taken to the home of Ming Toy (who is actually Chinese) and Ton Nakiinimit Swuwannaakudt. Her parents and their two children are all part of the household with Ton’s mother arriving soon. Ton is an artist, and his house, a work of art in itself, has been featured in a slick magazine. Each room is a carefully appointed space of loveliness, and rest. Very large patterned gold and white carp meander in a pond that surrounds the house. I had seen such fish, fifteen to eighteen inches long, in Japan.

I was told that some of them were easily worth \$1,000 a piece. However, a bit of clutter edged the area near the water. This was an actual barricade to keep Mame, the family beagle, out of the pond. Undaunted, he would position himself each morning at a likely place and prepare to launch himself into the drink. Once shamed off the idea, he would sometimes howl mournfully or sulk.

Ton and his family were as gracious as the home was beautiful, and the food was divine. I felt truly blessed. I was sometimes told in a most smiling and gentle way, that something was “a little bit spicy.” A few seconds later, when I began gesturing frantically for water to put out the fire, the proverbial glass of hot water was proffered. I learned quickly that anything red or even pink was off limits for my tender mouth and stomach.

The toilets were one step down from those of Japan, and many steps up from those of China. Not only was there a comfortable throne, but there was also a sprayer with a nozzle, very like our garden hoses. One uses this to wash any offending area at the end of the process. The downstairs bathroom at Ton’s was also filed with art, plants, and lovely picture books. I called it the gallery. I was so happy after China’s facilities; I could have wept for joy.

I was also happy to see Chong, a young woman I had met on my first visit to Thailand. She is now a skilled and beloved class teacher, but is headed for a Camphill in Britain next year. We spent an afternoon in a beautiful Buddhist garden tended by nuns dressed in white. Besides extraordinary flora and freeform mud structures (a bit like straw-bale buildings), there was a sort of wind harp easily ten feet tall and twenty feet long. It was an enchanting afternoon.

I was also delighted to encounter again a dear Austrian friend, Maria Domning, whom I had met in the past both in Thailand and in Sweden. A former kindergarten and class teacher, she attended the lectures I gave and augmented my work in wonderful ways. We had several rich and thoughtful conversations.

The Tridhaksa Waldorf School, where I taught, sits near a restaurant on stilts over a lovely pond and has two good-sized, three-story buildings with ample play space in a suburban neighborhood. The administrator, U-sa Tanompongpan, has been the pioneer behind the school from its beginning. She and her husband have given much to the material development of the school. They now have solid kindergartens, grades 1-6, and a Raphael class for children with special needs. I

was impressed.

I taught a five-hour intensive for four days on Waldorf high school education, threefolding, and school structure. I also worked with a fine man, Tik Wonchai, an architect, who will teach history in the high school. This was an extraordinarily talented group of professionals ready to create a high school for their children. I urged them to reach beyond their own children to the other students in the school. I think they will.

I have never had an audience that understood so well the principles of the three-fold social organism. My “students” would say, “Yes, that is Thai Buddhism” or “That is what the Lord Buddha has told us.” The three spheres are already delineated in the culture, and there is an opening for anthroposophy here that is quite wonderful. Karma and reincarnation are a part of life. The natural reverence for life in the people with whom I was working was inspiring.

There are two schools in Bangkok. One is the Tridhaksa School and the other is known there as Dr. Porn’s school, Panyotai Waldorf School. Dr. Porn and U-sa had a falling out early on, and they split to form two schools. I had met Dr. Porn Panosot and his wife, Janpen, some years before, when their school was beginning in his living room. Now the school was just finishing a brand new building into which they were moving when I went to visit. I wanted to visit the other school, so Ton took me over to the new building. When I arrived, I found a group of devoted parents and teachers trying to put a library together in time for the inspectors later in the week. They have begun their high school, and they have a lovely suburban site near farm country, with two courtyards.

Everyone was, understandably, exhausted from moving, and several of the teachers were warm and friendly.

I see some patterns with new schools. For example, strong pioneers begin schools and then cannot let go. Group working is poorly understood, and there is not enough practical, practicing anthroposophy to help make it possible. Then groups within schools separate from one another. I wonder if we really understand how serious karma is: that our lives on earth are our only real karmic workshops, and it’s important to use them well for the future of the human being and the earth. Then I think maybe the little bit of time we are able to work together is enough to create a seed for another life. But the same situations will come again in a new lifetime, the same people will arise again, and things will be more difficult if they are not addressed when first presented. Waldorf education is so needed in so many places, but it is often hampered by these personality clashes we have. It is so disheartening that we waste so much time on these things when there is so much work to do. I pray the opening lines of what I know as the prayer of Mary Queen of Scots: “O Lord, deliver us from pettiness.”

I also think about the story I have heard several times concerning faculty life in the first Waldorf School. A teacher asked Dr. Steiner something to this effect, “Why can’t we get along?” He answered, “You are doing very well. If you knew what you had done to each other in a past life, you would not be able to sit in the same room together.” Perhaps we are making progress after all.

Everyone from the Tridhaksa School took such good care of me, I felt pampered. I visited the Four Season’s Hotel which



*Students from the Panyotai Waldorf School in Bangkok perform on the stage of the Goetheanum, May 2008.*



is exquisitely decorated in traditionally Thai frescoes which Ton, his sister and his father painted. One evening, Pinpochana Patchimsawat or Ning, the incipient seventh grade teacher, Nam-oi Saihoo, and I went downtown and walked forever trying to find a store that sold Thai silk tunics, but western styles have replaced them. We rode back in a tuk-tuk, a three-wheeled motorbike taxi with three of us in the back and the driver in the front. It was thrilling to feel the hot humid wind whistling in our ears as we dodged about the thick Bangkok traffic. We had a lovely meal accompanied by watermelon drinks before going to the Thai puppet theatre.

This is not to be missed. I wish we could bring this troop of remarkable performers to San Francisco. A mixture of puppetry, dance, music, singing and staging, the work is brilliantly choreographed. Three very fit young people dressed in black, manage each puppet, an intricately articulated, hand-carved wooden doll about the size of a three-year old. The central handler holds the puppet above the shoulders and works the body and the mouth; the two others work each arm and hand. The workmanship is exquisite. The puppets, from heroes to giant monsters, are painted in brilliant colors and are accented in gold, with careful detail. A small grouping of traditional Thai instruments and storytelling singers flank the stage like wings in an orchestra. The story began against a backdrop of plain

curtains, but, as it progressed, the curtains opened to wonderful scenery. At one point, a huge snake wrapped around a tree churned the ocean in a battle of good and evil. The puppet handlers move about in dance-like forms with their charges, and there is a great deal of stamping and hallooing by them, as well as sound effects made by the storyteller singers and musicians. I was spellbound, and would happily have seen the whole thing all over again. At the end, the handlers brought the puppets into the audience to flirt with us. Hanuman, the far-leaping monkey who is hopelessly pursuing a beautiful princess, gave me a kiss and insisted on one in return.

Saying goodbye to Ton was hard. We both felt we had found a new friend. He told me to come back and stay at his house anytime or forever. I told him I was tempted. We laughed as we realized I would only be one more grandparent.

The weekend was spent with a university professor of economics, Pat, her young son, and her kind brother, Pol, who drove me many miles to a small town outside the city. After some hours of easing along through Bangkok traffic, we were finally speeding past salt flats where waterwheels made of bamboo are still used to pump salt water into large evaporating ponds. Some salt comes out gray, while some is very white which is, of course, the most valuable. Little roadside stands



sell it in stacked blocks or bags.

We finally arrived at our destination, a charming fruit “farm” on the side of a road with little cabins positioned over watery canals that irrigate the fruit. The farm’s few acres front on the only river in Bangkok which moves gently along with large clumps of water lilies. “You can swim out to those,” I was told. “They can hold several people.” I was beginning to fancy a swim, when Pat added, “Of course there are the poisonous snakes.” “Really?” I asked with my now legendary naiveté. “Yes, and they kill people every year.” That was enough for me. I stayed safely on shore and watched the lush world around me.

New bird life was plentiful in song and shapes: thin-beaked king fishers, ever present mina birds, small curve-beaked fruit eaters, iridescent finches, very loud black bird with blood curdling calls that covered a city block, white winged-black bodied cranes, and bright orange combinations that look like orioles. At the edges of restaurants open on three sides, they sang along the river in banana groves, jack fruit trees, and orchards of things I have never seen before.

After settling our things, we went to a lovely park and then to a fabulous town along one of the many well-developed canals that crisscross Thailand and branch out from its only river. We strolled on walkways complete with small shops built on stilts on the edge of the river. Every imaginable combustible was artistically displayed in small stands by smiling families. The varieties of fruit and vegetables for sale are wondrous. Many are unique to this area like pommelos, one of my favorites, and other little fruits for which I never learned the names. Grills were busy roasting up fish, squid, clams, vegetables, and other incredibly tasty dainties. Wide-eyed children helped with cooking and catering. The Thai people get my award for the best cuisine so far with the Japanese close behind. The street food is so good and nutritious.

As we walked along the pier, boats pulled up with various meals for sale. Dishes were cooked right there on various containers of coals in the narrow boats, and then handed up in a long-poled basket after the fees have been collected using the same contraption. A band was playing on one side of the water, and people settled on steps on the other side of the canal to listen. It was a sort of Thai Venice. Sauntering along, I noticed a massage place. Open to the air on one side, clients established themselves in comfy, reclining chairs, or, for the full treatment, onto generous tables. I headed for a chair and had just settled in, when I was startled by what sounded like gunfire.

The masseurs rushed to the door, and I followed close behind. A flotilla of small boats decked in yellow-and-white flowers and yellow-shirted people was headed up the canal. The lead boat carried a golden Buddha, and it seemed as though most of the rest of the town followed in the some two hundred boats. Several contained bands ranging from those playing ancient Thai instruments to others playing jazz and rock n’ roll. People were laughing and singing with glee.

It was a noisy joy fest. “Why all the excitement?” I asked Pol. It turned out the town was bringing a golden Buddha statue, the first new one in fifteen years, to their temple. The whole community was celebrating. This has been the most joyous moment of my trip thus far. When the firecrackers and general chaos was over, I returned to a glorious foot massage with a warm-hearted woman working on each leg and foot. It was glorious. A yummy street meal by the river followed, and we then met a boat to take us up river to see fireflies.

I was not initially too excited, but it was magnificent moving up the water in the cool evening breeze with new friends. After an hour or so, it grew dark, and, sure enough, we soon saw blinking trees. These were not the fireflies of East Coast America. These were larger and blinking like Christmas trees with the intensity of hurried Morse code. On the way back, we saw other trees full of nesting herons that looked like snow piled in their tops. It was a glorious ending to the day.

We returned to our little farm, and settled into our respective abodes. Mine was a small room on stilts with a tiny porch and bathroom at the rear which flushed by dipping a large pan into a water-filled cistern and emptying it into the toilet. I was grateful for the seat. Once settled on my thin mattress on the floor, I was ready for dreams filled with golden Buddhas, but this proved impossible. Barely would my eyes close when the intense hum of a motorcycle or other unmuffled vehicle tore into my repose. It was like the ring of Dante’s hell where insects are buzzing and biting.

After little sleep, I rose early and wandered around the farm until I was invited to breakfast by the owners. We sat on a terrace drinking coffee (a lot of it after a near sleepless night) and eating pommelo, good rice and fish soup, and a pastry like beignets. Our hosts were, as usual, wonderful, and we soon left for the long drive to the Ancient city, a sort of historic park.

I have never seen anything quite like it. Of many acres, the site is arranged in the shape of Thailand with original buildings of historical significance or copies thereof built in the parts of “Thailand” where they once were. The project of a private businessman, the place is beautifully designed and really does capture the essence of the culture and its architectural history. It includes full and three-quarter reproductions of royal palaces, Buddhist temples, ancient homes, and so on. The central section is set over a lovely pond full of fish where Pat’s son lay in a gazebo and tried to catch them with his bare hands.

I basked in the strange rich, musical, Thai language of p’s, b’s, k’s, ings, and ongs running up and down a scale of tones beyond my grasp. I reflected on the many reason I loved this place. There had been a military coup a week or so before I arrived. I asked how things were going, and everyone laughed. When the tanks rolled up the streets of Bangkok, I was told people rushed out to wave, children climbed up on them, and there was a party atmosphere. “Oh,” I said, “then the people were glad?” I was told they just wanted to see the tanks and were not so interested in the politics. They clearly don’t take



this sort of thing very seriously.

Then there are the street dogs of Thailand. Sweet, scruffy creatures, they are fed by all, and proliferate regularly. However, they are generally happy and well loved even if many have no regular owner. The Thai people also have a lovely relationship to other nature. There are many roadside and backyard shrines to nature spirits, the Buddha and his consorts, and/or those who have died. Fresh food is put out daily at these places, and I noticed many Thai people bowing or praying at these little roadside shrines as they passed. It reminded me of the little shrines to the Virgin Mary that used to dot the roads of Austria thirty years ago.

I was puzzled by so many families clearly living near poverty but who seemed to be happy. It was a sharp contrast to the materialism of our dear USA and China. I asked my economist friend if this was an illusion. She said, "No," and then pointed to a statue of Buddha which we were passing in the car. "See that gesture of Lord Buddha," she said. "It means enough. Our king tells us to pay attention to this gesture because we only need enough."

"How much is enough," I asked.

"Enough to eat, a place to sleep, a way to be healthy and people to love," she answered matter of factly. I thought again of the threefold social organism and about how much I needed to unlearn to be happy with just enough.

Yes, the Thai culture is rich, artistic, old and wonderful. The amount of sheer artistic beauty is impressive. It was a sharp contrast to what I had experienced on my first visit to China where culture has been so denigrated. I wondered about how much had been lost. I was soon to find out.

After a glorious day at the Ancient City, I was exhausted. I was relieved to fall into bed at a hotel near the airport. Dear Nam-oi Saihoo appeared early in the morning, and I was soon boarding for my trip back to China, this time to Guangzhou. I was filled with gratitude for the amazing people I had met, and the generosity and hospitality I had experienced. The only Asian country not colonized by the west, Thailand, which means freeland, is high on my list of favorite places, and I have promised to return.

## Shakespeare in Bangkok

*John Chalmers, Honolulu, Hawai'i*

I have been going to Bangkok, Thailand, to help the Pannyotai Waldorf School for two summers now. This summer I was asked to do a play with the eleventh grade. This was the group of students that had started with the school at its inception. I decided we would do *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. I knew the play well and it was one of the shorter plays by the bard.

I was able to cast the students during the month of June from Hawai'i because I had worked with them the previous



year. So, when I arrived on July 7 we immediately began working on the play. Only a handful of students spoke English well; some had good reading comprehension, but one did not speak any English at all, and of course-- for many other reasons as well-- he was cast as the creature Caliban.

When I arrived I learned that the student playing Prospero was well into memorizing the first three acts and this was encouraging, but the student playing Ariel had not even begun to look at her lines! A number of students also needed coaching in their English pronunciation, especially in Shakespeare's particular and challenging diction. We had only three weeks to prepare the play, and there was a four-day Thai holiday right in the middle. No problem, I love the impossible.

The boys had mandatory military training every Thursday, so it was just me and the girls. We brainstormed and decided on a myriad approaches to the Caliban problem. One girl became his line coach, another, his personal interpreter. We designated a group to do his longer passages in a chorus behind the curtain, and finally we found a translation of *The Tempest* in Thai that we used for his inflammatory "asides" to the audience.



Mr. Kenya did a wonderful job with all the eurythmy, which, of course, made the play a magical dream performance. With the help of internet research, a talented parent conjured the Renaissance flare for the costumes. An English teacher from South Africa performed and helped with stage design. The people I stayed with lived a short walk from the school and they owned a professional lighting company. They swooped in a half hour before our first performance to do our beautiful lighting.

So, it all worked out well. The play was a great success. This is perhaps why Shakespeare says, “the play is the thing.” The Thai students were the miracle and joy of the impossible.

## The Soul’s Journey: Chartres Cathedral and the Waldorf High School Curriculum

*Bridget Quinn, San Francisco, California, USA*

I attended a conference at Rudolf Steiner College in Sacramento, California, the influence of which reverberated throughout my school year. Called The School of Chartres – A Millennial Celebration, the conference was as much an expression of gratitude at 1000 years of esoteric development flowing outward from a French cathedral school, as it was explication of the church’s architecture itself. As an instructor of Humanities at San Francisco Waldorf High School who teaches Architecture, Art History, the Old and New Testaments, Dante and Parzival, among other subjects, I was moved by the recurring presence of Chartres echoing through our curriculum. It occurred to me, naturally, that this is no accident. The Waldorf curriculum, especially in the upper grades, is a soul’s journey and one of the great touchstones of that journey is the Cathedral of Chartres.

Chartres has long been an important landmark for anthroposophy, due to the profound beauty of the cathedral itself, and to Rudolf Steiner’s discussions in the Karma lectures of the significance of the School of Chartres to the development of humanity. The Waldorf high school curriculum allows young people to encounter the mystery and promise of Chartres for themselves, and to carry what they find there into the future. They usually only meet Chartres head-on in the 12th grade,

when they study the history of architecture, but these students are prepared for this encounter emotionally, intellectually and inwardly by their involvement in classes such as the New Testament, Parzival and Dante.

It might prove beneficial to begin with the question, what is Chartres? The name itself is difficult for English-speakers to undertake with confidence, and the same might be said for what that name implies. When one speaks of “Chartres,” one can mean the Gothic cathedral built between 1194-1220 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary; or the School of Chartres, a Medieval academy of Christian Platonists; or both. In this article I will mainly discuss the cathedral of Chartres, with the understanding that the building is a visual exegesis on the philosophy and ideals of the school.

The history of Chartres is a long one, dating back to Druidic times, when a sacred grotto served a pagan cult of the Black Madonna, whose statue, remarkably, was kept in the much later Christian Cathedral until it disappeared in the vandalism of the French Revolution. Some legends say that even before the Druidic grotto there was a megalithic dolmen on the site, though no archeological evidence of the monument has been uncovered. (Strachan: 10) Dolmens are not uncommon to Neolithic France, but where found they undoubtedly indicate a sacred site. Whatever the precise history of pre-Christian Chartres, what is certain is that it was long associated with a sacred feminine presence.

The very earliest Christians at the site felt this connection to the divine feminine. According to legend, Chartres was the first place in Europe dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The history of Christian Chartres begins with Joseph of Arimathea, who is also pivotal to the history of the Holy Grail. Waldorf students often first encounter Joseph of Arimathea, briefly, when reading the Gospels of the New Testament, then again when they study Parzival, where they are often told stories regarding the grail legend. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to give





but the briefest overview of the wonderful history of Joseph of Arimathea, but I would recommend those interested look at Rene Querido's book *The Golden Age of Chartres or, The Holy Grail* by Richard Barber.

For us, suffice to say that Joseph of Arimathea appears only briefly in the Gospels, as the follower who asks Pilate for the body of Christ, which he is given and which he buries in his own tomb. The canonical gospels do not say much more than this. But later works, especially the Gospel of Nicodemus, written toward the end of the fourth century, and *Joseph d'Armatheie*, written by Robert de Boron around 1150, tell of Joseph's personal connection with the risen Christ and, in Boron's account, of his receiving the cup of the Last Supper from Pilate, in which he collects Christ's blood before burying Him. Later, after years of imprisonment by Jewish authorities, Joseph is set free and receives a vision to travel west with the Grail until he finds a place where his staff will flower in the earth.

Joseph of Arimathea travels into Europe with three Marys – Mary the Egyptian, Mary Cleophas and Mary Magdalene (whose bones purportedly still reside in a Romanesque church dedicated to her in Vezelay, France). When he comes to Chartres, Joseph understands its importance as a feminine shrine and sends a messenger to Ephesus for the Virgin Mary's leave to dedicate Chartres in her name. With this, Chartres becomes

the first place in Europe dedicated to the mother of Christ. It is also one of the earliest European sites associated with the Holy Grail. From Chartres, Joseph goes upward through France and passes into England, where his staff at last flowers in the soil of Glastonbury, still believed by some to conceal the Holy Grail.

Understandably, the attraction to the site of Chartres was strong for early Christians, who built a first chapel there in 500. Two later additions expanded the chapel into a major church, first under the Merovingians in 743, and again under the Carolingians in 858. With the Carolingians Chartres also received its most precious relic, the Chemise (sometimes called the Veil) of the Virgin, believed to have been worn at the birth of Jesus. This gift, from Charles the Bald, son of Emperor Charlemagne, was pivotal in the history of Chartres. First, it placed Chartres foremost in the Marian sites of Europe, underlining the church's special relationship to the mother of God and establishing it as an important pilgrimage site. Second, the chemise led directly to the Gothic building we know on the site today.

During the Romanesque period, as the cult of the Virgin was beginning its fevered rise that would have all of Europe in a burning Marian passion, the church at Chartres was expanded and completely rebuilt. The church needed to be larger both to glorify the Lady whom it served, and to serve those flocks of pilgrims who yearly came in greater numbers to venerate her sacred relic. Unfortunately, not long after its completion, the spire of the new church was struck by lightning and the whole building burned nearly to the ground. But the relic of the Virgin survived the flames unscathed. The preservation of the chemise was deemed a miracle, and the fire declared the response of a Lady unhappy with what was offered her. A new church, bigger and more glorious, was immediately begun with a passion that struck even cathedral-mad Europe as especially ardent. It would be a church befitting the Queen of Heaven – no expense or labor spared – and it would be built in the New Style, one invented mere decades before, what we call the Gothic.

The chemise of Mary sets the tone for the entire orchestration of the rebuilt church. It is that rarest of relics, one not associated with martyrdom or death (the Crown of Thorns, the Blood of Christ, the bones of Mary Magdalene), but with their opposite. It is a relic of birth. And the church built to house this relic reflects its greatest treasure. Nowhere in the sculptural program of Chartres are there scenes of agony, of retribution or even of fear. The entire church offers a picture of calm divinity, of peace and perfection. As such, it is a supreme vehicle for transformation, a mother calling forth the birth of one's highest self.

The above is one of the major ways in which Chartres is unique among Medieval churches. Fear – that is, death and judgment – is not the stick at Chartres; offered instead is the blessing of salvation. Where graphic scenes of torment of the Damned are standard fare in many churches of the Middle





Ages, such visions are absent from Chartres. Perhaps the most striking example of this turning away from agony and fear comes in the depictions of the life of Christ, where nowhere in the many recountings of His life and work – in sculpture, stained glass or other adornment – is the scene of His crucifixion illustrated. Not even in his role as Judge at the end of time, do we see Him in the harsh execution of this duty. Instead, the sculptured tympanum above the main door of the cathedral – called the Royal Portal, as befits its place in calling the faithful to step through Him who is the Way – shows a beatific Christ surrounded by the four apocalyptic animals (emblems of the four Evangelists), one hand raised in benediction.

These images from the life of Christ, and of his mother Mary, have strong resonance for Waldorf high school students, who have recently read the New Testament for themselves. In my experience, what they find there often surprises them. For example, a Jesus more interested in loving one's neighbor than in damning others, with challenging power rather than wielding it. Chartres confirms that their experience of the New Testament is one shared by other Christians, of other times, and perhaps their own time. Chartres points to another kind of Christianity, one far different from the caricatured (sometimes justly) picture of American political wrangling or televangelism that students encounter in the media every day.

Likewise, Chartres lacks images of martyrs with their attributes of martyrdom (Saint Catherine carrying her wheel, Saint Bartholomew his own flayed skin), typical in Catholic depictions of saints. There is, however, a scene portraying a saint just before the moment of martyrdom. Amid the many sculptural cycles in the South Porch of the church is one depicting a kneeling Saint Denis, hands upright in prayer, patiently awaiting the descending sword wielded by a Roman executioner who stands over him.

Saint Denis is the patron saint of France. The blood of his martyrdom is the source of the red ground of the Oriflamme, the royal standard carried by French kings. The depiction of the martyrdom of Saint Denis is therefore a moment of destiny: his death is the beginning of that France in which Chartres is conceived. And there may be more to the connection between Saint Denis and Chartres as well. High on the east side of the South Transept of the church, Denis is again depicted, this time in stained glass. Here, he presents the Oriflamme to a Templar Knight. In case we do not recognize

the saint merely from the standard associated with him, the Medieval artists of Chartres have provided his name in white glass beneath his long green feet: Dionysius. Saint Denis, or Dionysius (or Dionysius), is central to manifesting the vision that is Chartres, and to Gothic architecture itself.

The history of Denis/Dionysius is one equally fascinating and confusing. Waldorf high school students first come upon Dionysius in the curriculum when they read the New Testament, where in the Acts of the Apostles he is converted to Christianity by Saint Paul in Athens. In Acts, he is called Dionysius the Areopagite, because he was a senator, one of those who met on the “field of Mars” or “areopagite.” The conversion of Dionysius is a significant moment for many reasons, not least because of the connection forged between this nascent Hebrew religious movement and Greek philosophical traditions, the marriage of which became Christianity. Dionysius himself was made Bishop of Athens, a position that gave credence both to this radically new religion and to Greek philosophy within that religion. It is not surprising, then, to find the influence of Dionysius in much of early Christian history.



What is surprising is not that his ideas reappear, but that Dionysius himself appears to keep reappearing. According to legend, Dionysius made his way to Rome, where he worked with Pope Clement I, the fourth Bishop of Rome. In Rome, Dionysius and the Pope planned a mission to Gaul to convert pagans there. Gaul is where we later find (in the third century) a Bishop of Paris also named Dionysius – or the French Denys or Denis – who is converting pagans to the irritation of local Roman officials. They eventually drag him off to the high point of the city, Montmartre (old French for Mount of Martyrs) where he is beheaded. Undaunted even in death, Denis picks up his head and continues preaching until he dies many miles away from the place of his “execution.” At the site of his final breath a church is founded in his name, Saint Denis, where the Kings of France will be buried.

Yet another Dionysius/Denis is a figure now called the Pseudo-Dionysius, a neo-Platonic writer of Christian mysticism, believed to have lived in late 5th / early 6th century Syria. This Dionysius is most famous for his work *De Coelesti Hierarchia* (The Celestial Hierarchies), a work of angelology that

explains the orders of angels and their place in God's cosmos. He details three orders of three in descending order of proximity to God: Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; Dominations, Virtues and Powers; and Principalities, Archangels and Angels. The number nine is significant to the Pseudo-Dionysius, as it was to the builders of Chartres. The Scholastic philosophers, especially Thomas Aquinas, were deeply influenced by the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, and through them, so was Dante. When students read the *The Divine Comedy* in the 11th grade, the significance of nine and the ordering of proximity to God are impossible to ignore in the nine circles of Hell, the nine levels of Purgatory and the nine states of Paradise. I tell my students a little bit about Scholastic philosophy, and about Pseudo-Dionysius, before we begin reading Dante, in order to prepare them for this rigorous, but beautiful ordering of the divine.

When they come to Chartres, after having read Dante, Waldorf students find a church where nine is also a meaningful number. The church has nine portals, three for each cardinal direction, and was originally planned to have an astonishing nine spires (only two of which were built). More explicit still are the nine hierarchies of angels – those very beings first categorized by Dionysius – carved in the archivolts of the central portal of the South Porch, where nearby is the image of St. Denis awaiting his martyrdom. For Medieval masons (and theologians), there was no separateness between Dionysius the Areopogite, Saint Denis and Pseudo-Dionysius. There was only Dionysius/Denis, mystic, visionary and martyr.

Where today scholars see in this confusion of persons the amusing bafflement of a Medieval mind incapable of making sense of the historical past, thinkers of that time believed in a deeper truth behind what appears as “fact” in the material world. Had someone told a Medieval mason or theologian that Dionysius the Areopogite and a Syrian monk writing some 400 years later under the same name were not in fact the same person, the Medieval person would likely be little troubled, since both share a spiritual truth. Rudolf Steiner explained the reappearance of Dionysius/Denis as a chain of initiates in a mystery school. As explained by Rene Querido, Dionysius the Areopogite,

“elected among his students one who would carry on his teachings. That student received the name ‘Dionysius’. Others subsequently were chosen down through the generations until the sixth century. Each received the name Dionysius and each taught what the original Dionysius had taught. In the sixth century, it was decided that these teachings should be written down, and they were, in Greek. And since the students well knew who the originator of them was, they attributed authorship to the actual source, Dionysius the Areopogite.” (Querido: 106)

This brings us to the central moment of Dionysius’ influence on Medieval Europe: when in 1144 Abbot Suger of Saint Denis, reading deeply the works of Dionysius and believing them the writings of the saint of his own church (St. Denis),

is inspired to create a New Style for his renovated choir. The New Style, which today we call Gothic, is characterized by many things, but most obviously, pointed arches (which require less continuous buttressing and therefore allow a solid wall to be safely pierced) and the lovely benefit of pointed arches: stained glass windows. For Abbot Suger, Dionysius’ theology was one of mystical transformation, of a world here that merely reflects a higher, more perfect reality. Christ, the Light of the World, is the mediator between heaven and earth. Light in Suger’s architecture is both symbol and a sublime spiritual reality. His choir at Saint Denis is the first church architecture to widely employ stained glass, but his insistence on utilizing light and color is not simply for the sake of beauty. Light is Christ in the world; colored light and the stirring it produces helps our souls comprehend this. In other words, encountering Suger’s church can affect a soul’s transformation. Suger composed a poem for the seeker entering his church, which he had carved above his new West Porch:



Whoever thou art, if thou seekest to extol the glory of these doors,  
Marvel not at the gold and the expense, but at the craftsmanship of the work.  
Bright is the noble work; but, being nobly bright, the work  
Should brighten the minds, so that they may travel through  
the true lights  
To the True Light where Christ is the true door,  
In what manner it be inherent in this world the golden door  
defines:

The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material  
And, seeing this light, is resurrected from its former sub-  
mersion. (Strachan: 39)

Suger’s picture of Christ as the “true door” is an invitation to step inside and begin the journey toward the True Light, to encounter that truth for oneself. It is more than theol-



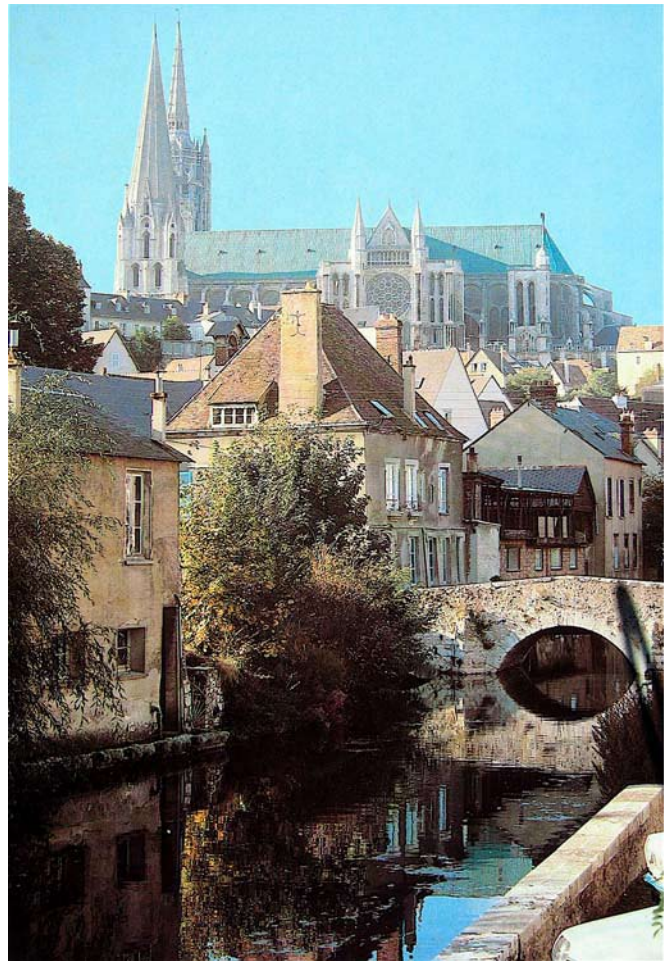
ogy; it is an invitation to initiation.

For Waldorf high school students, the journey toward truth is one they have traveled metaphorically (and hopefully inwardly) in reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* and von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Suger's poetic insistence that, "The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material," is familiar to students, both in the character of Dante traveling through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, and in the person of *Parzival*. These are stories of "dull" men, unknowing, who in their journeys of discovery become "slowly wise." They come, in other words, to "see the light."

There is a further explicit connection between Dante and Chartres, particularly the School of Chartres, where the Seven Liberal Arts were used as a graduated ascension of learning for the students there. The seven liberal arts as tools for higher knowledge were applied as early as ancient Egypt and Greece. At Chartres, they were the basis of instruction and, as such, were enshrined in the stonework of the cathedral. Above the right doorway of the Royal Portal (the church's main entrance) are sculptural representations of the seven liberal arts, which Querido contends are the very first sculptured examples of this group. (Querido: 72-72) The personification of each of the seven is in the sculptural form of a feminine embodiment of that art: Grammatica, Dialectica, Rhetorica, Musica, Arithmetica, Geometria, Astronomica. And then the historical figure who best embodied that art is depicted under "his" goddess: Donatus, Aristotle, Cicero, Pythagoras (for both Musica and Arithmetica), Euclid and Ptolemy. The question immediately begs asking: Why pagan goddesses and pagan "greats" on a Catholic cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary? They not only appear, but have a place of importance at Chartres because the seven liberal arts were the very foundation of the School of Chartres, its pedagogy and purpose. These steps, which students successively mastered and through which they attained mastery, were part of a journey of transformation. That transformation was ultimately linked to Christ and his mother – again, the birth of the students' higher, Christ-like selves – illustrated by the masons of Chartres by grouping the seven liberal arts above the portal where Mary holds the Christ child on her lap.

Though this connection – pagan and Christian – is surprising, it is not unique. In Volume III of the Karma lectures, Rudolf Steiner describes a vision of the Medieval poet Brunetto Latini, Dante's teacher and mentor, entailing the seven liberal arts:

"There appeared to him the Goddess Natura, there appeared the Elements, there appeared the Planets, there appeared the Goddesses of the seven Liberal Arts, and at length Ovid as his guide and teacher. Here once again there stood before a human soul the mighty vision that had stood before the souls of men so often in the first centuries of Christianity. Such was the vision of Brunetto Latini which was afterwards handed down to Dante and from which Dante's *Divina Com-*



media took its source." (Steiner: 92)

In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante travels with the Roman poet Virgil as his guide through the Christian worlds of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Pagan Virgil has been sent to Catholic Dante by the divine feminine in the persons of the Virgin Mary, Saint Lucy and finally, Dante's own beloved, Beatrice. Dante's passion for Beatrice is what ultimately leads him upward, to behold the threefoldness of God, wherein the poet is transformed: "already my desire and my will were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed by the Love that turns the sun and other stars." The connection between art and spiritual transformation is natural for Waldorf students encountering Chartres after having read Dante. They are not surprised to find pagan and Christian together, goddesses and the Virgin, arts and religion. It makes sense to them and, possibly, to their souls.

Dante's veneration of Beatrice is, of course, a late Medieval expression of that most interesting phenomenon of the Middle Ages, the cult of Courtly Love. And it is with this honoring of the feminine – earthly and divine – that we find another fascinating connection between the curriculum and Chartres, one perhaps best summarized by Henry Adams in his seminal work *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*, "There is nothing about Chartres that you would think mystical, who know your Lohengrin, Siegfried and Parsifal." (98) By this I

think Adams means that pursuit and honor of the feminine ideal was as a spiritual truth, not mystical but real, as amply expressed in the material structure of the masons of Chartres as it was in the imaginative world of epic poetry.

The ideal of Courtly Love, along with its rules, requirements and objectives, are attributed to the famous court of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Eleanor herself knew something of love, bearing ten children, eight in England and two daughters in France. Her French daughters were raised amid a court steeped in the culture of courtly love. Alix would become Countess of Chartres, where the divine feminine and the ideals of courtly love were natural compliments. Her older sister, Mary of Champagne, married Count Henry of Troyes. At Troyes, Mary sponsored works on the theme of love, most famously a *Conte du Graal* from the court poet Chretien de Troyes, called *Perceval*. This unfinished *Perceval* is the basis for Wolfram von Eschenbach's later epic *Parzival*, which Waldorf students read in the 11th grade.

Adams again underlines the connection between that great Medieval epic, *Perceval* (or *Parzival*) and that great Medieval monument, Notre Dame de Chartres:

“Christian wrote about *Perceval* in 1174 in the same spirit in which the workmen in glass [at Chartres], thirty years later, told the story of Charlemagne. One artist worked for Mary of Champagne; the others for Mary of Chartres, commonly known as the Virgin; but all did their work in good faith, with the first, fresh, easy instinct of color, light and line.” (Adams: 206-7)

Just as *Parzival* initially undertakes his quest under the influence of, then in service to, a beautiful lady, but finding God and fulfillment of his own destiny, so is entering the church of Chartres a kind of quest and journey. One enters perhaps – especially today – for beauty's sake, but in entering, a journey of transformation is begun. It is often noted that our world “grail” comes from “gradalis,” meaning “by degrees” and just as the seven liberal arts brought the students of Chartres through steps of graduated understanding, so the cathedral works on the soul of the pilgrim who journeys there.

That this journey is a quest is beautifully illustrated by Chartres' famous labyrinth, a great feminine circularity enfolded within the vast rectilinear nave. The labyrinth is both symbol and fact that one must journey to come to the center, and that though the way may turn back on itself, may twist and turn, become repetitive and tiresome, one cannot be lost if one perseveres (perseverance being quite like that French name *Perceval*). At Chartres, the quest's connection to the divine feminine is emphasized by the size and position of the labyrinth, which lies upon the nave floor beneath the church's famous rose window. If the wall of the rose window could be lowered to the ground from the top, pivoting at the ground with its base remaining in place, the window would lie precisely over the labyrinth of the nave. The rose window – exact size and dimension of the labyrinth below – is dedicated to the Queen of Chartres: Mary, the Rose Without Thorns.

The journey to the center of the self, which the labyrinth implies, is one undertaken by all Waldorf students where, not unlike the students of the School of Chartres, they travel from Grammatica to Astronomica, ascending a graduated course of study that will lead, grail-like, to the true self. Most beautifully, though the quest is singular to each student, they do not travel alone, but in a fellowship of classmates. Together, at each way station of the curriculum, they follow beauty upward to truth. Chartres is one of the beauties they encounter on that journey, one waiting, ready, in the twelfth grade to admit a group of fellow travelers well prepared to enter there.



## A Report on the Khandala Waldorf Education Seminar, May 2008

*Aban Bana, Mumbai, India*

The tenth Waldorf Education Teachers Training Seminar was held in Khandala, which is a hill station in the Sahyadri range, about 100 km from Mumbai, India. The venue has always been the D.C. boarding school where the accommodation is quite cheap and the food is very good, healthy and pure vegetarian. Mr. Basavaraj, the administrator of D.C.School, is aware of our needs and what we deem important, and cooperates accordingly.

This year there were sixty participants during the first week of our seminar, mainly Waldorf teachers from India, Nepal and two from Europe. The second week, which was specifically for teachers from mainstream and Waldorf-inspired schools as well



as from NGO's, had twenty-five more participants. Lecturers at the seminar were Peter Patterson, Geert de Vries, Helga Bay Mueller, Leonie Le Maistre and Aban Bana.

Subjects on offer at the Khandala seminar were the theory and practice of Waldorf Education right from kindergarten through to the upper school, as well as artistic and creative subjects like painting, black and white drawing, form drawing, geometry, singing, recorder and Indian flute music, games, speech and drama, as well as eurythmy. The day began at 7:30 am with morning circle and ended at 10 pm with presentations from the various schools and NGO's. Several of the seminar participants work in non-governmental organisations for the welfare of underprivileged or handicapped children.

This annual residential seminar, which started in May 1999, has been instrumental in bringing Waldorf education to hundreds of teachers in the Indian subcontinent. Not only have Waldorf teachers profited from the high quality of the subjects on offer, but many teachers from conventional schools have been inspired to take on a new approach to child education. Some of these teachers have started their own Waldorf inspired schools or have modified the curriculum of the mainstream schools in which they teach. Two years ago a group of teachers from Mumbai met at this seminar and decided to start classes for the underprivileged children in the suburb of Goregaon. This initiative now has over a hundred children and that number is steadily growing.

We are very grateful to all the teachers who have taught at Khandala, especially Geert de Vries and Chris Bennett, and to those who have financially supported the teachers, like Nana Goebel and Philip Martyn. Our seminar fees are quite low, as we would like all those who wish to attend.

For details about the Khandala Waldorf Education Seminar in May 2009, please contact Aban Bana: [abanbana123@rediffmail.com](mailto:abanbana123@rediffmail.com)

## Tashi Waldorf School -- 2008

*Rachel Amtzis, Kathmandu, Nepal*

Nepal became a republic on May 28, 2008 after constituent assembly elections were held in April. Since then many important events have taken place at Tashi Waldorf School.

The third term of the school year ended on January 9th. The occasion was marked with performances by the primary classes and a puppet show, "The Honest Woodcutter", by the kindergarten teachers, based on a Nepalese folk tale.

Losar, the Tibetan festival marking the new year, was celebrated on February 5th, the first day of Bumjur Dawa on the Tibetan



calendar. The Fire Pig Year has ended and the Year of the Earth Rat has begun.

The primary class students made khapse, sweet and crunchy fried biscuits traditionally eaten at this time. The Lhap So ceremony was performed to drive away evil spirits and negative energy.

Shiva Ratri, the Hindu festival celebrating Lord Shiva's annual reawakening and the thawing of the rivers at winter's end, was also observed. The children danced, sung and baked potatoes around a bonfire in the playground.

In mid-March, Class 3 made their annual visit to Chobhar Gorge, the mythic birthplace of the Kathmandu valley. They visited temples and

caves in the area, had a picnic lunch and sketched the scenic natural surroundings.

On March 20th, a day before the start of Holi, which celebrates the onset of spring, the students and teachers gathered in the playground.

Donning butterfly masks they had cut and painted, the children made a colorful moving ring around the Holi Fairy. Together they danced and sang "Come Bright Butterfly", "Ranga Ranga Milai" (Mix the Colors), and "Holi Aiyo" (Holi has arrived).

Earlier, the Holi Fairy had visited each classroom to give tika (a vermillion blessing) to each child.

The eighth school year concluded on March 28th, with musical and dramatic performances from every class.

Class 3 performed an action-packed drama adapted from a tale in the Ramayana: "Ram's Fourteen Years of Exile."

Right: Hari, as the demon king Ravana, abducts Sushma, playing Ram's beloved wife Sita.

Kripa's nursery group did a circle dance and sang "I Have Made a Pretty Nest" and others.

Class 2 students enacted the story Henny Penny, or Saani





Kukhuri ("little hen.")

The upper-kindergarten children presented a puppet show, Asal Saati ("Good Friends.")

Class 1's play, Sun ko Haas, told the story of The Golden Goose.

The kindergartens performed songs and dances, including "Mother Earth", "Raise Your Hands", and "King Winter is Now in the Land."

During the April holiday, the Class 3 graduates took a 'Bridge Course', taught by Nima Sherpa. The course was designed to ease the transition into mainstream curriculum schools.



Tashi Waldorf School's ninth year of operation began on April 28th, with 124 children enrolled.

There are currently 14 children in Kripa's nursery group, 15 in Kamala's kindergarten, 22 in Durga's kindergarten, 21 in Chandra's kindergarten, 22 in Aruna's class 1, 20 in Nirmala's class 2, 8 in Lobsang's class 3, and 2 in Dolma's special needs group.

New staff members have joined our community: Ms. Ganga Khanal began as a kindergarten assistant last November, and Mr. Bharat Nepali began as a part-time music teacher this May.

Shishir (cl 3), leads Suman (cl 1), to his new teacher, Ms. Aruna Rai.

The music curriculum now includes lessons on the Sarangi, a Himalayan instrument that resembles a fiddle. Sarangi translates to

"100 colors", indicating its stylistic adaptability and tonal flexibility. Class 3 are practicing the 8 notes: Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, and Sa.

Class 2 visited Namo Buddha on May 23rd. This temple is located near Dhulikhel, a hill town on the eastern rim of the Kathmandu valley. Pilgrims light candles and raise prayer flags at this site to commemorate Lord Buddha's great compassion for all creatures.

Buddha Jayanti was celebrated in mid-May. Butter lamps were lit and the Sanskrit prayer "Bhuddam Saravam Ghachami" was recited. 2008 marks the 2,571st birth anniversary of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, who became Buddha Shakyamuni. The festival also celebrates Lord Buddha's enlightenment and passing, which the students learn about during storytelling sessions.

### Teacher Training

Sue Simpson, eurythmist and former Waldorf school principal, visited TWS this past December for a school quality assessment and teacher-training. Sue gave workshops on eurythmy and morning circle activities. She also met with trustees, management committee members, and parents to discuss eurythmy, child development and its relationship to a Waldorf curriculum, the structure of a Waldorf School and how to better ease the transition between a Waldorf school and a mainstream school.

### Sponsorship at Tashi Waldorf School

A very hearty THANK YOU to our child and land sponsor community, and a big welcome to our newest members! We now have 92 sponsors. All of us at TWS are extremely grateful for your continued support.

For those sponsors whose children ended their enrollment after the conclusion of the 2007-08 school year we deeply appreciate your patience and understanding. We are trying hard to retain more students each year, and are still striving to add classes 4 and 5, so that the TWS primary school can be complete. We have found that parents are sometimes reluctant to continue their children's enrollment when the school doesn't yet cater to children who have graduated class 3. TWS hopes to add class 4 in spring 2009, and class 5 the following year.

Child sponsors should have received an annual progress report for their child or children in June or July. If the report hasn't arrived by August please let us know so we can resend it. As of this month there are 47 children, most of them new students, who need sponsors. Land sponsors are always needed so that TWS can successfully purchase the land it cur-





rently rents. Please contact us if you wish to sponsor a child or become a land sponsor.

The TWS faculty and staff would like to thank the many kind visitors who have helped keep the school stocked with Steiner educational materials, such as watercolor paint, colored beeswax, and block crayons, which are not available in Nepal. We also give thanks to our many generous donors and volunteers who have helped us keep the school operating for nine wonderful years, and we hope many more to come!

Special Thanks to Our Friends Around the World

## Journal for Waldorf /Rudolf Steiner Education

This bi-annual newsletter, jointly produced by the Pedagogical Sections of Australia, Hawai'i and New Zealand, focuses on news and scholarship dealing with education in the Pacific region, Asia and the world.

Each hardcopy issue is \$10 in Australia, NZ or USA, in the currency of that country (includes postage). Discounts of 10% are available for 10 copies or more. Back issues are also available. Next issue January 2009 (Journal 11.1).

Neil Carter: [waldorf@clear.net.nz](mailto:waldorf@clear.net.nz)



## Along the Silk Road: More than Ancient History

*Van James, Honolulu, Hawai'i*

A traveler doesn't know where he's going.  
A tourist doesn't know where he's coming from.  
—Paul Theroux

As a teaching artist and author of several books on art and archaeology, whenever I go somewhere to work I also make a point of visiting the cultural sites of that place. As long distance travel is called into question for both financial and ecological reasons it is increasingly important to meet and acknowledge the cultures we encounter on our travels. Living in a place (Hawai'i) that is far from everywhere makes this doubly important. Therefore, when recently in China for workshops and a training course, I extended my stay to travel with friend and founder of the Chengdu Waldorf School, Harry Wong, and his son Shi Ming. We planned to follow, in part, the ancient Silk Road, the trade route and corridor of influence that has connected East and West for millennia.

Esoteric tradition traces the great Sun Oracle migration of Manu-Noah, following the Atlantean catastrophe (end of last Ice Age), to this region, and from here the Seven Holy Rishis are said to have cultivated the earliest embodiment of the ancient Indian civilization. From three thousand BCE, following the incarnation of Lucifer (according to Rudolf Steiner) up to around four hundred CE the wisdom of the Light Bringer flowed through this corridor to the West, inspiring such cultures as the Greco-Roman. The rhythmic eastward and westward invasions of the Mongolian peoples also flowed through this part of present day China. Today the Silk Road region is mostly remembered as a pathway of commerce. No doubt this is because today we view business as the most essential aspect of our lives. Our cities no longer have religious centers as their tallest, most prominent features. Now the commercial office buildings scrape the sky and declare what is most dominant in our culture.

But there can be found in Sichuan (not far from the three-year Chengdu Teacher Training program that just completed its second year with eighty participants) concrete evidence of the flow of spiritual ideals that arrived in China via the ancient Silk Road, as one views the Leshan Giant Buddha. Now the largest stone Buddha in the world, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was carved out of a mountainside during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) when Silk Road travel and influence were at their peak. The 233-foot high Maitreya Buddha was constructed to calm the waters of the merging Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi Rivers. It faces Mount Emei, with its temples and sacred shines, another World Heritage Site. Apparently, when all the rock had been carved from the cliff face to reveal the great Buddha, and then dumped into the confluence of the rivers, it did calm the waters as intended.

However, the official culmination of the Silk Road is

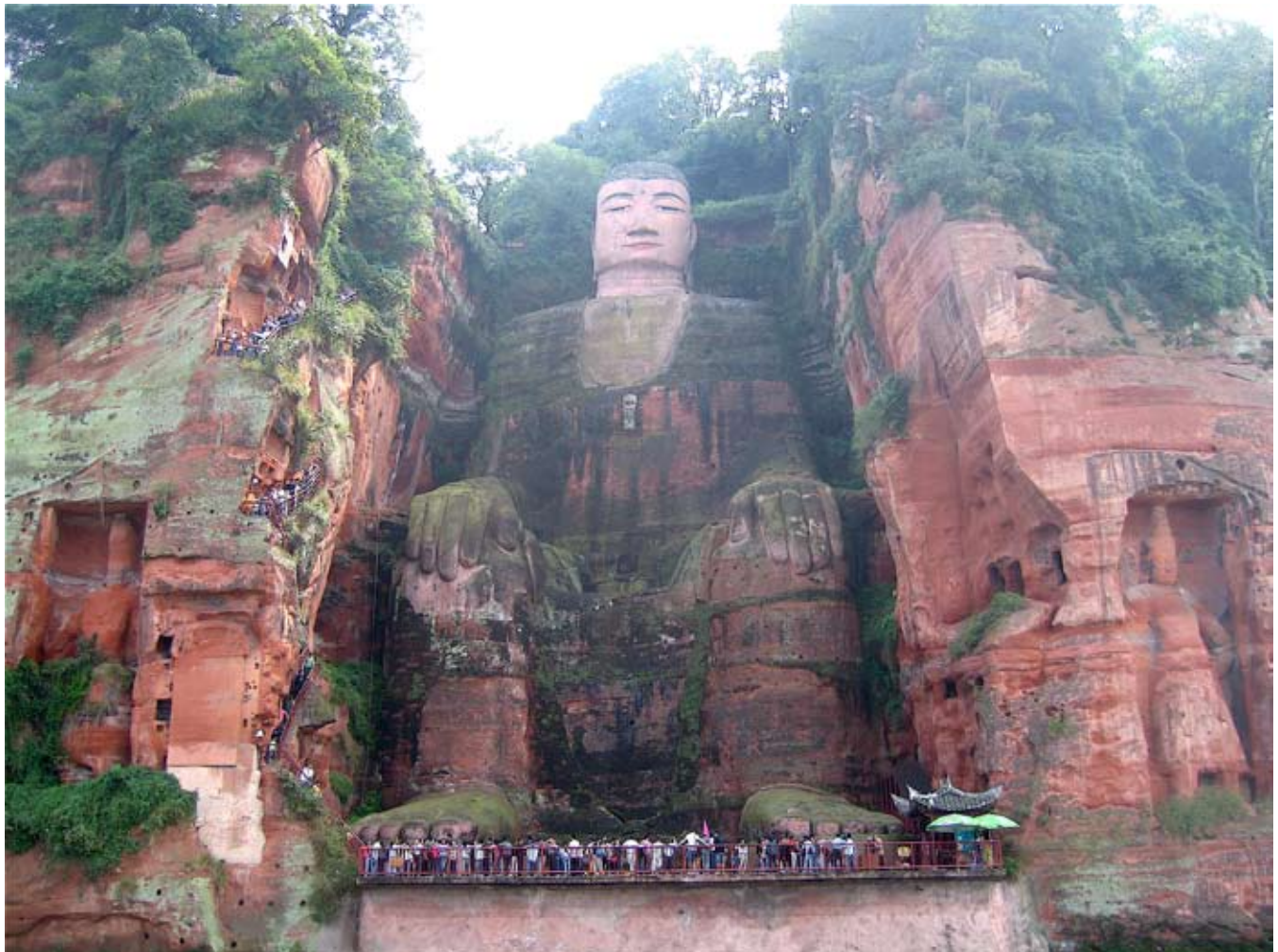
considered to be Xi'an, north of Sichuan. Known for its famous terracotta warriors of the Qin Dynasty, it was the ancient capital of China during much of the Silk Road's history (Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui and Tang dynasties). It was from Xi'an that the riches of the Silk Road, both spiritual and material, were gathered and distributed throughout eastern China or sent on their way across central Asia toward the Near East and on to Europe.

One of the cultural sights west of Xi'an, outside of Dunhuang in the central Chinese province of Gansu, is the Mogao Caves. Strategically located in an oasis along the Silk Road, this system of 492 man-made caves contains some of the finest examples of Buddhist art from a thousand year period beginning after the cave's construction in c. 366 CE. Another World Heritage Site, the caves are decorated with over 450,000 sq. ft. of colorful murals and they possess the second and third largest stone carved Buddhas. This artwork aided the meditation and visualization of monks who lived and worshipped in the caves, and served as teaching tools for pilgrims and travelers along the Silk Road as Buddhism spread amongst the Chinese. Although Buddhism also entered China through Tibet, its smoothest route was via the Silk Road together with the flow

of more material goods, such as silk, spices, and gemstones. Nestorian Christianity and Manicheism also found their ways into China by this route, as did Islam later.

The art of these caves is quite unique in its expressive desert style. Hundreds of years before Islamic art reached its high point, the Mogao painting style articulated a windswept, movement filled, linear language of form and gesture that is echoed in later Islamic calligraphic painting. The Flying Devi figures especially display this fiery flexibility as they maneuver their way across the walls and ceilings of the grottoes in this area renowned for its Flaming Mountains that burn red in the setting sun. As protectors of the Buddha, the Devi are unusual spiritual beings that clearly fly, but have no wings, only long flowing (silk?) garments that appear to function as wings. Coincidentally, this area is where scenes from *Crouching Lion, Hidden Dragon* were filmed; a movie that featured otherworldly, flying martial arts practitioners. The Flying Devi appear in cave after cave along the Silk Road.

The Mogao Caves, and their nearby neighbor the Thousand Buddha Caves, are part of a vast network of Buddhist grottoes that include Longmen, Yungang, Bezklik and other sacred art galleries housing exquisite religious paintings and



*Leshan Great Buddha, Sichuan, China.*





*Flying Devas decorate many of the cave walls at Mogao in Dunhuang.*

sculpture. One begins to see that the commercial aspect of the Silk Road trade, foremost in the history books, seems much less impressive in comparison with the cultural-spiritual oases that flourished parallel to this trade. As one travels further west from Dunhuang to Turfan (Xinjiang province, Uyghur Autonomous Region), across the barren landscape where camels used to carry their loads and have now become tourist attractions, one sees the continuing stream of commercial truck traffic and realizes this passage way through Asia is also where China's largest oil and mineral reserves lie. This region is extremely hot in summer and very cold in winter. It boasts the second lowest depression on earth after the Dead Sea and there are many salt lakes in the area. It is said to be the most distant place on the continent from any ocean, and I could feel a kinship to it, being from Hawai'i, the most distant group of islands from any continent.

In the area between Turfan and Urumqi (Wulumuqi), the capital of the Uyghur Autonomous Region, there are numerous ancient city ruins, such as Gaochang and Jiahe. These two sites, both built around the 1st century BCE and aban-

doned after the invasions of Genghis Khan in the 13th century, were stopping points for travelers on the Silk Road. The area is well beyond the reach of the westernmost ruins of the Great Wall, built to keep the Mongols out of eastern China, and its people have a very different look from the rest of the country. The population of 70% Uyghur (Turkic-Islamic roots) and only 25% Han Chinese would prefer some form of independence from Beijing, as the unrest in the area has clearly shown. This part of China borders on Mongolia and Russia to the north; Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Afganistan and Pakistan to the west; and India and Tibet to the south. It is lamb kabob and street bazaar country. Donkeys are still a viable form of transportation.

Many of these places along the Silk Road have been developed into lucrative tourist stops. The Mogao Caves entrance fee is priced so high that locals will not go and out-of-area



*The ancient city ruins of Gaochang are a part of the history of the Silk Road.*



Chinese complain. But there are still sites that remain off the tourist map. A petroglyph site called Kangjiashimenzi, dated to well before Buddhist influence in China, was not at all easy to track down and certainly no tourists were anywhere in the area. With scant information from a Chinese handbook and even fewer details from an obscure website, we set off with Danny, a Chinese-speaking Belgian ex-patriot—now area resident, into the foothills of the Tian Shan (where according to Taoist tradition, the goddess Hsi Wang Mu guards the “peaches of immortality,” at the center of the world), four-hours drive southwest of Urumqi. In this place that receives minimal annual rainfall we managed to catch a day of cold drizzle and muddy, very slippery mountain roads—no guard rails to prevent spectacular, plunging views into the gorges below. After enquiring with several peasant farmers and Uyghur goat herders who spoke little or no Chinese, we found a guide who could lead us to the prehistoric rock art. In the dense Atlantean-like mist we found a visible memory of indigenous Eurasian humanity. The slim, alien looking human figures accompanied by rams and tigers were like nothing in recorded Chinese history. It was well worth it—this journey to the center of the earth!

In traveling through this region of China one sees not only a place of the past, but also a place of great future potential—even with its forbidding landscape. The Silk Road has been rushed through by so many—including

Harry, Shi Ming, and me—that it hasn’t given up a fraction of its secrets. The Silk Road is just as much a mystery today as it was in Marco Polo’s time or a thousand years before him.

#### Afterword

Silk is a miraculous material! As a natural protein fiber spun by mulberry silkworms (*Bombyx mori*) it refracts light in a special way that shimmers. Because of its triangular prism-like structure, light dances off it in all directions to give it its unique sheen. Silk is also one of the strongest natural fibers. It is used for parachutes and was used in the early development of bulletproof vests. A pencil-thin cable length of silk can pull a 747 airplane. It is both beautiful and strong, much like the route it has lent its name to. More than half the world’s silk is still produced in China.



*Kangjiashimenzi Petroglyphs, China*





*Garden House School, Hong Kong, China*

## Garden House

In Clearwater Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

The Garden House joins sister school **Highgate House School**, The Peak, as a new Waldorf inspired international pre-school and playgroup in Hong Kong.

Contact: [info@gardenhouse](mailto:info@gardenhouse)

[www.gardenhouse.hk](http://www.gardenhouse.hk)

## UP-COMING

## Individual Evolution for World Evolution Personal Action, World Healing

*A conference sponsored by the Anthroposophical Society of Australia Mt Barker Waldorf School, South Australia  
January 22-26, 2009*

Today we live in earnest times which challenge our traditional knowledge of the world and our place in it. Natural global crises, social global complexity stand at our doors demanding our attention and our involvement. Our evolution as individuals has become a crucial element in the evolution of the world. We are called upon to understand the world and ourselves with as much as consciousness as we can muster and then act ethically out of that consciousness.

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## The Balancing Power of Education

*Dr. Philip Incao and Bonnie River*

The Hawai'i-Southern California Waldorf Teachers Conference

Haleakala Waldorf School, Kula, Maui

February 19-21, 2009

Contact: [info@waldorfmaui.com](mailto:info@waldorfmaui.com)

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# Encircling Light - Expectant Silence A Conference on the North

*August 1-8, 2009*

In the first decade of the 21st century, Canadians are re-awakening to their North and their Northern identity. With the melting of the polar ice cap, issues of sovereignty and resource extraction from a North becoming more accessible and vulnerable are also symptoms of underlying questions we need to address—questions that concern all human beings.

## **The significance of the North for the future of humanity**

That will be a primary theme and research question during this Conference week. What can the North make possible for us as evolving human beings? When one stands at the 60th parallel in Oslo and Whitehorse, under a sky that comes close to the earth, the reality of a spiritual world also draws closer. At the same time, a more intense experience of oneself as a human being becomes possible. When the trees shrink into an expanded landscape and the mountains stand back, the upright human being can stand forth and come to an enhanced consciousness of the possibilities and perils of being human. Is that consciousness under threat from current developments in Canada's north and in other northern countries?

During the Conference week, colleagues from Canada, Alaska, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, the First Nations of the Yukon and the Goetheanum will offer morning theme presentations, afternoon workshops, and evening events and artistic performances, opening many paths into the Conference themes. One evening event will be under the leadership of younger members and friends of the Anthroposophical Society.

## **Where is it?**

*Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada,*  
a city of some 23,000 people will be the site of the conference. Rooted in the history of the Klondike gold rush, Whitehorse today is a lively cultural centre that attracts people from around the world.

## **Who is involved?**

The conference is hosted by the Anthroposophical Society in Canada in collaboration with colleagues in Norway, Alaska, Denmark, Sweden and at the Goetheanum. The Anthroposophical Society in Canada has been at work since the summer of

2006 in securing venues in Whitehorse for the Conference, making human connections with those who will provide the services needed for the week, and planning the conference program with the many colleagues from around the North who have agreed to work with us.

## **Speakers:**

**Philip Thatcher**  
**Sergei Prokofieff**  
**Frøde Barkved**  
**Meta Williams**  
**Lisa Del Alba**  
**Mary Lee Plumb- Mentjes**  
**Monique Walsh**  
**Hannes Weigert**  
**Seija Zimmermann**

## **The Spirit Seeks Us**

There is an Inuit saying to the effect that the Spirits seek us out from time to time because they are in need of human warmth. That is the time for us to listen carefully to what they are saying and to what the expectant silence of the North is asking of those human beings who stand within its encircling light.

Contact: [www.encirclinglight.ca](http://www.encirclinglight.ca)

## **2010 Kolisko Conferences in Oceania**

*with Dr. Michaela Goeckler*

Tentative calendar dates:

Hawai'i, USA—February 14-19, 2010

Sydney, Australia—(to be announced)

New Zealand—July 13-17, 2010







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*Reclining Buddha, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, China*



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*"We see about us today a world of light; millions of years ago it was a moral world. We bear within us a moral world, which, millions of years hence, will be a world of light...And a great feeling of responsibility toward the world-to-be wells up in us, because our moral impulses will later become shining worlds."*

**--RUDOLF STEINER**