GARDENS

Daily Life as Spiritual Practice

with
Ven. Tenzin Palmo, subject of Cave in the Snow
September 13-15

Third Annual Kopan West Retreat
November 8-17

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INNER CITY HAVEN by Alison Murdoch

The garden at Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London has been transformed from a high-security yard and parking lot of a former courthouse to an inviting green space used by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama blessed the first tree on his visit to the center in 1999, it was a gloomy square of grey concrete bearing the wounds of razor wire and other symbols of conflict and distress. The following year the Sacred Land Trust chose Jamyang as one of four spiritual sites in the UK to receive funding for arts projects to mark the Millennium. Cathedral sculptor, Nick Duman, was commissioned to create a life-size Parinirvana statue of the Buddha in Bath limestone.

Two years later, the concrete floor-scape has been stripped back by volunteers to reveal the Victorian cobbles below, a popular vegetarian café opens its doors onto a wooden deck, and the Buddha presides over a spread of colourful plants, tables, chairs and sun umbrellas. A second tree was donated from the Amnesty International Peace Garden and hops, willow, jasmine and clematis, chosen for their astrological and healing properties as well as their beauty, are draping the courtyard walls with a curtain of green.

The long-term vision for this inner city oasis includes Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s suggestion of playing mantras on loudspeakers at key moments during the day, a fountain to make continual water offerings in front of the statue, and a remembrance wall where people can place stupas in memory of departed friends and family. Volunteers envisage public events about organic and “compassionate” gardening, more play facilities for children, and raising money to install a yurt for the winter.