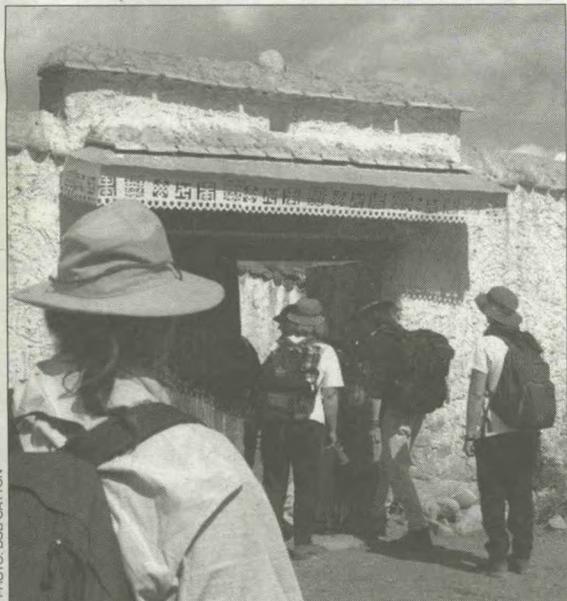


and they loved me, too. I even built a small cave and stayed inside, pretending to meditate.

"My family's shrine room was bigger than most American houses at that time. It was very old and many generations had collected the things in it. We had many statues, including a huge Maitreya Buddha, the five Dhyani buddhas, Tara, Vajrasattva, Avalokiteshvara. We made water offerings and lit at least one butter lamp every day. Once a month and on special occasions five monks would come to make puja all day long; and occasionally, they would read the *Prajnaparamita pecha*."

The Rakor nuns began taking Dondrub Dorje to their gompa, where he presided at ceremonies and slept in a little room beside the shrine room. He was always very happy there, despite the long rituals and being away from home for days at a time. Although recognized as the reincarnation of Ache Jampa, the boy was not given the usual title of rinpoche or tulku because the Gelug lineage only granted honorifics to male-to-male reincarnations. Female-to-male did not rate. In other traditions and at other times this has not always been the case.

By the time he was five, Dondrub Dorje wanted to live in a monastery. "Even though my family was harmonious, I thought family life was really garbage. They were happy in a way but worked so very hard, almost twenty-four hours a day. They prospered, but I was dissatisfied. I felt it wasn't right that everyone just work, work, work, eat, sleep, make *kaka*, and then work, work, work some more. I had an intuitive feeling that human life could be more meaningful. Deep



Pilgrims visit the home of Lama Yeshe's family.

inside I felt this kind of life was not right for me. As I was the first son, they wanted me to carry on the family business, but I continually tried to persuade them to change their minds. Finally they said I could go to the monastery."●

[Dondrub Dorje, later to be known as Lama Thubten Yeshe, studied at the great Sera Monastic University until 1959 when the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced him into exile in India. Lama Yeshe continued to study and meditate in India until 1967, when, with his chief disciple, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, he went to Nepal. Two years later he established Kopan Monastery, near Kathmandu, in order to teach Buddhism to Westerners.]



FAMILY LIFE

Parenting as a Path

BY PAM CAYTON

My children continue to remind me of all the growth I've yet to do and all the wisdom I've yet to gain. Throughout the days, months, and years they constantly offer immediate, uncensored reports on how I am progressing. They are my practice.

I soon became aware of imprints so deeply ingrained that the "sink or swim" dilemma of being a first-time parent presented a remarkable flood of natural responses. Having been a '60s teen, I had questioned many of the norms of society, and as a new parent I think it is safe to say I felt confused. Believing that each child is born with their own imprints and personality, I was convinced that I should allow the child to awaken and be his or her own being. The first major shock to my belief system was when my fourteen-month-old son suddenly demonstrated what appeared to be an imperfection. Selfishness raised its ugly head and roared through his tiny voice, "No! Mine!" Now what was I to do?

I pulled out some books and poured through the lists of developmental stages of children and was reminded of the fact that this stage was in fact very natural. Of course! What did I expect! The Dharma certainly states that attachment and anger sprouting from I-grasping ignorance is the root of samsara. The grasping to exist and the accompanying throwing karma propelled my child to take rebirth. Now how was I, on the one hand, going to accept this behavior as "natural" while on the other hand beginning to guide my child in behavior that was in line with my own values? I tried to educate myself and attempted to meet these challenges, at times methodically, but also spontaneously.

Children are masters at figuring out their parent's approach as well as the environment they inhabit. They are superb observers, and before they can even articulate their needs, they've figured out how to get what they want. However, if the needs of the child or parent are not met, both may find themselves erupting into outbursts and tantrums. Whenever I would fall into the trap of focusing on my needs, I would get frustrated and anger or resentment would arise. It became very clear to me that self-cherishing, thinking about my needs before others, was the root of my suffering. However, I remember Lama Yeshe saying, "Middle way, dear. Don't be too extreme one way or



Pam Cayton: "My children are my practice."

the other" and "Be gentle with yourself and you will be able to be gentle with others."

It became clear that my children needed to develop coping mechanisms to deal with life's many challenges. Children literally scream out for boundaries. Lama talked about "idiot compassion," and I too became aware of the literal meaning of "spoiled." I began to realize how important it is to help our children become more aware of the effect of their actions on themselves, others, and the environment. I remain in awe of the enormous responsibility we have as parents, to guide our children to actualize their greatest potential. At the same time, my children are very good at reminding me to practice what I preach, to walk the talk. In reality, they are training me.

I spend my days caught up in the illusion of reality. It is easy to get lost in it. Bedtime has been a precious time for reminding myself and my children of the true nature of our minds. I remember the lamas stressing the importance of the moments before sleep. Visualization and mantra became our bedtime ritual. When the children relax in bed, the stresses of the day bubble to the surface. It is a great time for them to process and also the prime time for them to let it go. After a brief discussion, we visualize their head resting on the lap of a deity of their choice. Our usual visualization is white light pouring down through the top of their head, filling their whole body, and then washing away all the uncomfortable and stressful thoughts. We discuss how problems only exist if we create them with our thoughts and hold them in our mind. We replace the stress with compassion and wisdom and fall asleep with a more positive, peaceful mind.

Parenting has been my primary practice. It has been an excellent training ground, and it continues to provide me with countless opportunities to apply the wisdom of my precious teachers.... the wisdom of the buddhas.●

Pam Cayton met the Dharma and her husband Karuna in Kopan in 1978. They studied and worked there for the next ten years before moving to Land of Medicine Buddha and, inspired by Universal Education, she founded Tara Redwood School. Pam, Karuna and their three children live in Santa Cruz, California.