

SOME 2024 COMMENTS ON THE ASIA MOVIE

HOW DID THE SEED OF THE TRIP TO ASIA GET PLANTED?

Deane: Because I was deaf in my left ear since the age of 3 due to a reaction to an antibiotic, I received a 4F (ineligible for service) from the draft board in the summer of 1968. I remember the recruiter saying, “I’m sorry to give you this news.” For me it was a relief. I had inchoate, not fully formed but negative feelings about the war. Would I have the courage to go to Canada to avoid serving? Now I didn’t have to make that choice, but I did have to decide how I wanted to live my life. I was a political science major, pre-law. Was that adversarial system the best path forward for me? I found a political science professor who listened to my quest for inner and outer peace and suggested I do an independent study, reading a book by Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*. This appealed to my desire to find some deeper meaning in life.

Deane and Johanna : While musing those questions, a few months later in December, 1968 a tall, intriguing woman came down the stairs while I was helping move my roommate’s girlfriend into a small apartment above a garage. She was a Berkeley hippie who had transferred to Stanford. Johanna and I had an amazing, magical connection during the first week of January 1969. But I had already decided I needed to leave the “womb” of Stanford and set out on my “Search.” That month I left on a spiritual quest to Israel (written about in Genesis [[Click here](#)]).

When I returned Johanna and I became inseparable, and a year later, in April, 1970 we were married. It was a “hippie” wedding, with recorder players of Renaissance music, and a service which stressed world peace and interfaith ecumenicalism.

Johanna: At 17, I was a freshman at Berkeley and probably spent as much time at various protests as in classrooms. I supported Free Speech rallies in Sproul Plaza and marched in anti-war demonstrations in San Francisco. At my parents’ urging I transferred to Stanford, known appropriately as the Farm because of its relative lack of engagement with the turmoil of the outside world. I focused on academics, studying history and literature and joining a group of students studying Blake’s poetry and art. I’d never thought about inner peace or Asia until I met Deane, but underneath a studious exterior I had a sense of adventure and I was very much in love. With a quarter to go before graduation, I left Stanford to fly to Japan (thanks to generous professors and independent study, I did graduate a year later 😊).

The cultural times. We were definitely a product of our times. Johanna had come from the “radical” Berkeley campus which contrasted with the more pastoral “Farm,” as bucolic Stanford was nicknamed. San Francisco had become a hotbed of the “hippie movement,” where young people had moved into the sprawling, inexpensive Victorian houses in the area around the University of San Francisco, earnestly seeking a new era of communal living, individual empowerment, and expanded consciousness.

In 1969, the country was deep into the controversial Vietnam War, a conflict that many young people vehemently opposed. It was also the era of the civil rights movement, a period of great unrest and protest. During this time, the famous Woodstock festival also occurred, an opportunity for people to escape into music and spread a message of unity, freedom and peace. One of the speakers there was Swami Swathikananda who said that America led the whole

world in developing material things, but the time had come for the country to be a world leader in the spiritual domain as well....”Let us not fight for peace, but let us find peace within ourselves first .”

Deane’s mom’s concerns. My mom asked me, “How did a nice Jewish boy from Kansas City who went to Stanford then was accepted to go to Harvard Law School end up going to Israel to find his Judeo-Christian roots? I guess I understand, but Israel versus Harvard?! And now you’re getting married and going to live in a Zen Monastery. Even my psychiatrist is confused!”

The trip “East.” Despite these concerns the words of the swami at Woodstock resonated with us. We decided we would take our “honeymoon” as a part of a spiritual searching in Asia. In my reading, I’d heard of an Ashram in India founded by Sri Aurobindo; and during the summer of 1969 when Johanna was working at an Upward Bound program at Occidental College as a counselor (and I was working as a swim instructor), my dad came to visit. Although he was bemused by our plans, he did introduce us to an Occidental professor he’d met who suggested that, on the way to India, we should consider visiting Daitoku-ji Monastery in Japan, where the teacher, Kabori Roshi, offered teaching and meditation for Western students.

Paying for the trip. We left with open-ended plans, and knew that finances would dictate how long we could be gone. We had saved some money from working as ad salespeople at the Stanford Daily (and Deane as a waiter, dishwasher at Tressider Union). We had about \$2500 dollars. It turned out that thirteen months later, we had only spend \$2100. We found some places (like Penang) where we could lodge for 30 cents a night. In fact, including all transportation, ships, accommodations we averaged only \$7.00 day for the entire period.

The movie ends where it does because we decided upon leaving Tokyo for the Kyoto Daitoji-ji monastery and then wherever this journey would lead us that we needed to travel as lightly as possible with just two backpacks. The movie camera did not fit. Further we wanted to experience, not observe and record.

ENDING COMMENTARY:

Ram Das once said that when you try to light a candle in your heart with meditation, the flame is new and weak. To still the mind it’s best the candle be lit in a quiet place (like a monastery); until you get “better” at it. Then you might take the candle out into the world to see how it handles more “breezy” conditions. Hmm, well, after visiting the Kamakura Buddha, we took our nascent meditation skills on the train back to Tokyo! Mingling with the crowds of people in the station left us dazed and confused. While some of the commuters seem to have retained an inner smile, most seem stoic at best, often overwhelmed, as if they had no choice but to endure day after day of this soulless, dehumanizing routine. We tried to remind ourselves that to feel calm and centered only when the environment around us is tranquil and pleasant is not real inner liberation. We tried to practice Siddhartha’s mantra: I can think I can wait I can fast,” but we wondered whether it was possible to maintain a centered self in society.

Arriving in Tokyo, we encountered the passion and conflict of the anti-war and anti-American bases protest! We were fascinated, empathetic, but completely overwhelmed. We wondered again how could we possibly fit into society, any society, especially when there was so much violence and conflict in the world, and still maintain our tranquility, our individuality. We wondered whether we should join the demonstrators; and long-term, what might be our unique talents and gifts that we could share to improve the lives of others. We aspired to make a

beautiful symphony of our lives, seamlessly interweaving the various “melodies” and “instruments” of societal commitment, social justice, individual creativity, inner peace and spiritual wisdom; but we worried the result would only be cacophony.

In this state of bewilderment and uncertainty, a friend we'd met guided us back to another monastery, where the monks taught us a simple prayer:

May all beings be happy, healthy and whole.

May they have love, warmth and affection.

May they be protected from harm and free from fear.

May they be alive, engaged and joyful.

Reciting this daily did not resolve all our questions, but it provided a first step on our path. Guardian statues stood guard outside the monastery, protecting the Buddha within. For us, they were a reminder to keep our inner temple safe, compassionate, and wise and to protect the metaphoric temples of our hearts.

We write this commentary in 2024, fifty four years after the movie was recorded. We are an old married couple, still in love, still trying to incorporate these lessons from Asia and keep the flame alive, working on stilling our minds, opening our hearts and bringing kindness and peace to ourselves, each other, our children and grandchildren, and the world around us.

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