

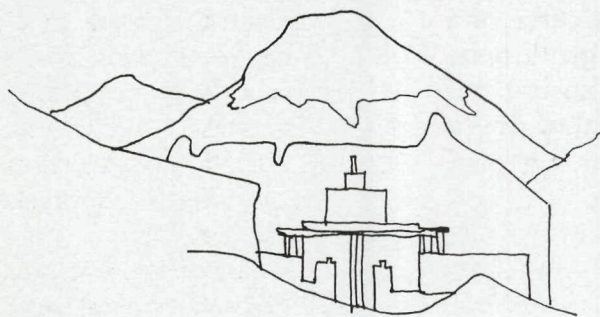
BOOK REVIEWS: HEALING IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

Deepak Chopra

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success
Amber-Allen Publishing. San
Rafael, Ca. 1994

Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields

Instructions To The Cook
Bell Tower. New York. 1996



The first time I heard that there was something called "the wisdom of the East," was when I saw the movie *Lost Horizon*, the one with Ronald Coleman. Of course I was fascinated that there were people with powers that could extend life to twice that of us ordinary mortals. Since I was about eight I did not give much thought to how long I would live,

but I remember thinking that they must be doing something right. Of course the characters who stumbled on to Shangri-La being from the west, were not content to stay. Their previous life styles, culture, needs, didn't allow for a life of contemplation on the scale required for them to adapt to an inner-oriented lamasery in the mountains of the Himalayas. "I reckon some folks have to get used to worst places" says one of the characters in James Hilton's book from which the movie was made.

It seems in the 1930's people were not yet ready to accept the "wisdom of the East." But that was before the "big war", the holocaust, Vietnam, the peace movement, the treks to "new age" thinking, and the commercializing of the "wisdom of the East" In the intervening years, we have

attempted to unravel the mysteries and adopt the wisdom of countless Shangri-La(s); East, West, North and South.

Thousands of books, videos and audio tapes, "learning centers" retreats, and the lecture circuits attest to our embracing the "outer" and making it the "inner." The trend has become a movement sometimes called "new age." That's it, just "new age," with its very own section in the large book store chains. Two of these books, *The Seven Spiritual Laws* and *Instructions to the Cook*, take very different approaches to helping us understand some of the things we need to learn and do, to gain the "hidden" wisdom, that will give us success and contentment: and if we wish, to become good cooks. Yes, healing can take place in the kitchen, and as we will see, on the computer as well. While Glassman uses cooking as a metaphor, it actually was one of the means through which its author gains self enlightenment and becomes successful; but cooking is also one way in which he helps the poor achieve their own success. It is an interesting story, and unlike *Lost Horizon*, is true.

The author, an American engineer turned Buddhist teacher, draws on the teaching of Dogen the founder of a thirteenth century Zen tradition. He writes of becoming a student of Zen, living

By Paul Abels
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and learning in a monastery. As a novice, through kitchen work and learning to cook, he is helped to understand and use cooking as a road to enlightenment. The importance of good ingredients, of the menu, or tasting, all are transformed into worldly lessons. The Zen cook knows one can't just jump into a new dish but must prepare the ingredients, and must make the best meal with the materials at hand. The cook must have a kitchen in which the right tools can be found quickly, clutter avoided. "Zen masters call a life that is lived fully and completely, with nothing held back, 'the supreme meal.' And a person who lives such a life—a person who knows how to plan, cook, appreciate, serve, and offer the supreme meal of life, is called a Zen cook." Glassman uses the cooking metaphor to aid us in our enlightenment.

While we are strengthened by the teachings, we are excited to see how Glassman uses his insights to serve and offer a meal of excellence and opportunity to others. Beginning with a bakery, he hires the needy of the community, he teaches them to be excellent bakers, using the finest ingredients. Soon he is serving the finest establishments, and goes on to establish the Greystone Foundation, a network of not-for-profit businesses in poverty areas. In addition to the bakery, there are three apartment buildings with living arrangements and social services for formerly homeless families. We have presented to us a "social-action Zen." We can honestly say that we are nourished by the cooking of Mr. Glassman, and the community benefits by the

banquet. We are served up a full plate; from a first course of individual, personal enlightenment, to mutual aid and community service. The book is like icing on the cake.

With over eleven books, numerous video tapes, cassettes and appearances on TV, no one can dispute that Deepak Chopra has achieved a phenomenal success. It is little wonder therefore that we eagerly reviewed his book, which promised on the cover, to be "a practical guide to the fulfillment of your dreams". This short book (110 little pages), which is based on an earlier, volume entitled *Creating Affluence: Wealth Consciousness in the Field of All Possibilities*, according to Chopra, could also have been called "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Life." The reason, "...these are the same principles that nature uses to create everything in material existence everything we can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch." Which of course raises my first question. Why then call it *the Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* which to my mind sounds a little more like Western wisdom, than Eastern? Creating affluence, and seeking success, do not exactly strike me as the spiritual path those in Shangri-La sought. All the more reason then, to delve into the seven laws.

Each spiritual law has its own chapter which both discusses the law and indicates how one can apply it in one's own life. While presenting each law and its application would violate a reviewer's obligation to reserve some surprises for the reader, selecting one law for illustration might indicate to the reader the depth of its con-

tent. Chopra's second law is "The Law of Giving" (the first is "The Law of Pure Potentiality.") This law says Chopra could also be called the "Law of Giving and Receiving," since as he points out, "the universe operates through dynamic exchange." He goes on to examine the word "affluence" which means "to flow to," and how money is "really a symbol of the life of energy we exchange..." We should not stop the flow of money as we would be stopping the flow of energy, we need to constantly exchange it. Relationships too, are give and take. "The more you give, the more you will receive." Chopra applies the law by; 1) bringing gifts wherever he goes, 2) gratefully receiving the gifts life has given him, and 3) making a commitment to keep wealth circulating by giving and receiving "life's most precious gifts of caring, affection, appreciation and love."

For me the book is what might be called a "mixed bag." Sections of the book which deal with other laws such as "Karma," or "Purpose in Life," were more satisfying. The idea of searching for affluence, success, and the fulfillment of my dreams appears on the surface so adverse to "eastern wisdom" that I must admit it influenced and perhaps negatively biased my appreciation of Chopra's writing, much of which is moving, truly spiritual and redeeming. A second reading, with a more open mind, helped. There is a vision to his work. At the book's conclusion he invites the readers to join the Global Network For Spiritual Success, by contacting him by mail, or e-mail. You will be informed about the

development of the network and sent a wallet sized card with the seven laws. Thus Chopra too, is involved in social action, a dream to mobilize the world so that they and you '...will achieve spiritual success and the fulfillment of your desires.' (Currently he has a page on the world wide web.)

In these two books East meets West, West seems to have won the high ground. Chopra's prose leads one to believe that the search for Eastern wisdom has been influenced by an interest in success and affluence, suggesting that the West is truly interested in spirituality, but on its own terms. Chef Glassman brings Eastern recipes to a hungry West, but refuses to permit his meals to be served in a "fast food restaurant."

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1. *Lost Horizon*. James Hilton. Pocket Books. NY. 1933.

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