

# DRAGON CAFÉ

*An East-West Collection*



Richard Marranta

## **DRAGON CAFE**

1st edition 2011; ebook

### **Text by**

Richard Marrantca

eISBN 978-616-222-065-4



**Published by**

**House**

**Internet:** [www.bangkokbooks.com](http://www.bangkokbooks.com)

**E-mail:** [info@bangkokbooks.com](mailto:info@bangkokbooks.com)

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**ABOUT THE BOOK & ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dragon Café brings together sparkling essays on Buddhism and world religion, health & diet, sacred love, creativity, myth and the hero, oracles and shamans, yoga, meditation, Kung Fu and Star Trek, vegetarianism, mysticism, and the East-West connection. It represents a lifetime of practice and travel, alongside study with yogis, monks, shamans, scholars and teachers of all stripe. It is about the search for adventure & peace.

Richard Marranca is a writer and teacher. He has a collection of interviews (New York Interviews) available through Bangkok Books, as well as a novel (Dragon Sutra) at another publisher. He has had a Fulbright to teach at the University of Munich, as well as five NEH/CCHA summer seminars in USA and abroad. He has traveled extensively in Europe, the Americas, Asia and, to a lesser extent in the Middle East. Along with a doctorate from New York University, he has certification to teach yoga and meditation, and holds Life Coach Certification from Fowler Wainwright International. He presently teaches college full-time in English and general humanities. He is available for presentations at: [Rmarranca@earthlink.net](mailto:Rmarranca@earthlink.net).

He enjoys running and hiking, movies and museums & general humanities. Since his teenage years, he has followed an environmental and vegetarian path and focused on the plight of indigenous peoples. On his to do list include working on an archaeology dig in Egypt or Greece, volunteering at Gombe Chimp Reserve in Tanzania and volunteering on an Indian reservation and teaching at a university in Asia, among others.

*“A growing familiarity with the spirit of the East should be taken merely as a sign that we are beginning to relate to the alien elements within ourselves.”*

from Carl Jung’s *Psyche and Symbol*

## THANK YOU...

A collection of essays qualifies as a collaborative effort among many people. I start by thanking my parents Angelo (passed away recently) and mother for their inspiration and assistance. To thank all my teachers would take up many pages, plus I wouldn't want to leave out anyone; so for now I'll just thank James Carse, Nick Lonero, Huston Smith, Ed Adler, Sonia Fishinger, Tim Renner, Allan Ashby, Jack Murphy (deceased). Thanks to Jean Alvarez and Victoria Larson for their encouragement in my research with myth and the ancient world; as well as teachers at Sivananda, Integral Yoga and Wat Mahathat, and Yvonne Christian at Bally (yoga). I wish to thank the early readers of my manuscript, including Claudia Arevalo, Bridget Briant, Carol Davis, Magrita Pfab, Guinevere Shaw, Mike Lee, Abraham Feria, Don Learish, Douglas Rosentrader, Emilio del Valle Escalante, Andy Pawelczak, Mark Tambone, Anna Jacus, Renah Del V. Dumilag, Denise Sadvary, Susan Gordon, Nancy Schofield and David and Fern of Viang Ping Spa in Chiang Mai

I'd wish to thank Sumalee Mahanarongchai of Thammasat University (Bangkok) for co-writing with me three essays on Buddhism; and Berndt Ostendorf for co-teaching a course -- Myth and Mythmaking in America -- at Amerika-Institut, University of Munich (essay included). I'd like to thank my many colleagues and students past and present for their insights & inspiration. Thanks to Sunaree Potipan for insights into Southeast Asia and Buddhism. I'd like to thank National Endowment for the Humanities & Community College Humanities Association and David Berry, George Scheper, Laraine Fletcher, Martha Holder and Sterling Delano, who made it possible for me to attend Andean Worlds 2005 and Concord 2009 (pertaining to my oracle and Emerson

essays). Thanks to Ed Naugin for Chinese Kenpo training and thanks to Jaratsaeng Chana for insights into Thai culture. Thanks to Fulbright for making the terrific teaching, writing and travel opportunity possible during my year at the University of Munich.

And thanks to George and the others at Bangkok Books for publishing and making this collection, Dragon Café, and New York Interviews available.

*Sacred Ecology from the East* (under a similar title) has appeared in Light of Consciousness Magazine and Community College Humanities Review; *The Balance of Compassion* has appeared in Lalitamba Magazine; *Castles in the Sand: The Creative Urge* (under a different title) has appeared in Community College Humanities Review; *Locating the Invisible: Pachacamac and a Shaman's Visit* has appeared in the Community College Humanities Review; *Gatsby Sutra* has appeared in the Association for the Study of Ethical Behavior in Literature's Journal (ASEBL); *My Fulbright Year in Germany* has appeared in the Community College Humanities Newsletter and a local newspaper; *Healthy Asia* (under a different title) has appeared in Light of Consciousness Magazine; *Compassionate and Natural* has appeared in Light of Consciousness Magazine; *Veg TV: Kung Fu and Star Trek* has appeared in Vegetarian Journal; *Animal Iconographies* has appeared in Lalitamba Magazine; and *Buddhism and Vegetarianism* has appeared in Thammasat Review (Thammasat University, Bangkok)

**Profits** from this collection will be distributed among a few organizations on my usual list: Tiger Temple in Thailand; Elephant Sanctuary (run by Lek, near Chiang Mai, Thailand); World Vision, Luang Prabang, Laos; Sea Shepherd (worldwide); PETA; Farm Sanctuary; Nature Conservancy, and others.

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## SACRED ECOLOGY OF THE EAST

*The sacred earth* is a fundamental belief in the wisdom traditions, indigenous peoples, mystics and just about anyone who believes in beauty and wholeness. It used to be that way in the West, and hopefully we are returning to this sense of the sacred and interdependence. In fact, the West has had a dual tendency: it has pushed destructive innovation and technology, but it has also fostered the environmental movement, democracy and other modes of progress. Now we need progress without the destruction. Is this too utopian? Do we have a choice? Much of the problem is not of philosophy but of overpopulation, which brings about extinctions and pushes the ecosystems toward the brink.

No matter where on the globe, each day humans launch all kinds of machinery into nature, destroying sentient beings and whole ecosystems, endangering the web of life: well, that's the theme of the movie *Avatar*. The array of intertwining catastrophes begins with pesticide seepage into ground water and rises to the looming disaster of global warming—in between there are deforestation, desertification, garbage mountains, and so forth. We are at the point where we need “mindful” technology and vast changes in human consciousness and consumption. Without this our economic systems, science and society in general have made a Faustian bargain, a bargain with the devil, so to speak. What's called for is a post-humanistic or earth-centered approach, one of utter compassion.

Can spiritual concepts encourage earth stewardship, even a re-sacralization of the earth? And what are these concepts? To find some answers, let's look at the great tree of life that the Eastern wisdom traditions offer those in search of fruit and not lumber.

## *Hinduism and the Sacredness of All Life*

Hinduism celebrates the sacred planet. Indeed, *all* life is sacred. Animals are sacred, most especially the cow, and the *Rig Veda* forbids the killing of cows. In the *Vedas* many passages call for compassion toward all animals. In India, rivers are sacred. The Ganges, one of India's sacred rivers, is a goddess to numberless Hindus. Though it has a long history of veneration, it is, like most of India's rivers, dangerously polluted. Veer Bhadra Mishra, a Brahmin and scientist residing in Benares, says that science and religion have to mesh if the Ganges is to be saved. He maintains that a Western approach, one based on fear of ecological disaster, will not succeed with the majority of people, that it is better to emphasize that the river is their mother. After all, each morning as the sun rises millions of people, as they have for millennia, bathe and offer worship in the Ganges.

In reaction to deforestation, its attendant floods and crippling of local economies, the Chipko (tree hugging) movement began in towns and villages in Uttar Pradesh. The people realized that too many trees had been felled or tapped to exhaustion, and they put a stop to it, an amazing revolution against destruction. The local people realized that the government was serving its own interests and those of a small number of rapacious contractors. Yet, the forests had served villagers' needs (for food, fuel, safety) for millennia. Moreover, deforestation causes killing floods.

So villagers and townspeople put sacred threads around trees and also put plaster on the huge gashes cut into trees to secure their resin. In fact, local people did everything they could to stop the devastation. This was not just for self-preservation: the movement was imbued with spiritual significance. In India, forests are sacred and there are many stories about Krishna summoning the gopis (his milkmaid devotees) to the forest with the magical sound of

his flute. *The Ramayana* is especially rich with the episodes in the forest. It is often in the forest where holy men and women find enlightenment. In fact, with their lists and descriptions of plants and animals, both *the Ramayana* and India's other great epic, *Mahabharata*, offer a natural history of India. Animal tales offer wisdom through playful narratives of forest life. Such a unitary sense of self and cosmos is central to yoga as well.

### *The Tree of Yoga*

Yoga, an integrated spiritual approach to life, emerged thousands of years ago in the Indus Valley. Archaeologists have discovered figures in the lotus position dating back at least 4,500 years. Although yoga is often seen in the west as a posture-oriented (asana) health-promoting program, it is much more than that, for its prime objective is to foster union with the Divine. In fact, the word *yoga* means not only union of our physical and spiritual aspects, but union of the individual soul, *Atman*, with the ultimate reality, the ground of being—*Brahman*.

Yoga, as well as other mystical mind-body systems, demonstrates that nature and spirit are one, that it is a risk to ourselves and nature to separate them. Yoga, in fact, opens our eyes, all our senses, to the world; in feeling peaceful, we make peace with the world. According to the sage Patanjali, who compiled *The Yoga Sutras*, yoga has eight limbs: restraint, observance, postures (or asanas), breathing (pranayama), sense withdrawal, concentration, meditation and spiritual absorption (enlightenment). Holistically practiced, yoga encourages us to be in harmony with ourselves and with the world.

The first of the yoga restraints is ahimsa, or peace toward all life. Here lies the realization that humans rock back and forth between extremes of behavior, often destructive behavior. "This