

Juniper

A Second Renaissance

Would it be too presumptuous to describe the dissonance between science and religious tradition as the challenge of our age? Books rallying against religious dogma top the best-seller lists; classic Western religions wrestle with the findings of science and modern thought; and politically and in the courts the battles over gay rights, school prayer, science curriculum, sex education, and stem cell research rage louder than ever.

A friend with no previous background or interest in Buddhist thought reported that when he started sharing with others his interest in Juniper's work he repeatedly found a wellspring of interest in Buddhist ideas. He said it was as if these people had been on a secret exploration of Buddhist thought and meditation. Why is this, and what is the relationship between Buddhist ideas and this modern dissonance?

Juniper's answer is that Buddhist training contains within it the seeds to resolve the dissonance between science and religious dogma. With its focus on inquiry, the mind, and inner development, Buddhist training permits us to have a rich inner life without having to accept ideas that have not stood the test of time. Buddhist tradition is not free of dogma; in many instances, it has similar trappings of classic religious traditions. The difference is that Buddhist tradition makes use of inquiry, reason, and critical thought to examine the nature of things. Its own principles give us the tools to free ourselves from old dogmas and to resolve the challenges of our time with inquiry, wisdom, and compassion. By applying this process of inquiry, we can dissect the essence of Buddhist methods of inner development and embed it in a modern wrapper.

The utility of Buddhist ideas for providing a rich inner life in a way that is consistent with modern knowledge is one of the driving forces behind Juniper's work. It also, perhaps, is why biologist Francisco Varela wrote in *Ethical Know-How*, "The rediscovery of Asian philosophy, particularly of the Buddhist tradition, is a second renaissance in the cultural history of the West."^{*}

^{*} Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How* (Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 22.