



A new vision of peacemaking

On September 12, 2001, the Naropa faculty gathered to ask itself: what distinctive contribution can Naropa University offer to our students—and to the world—in light of the devastating events of the previous day? The answer they came to was to develop a new major in Peace Studies, the lecture series of which is described elsewhere in this issue. Here I'd like to reflect on the larger context of this initiative, for it captures something essential about the nature of this special place.


This past fall it was my privilege to attend the inauguration of the new Harvard president, Drew Gilpin Faust. By custom, presidential inaugural ceremonies begin with a procession of regalia-clad presidents from other universities, marching in the order of the date on which their universities were founded. There were more than two hundred presidents in the procession, and it was led, naturally, by Oxford and Cambridge, founded in the twelfth century. Representing Naropa University, founded in 1974, I found myself six places from the end. My back-row perch offered a splendid perspective from which to reflect on the events at hand.

I had walked to the ceremony by way of Memorial Hall, a cavernous Victorian era structure built to honor the Harvard graduates who had died in the Civil War—on both sides, north and south. Etched on the walls are the names of those who died, along with the battle where they fell—Shiloh, Manassas, Antietam, Bull Run—names that hover over American history. It is a powerful, contemplative place. The inauguration itself took place in the heart of Harvard Yard, framed on one side by the imposing Widener Library with its millions of books, and on the other by Memorial Church, a classic New England church with a soaring white spire. Memorial Church, too, was built to honor Harvard's war dead, starting with the desire to commemorate those who had died in what was then called "The Great War," World War I. Again it honors those who fell on both sides, Axis and Allies, and their names, too, are etched on the walls, one by one. As the practice of modern warfare expanded, so, too, did the need to expand the list of those whom Harvard memorialized—and so names were added, first for World War II, then for Korea, and for Vietnam—so that now Memorial Church honors the memory of more than 1,100 Harvard alumni/ae.

What a tragedy, I thought, looking out over the nine centuries of learning, stretching back to Oxford and Cambridge, symbolized, on the one hand, by the knowledge stored in Widener Library and, on the other, by Memorial Church. What a tragedy that we have not managed to get peacemaking woven into the very fabric of our educational heritage. What a tragedy that we have not yet managed to focus the unparalleled resources of American higher education on the kind of self-knowledge that moves students in the direction of peace within, so that they might then become agents of peace without, agents of peace in the world.

And then I smiled. I smiled because I realized that it was my great privilege, seated six places from the end of this nine-hundred-year heritage, to sit at a turning point in American higher education. It is a privilege shared by all of us who work at Naropa University, brilliantly conceived three decades ago to bring together the best of East and West in a new vision of learning, of living—and of peacemaking. Just as we can now look back and see turning points in the Western educational heritage in the Enlightenment or the Scientific Revolution, so, too, will our educational descendents be able to look back and see our work at Naropa as a harbinger of things to come in education.

As the Dalai Lama has said, reflecting on the growing convergence between what we know through neuroscience and through the practice of meditation, we are about the business of creating a new kind of human being, more benign and compassionate, more peaceful. Surely there is no greater need in today's world.


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