This is the first television series to explore the American encounter with Buddhism—with all of its rich and diverse traditions, challenges, and contradictions.
The core focus of Buddhism is universal: an end to suffering.

These are tumultuous and challenging times on every front, with an urgent need for change and solutions for both individuals and society.

For the past fifty years there has been an unprecedented flowering of Buddhist traditions in this country in two interwoven streams: Asian immigrants and motivated Americans—moving from exoticism to Mindfulness, and from the margins to the mainstream. Buddhist teachings speak to the concerns of a very distracted contemporary culture. At the same time, these traditions continue to evolve dynamically, directly addressing the most pressing issues of our day: care for the planet and all living things—care for others.

Buddhist ideas, practices and teachings comprise the fastest growing spiritual tradition in America. This 2500 year-old philosophy has been called a “science of mind” and its hallmarks of wisdom and compassion have been at the heart of America’s literary and intellectual spirit since the early days of the nation.

This wisdom tradition that now inspires and informs many of America’s leading technologists, environmentalists, psychologists, educators, artists, and even some members of Congress, will be explored for the first time in a major national television series.

You can be an important part of this historic project.
IN THE BEGINNING…

From nearly the very start of the American experiment, Buddhist currents already flowed in the heart of the most revered literary and political establishment…

It was 1844. Just before he abandoned a vibrant life in the cosmopolitan nineteenth century New England world of ideas and letters for his famous adventure in contemplation at Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau published the first English translation of an authentic Buddhist text—an excerpt from the Lotus Sūtra—in the Dial, a magazine started by the eminent scholar and author Ralph Waldo Emerson. The translation was by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, one of the leading female intellectuals of the day.

AND TODAY

Over a century and a half later we can ask:

- What’s a Zen master doing at Google?
- How is meditation good medicine?
- Who jump-started the revival of Buddhism in Asia?
- Who’s meditating in Congress?
- How has Zen helped make NBA champions?
- What are Tibetan monks doing in MRI labs?
- Which popular television cartoon characters know their Buddhism?
- How are war veterans healing their hidden wounds?
- Where did the mindfulness movement come from?
- Can meditation make a difference for children?

THE SERIES

This panoramic film series will journalistically explore key issues through the powerful personal stories of our participants and by examining important events, major books, and artistic expression through the years.

We witness remarkable teachings and gatherings at several of the most important Buddhist centers in America, some never before seen on television. Our journey with leading teachers, artists and critics in the arena today, and share compelling stories of awakening, transformation, and compassion. There’s humor as well…

HISTORIC FIGURES

Key roles have been played by men and women, both famous and overlooked including: INITIATORS and FACILITATORS:

Emerson, Thoreau, Elizabeth Peabody, Mary Farkas, Edwin Arnold, Henry Cabot Lodge, Ernest and Mary Fenollosa, Paul Carus, Henry Steele Olcott, Isabella Gardner, Gene Smith, Erich Fromm, Georgia O’Keefe, Mark Rothko, and others…

And PRACTITIONERS and TEACHERS:


"Thoreau…forecast an American Buddhism by the nature of his contemplation…he was perhaps the first American to explore the nontheistic mode of contemplation which is the distinguishing mark of Buddhism."

– RICK FIELDS, HOW THE SWANS CAME TO THE LAKE
The stories of a wide range of participants will be examined, including

**TEACHERS:**

Jack Kornfield, Thich Nhat Hanh, Joan Halifax, the Dalai Lama, Michael Stone, Sharon Salzberg, Tetsugen Glassman, Heng Sure, Ajahn Amaro, Gelek Rinpoche, Tenzin Wangyal, Wendy Nakao, Stephen Batchelor, Yvonne Rand, Bhante Gunaratana, Khyentse Norbu, Anam Thubten, Robert Thurman, Angel Kyodo Williams, Noah Levine, Richard Baker, Jan Willis, and others…

And **CREATIVE CULTURE BEARERS**—writers, film personalities, musicians, sports professionals, and artists—including:


And even members of Congress:

Rep. Tim Ryan and Sen. Mazie Hirono

**QUESTIONS EXPLORERED**

• What’s the attraction? What do Buddhists believe/practice?
• Is this religion? philosophy? psychology? aesthetic? lifestyle?
• What do Buddhist traditions offer now in the face of world conflicts and challenges?
• Who were the key men and women in American Buddhism over the years? Who are they today?
• What has been the place of Buddhism in American culture?
• What has been the experience and role of women in Buddhism here?
• What about race? class? Immigrant/convert issues?
• How do neuroscience, psychedelics, sex and power, care for the dying, prison outreach, modern art, music, literature, media, psychology, climate change, and the web converge with Buddhist traditions here?
• How have Buddhist literary, music, and art contributors influenced the American experience?
• What effect, if any, is all this activity here having on Buddhism around the world? Has our egalitarian/individualistic ethos affected Buddhist cultures elsewhere?

There is Buddhism in America; is there an American Buddhism?
Several foundations have generously made initial grants to support research and writing for the current crucial development phase.

But many of the key participants are in their 80s, and we must move ahead immediately with filming interviews. Your contribution now will enable us to start filming and will make a difference in getting this historic story told in a timely way.

Please join us in this very important project.

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**PERSONAL STATEMENT**: The late Rick Fields compellingly told the story of Buddhism in America in his book *How the Swans Came to the Lake*—A Narrative History of Buddhism in America. We spoke frequently about making a parallel film, but were overtaken by his illness and untimely death.

Since then I’ve spent over a dozen years building the nonprofit Buddhist Film Foundation and its International Buddhist Film Festival as the leading platform for the presentation of Buddhist cinema for general audiences. I’ve seen nearly every film produced in the arena and we have presented over 300 of the best in ten cities around the world. Yet not one film has told the full story of Buddhism here as well as Rick had chronicled it.

For a variety of reasons, this is finally the perfect moment to make this series: for one, there is clearly a significant audience for the story, far beyond what was available when the last edition was published over twenty years ago. For another, there’s the urgency of the advanced age of several key people in the story, pioneers now in their 80s.

I’m especially motivated by the fact that these are extremely challenging times, and the Buddhist traditions offer many tools, ideas, perspectives, and inspiration to anyone seeking a sane and meaningful contemporary life.
“The seventh century Chinese monk Xuanzang walked across deserts and mountains all the way to India, spent ten years learning Sanskrit and collecting Buddhist texts, then made his way home to translate everything into Chinese. Today, a student of Buddhism can find what she needs right here in the USA, perhaps taught by an American-born teacher, with texts, practices and temples possibly right in her neighborhood. And even more, almost all the teachings from every Buddhist tradition are found on the internet, in fifty languages including English. This is a new era for Buddhism, for America, for the West.”

— JACK KORNFIELD

CONSULTING PRODUCERS

Lyn Goldfarb is an Academy-Award nominated filmmaker, specializing in historical and social issue documentaries, with 16 feature documentaries broadcast nationally on PBS and major cable. Her award winning, national prime time television credits include: The New Los Angeles, California and the American Dream; Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire, The Roman Empire in the First Century; The Great War, The Great Depression, People in Motion, Danger: Kids at Work, With Babies and Banners, and A Taste of Freedom.

Jed Riffe is an award-winning independent filmmaker and new media producer, best known as producer/director of the milestone documentary The Last Yahi, the true story of the man known as the Last Yahi. With Lyn Goldfarb and Paul Espinosa, he produced California and the American Dream, a four-part nationally broadcast PBS Series. Other documentaries he’s produced and directed include Waiting to Inhale: Marijuana, Medicine and the Law; Who Owns the Past?; and Roots of Beauty.

Rick Tejada-Flores is an award-winning documentary filmmaker with over 30 years experience in the industry. His works have appeared on PBS on American Masters, Independent Lens, and as stand-alone specials, and broadcast by the Sundance Channel, History en Español, YLE Finland, Channel Four (UK). Among his credits are Si Se Puede!; Lou ‘N’ Sow; the Art of Lowridering; Rivera In America; Elisa, the Fight for Land and Liberty; Jasper Johns, Ideas in Paint; The Fight in the Fields, Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Struggle; The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It; Race is the Place; American Encounters; Caminante; and Orozco: Man of Fire.

PARTICIPATING SCHOLARS (partial list)

Jacquelynn Baas BERKELEY ART MUSEUM Founding director of the Hood Museum of Art and retired director emeritus of the Berkeley Art Museum, she is the author/co-author of several books, including Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art and Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today.

Robert Buswell UCLA Distinguished Professor of Buddhist Studies and founding director of the Center for Buddhist Studies, he is the author/co-author of The Zen Monastic Experience, The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, Cultivating Original Enlightenment.

Janet Gyatso HARVARD The Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies, she is the author of several books, including Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary; In The Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism; and Women of Tibet.

Paul G. Hackett COLUMBIA He serves as the Chair of the Tibetan Information Technology Panel of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, and is the author of several books and papers, most notably Theos Bernard, The White Lama; Tibet, Yoga and the American Religious Life.

Donald Lopez MICHIGAN Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, he is author/co-author of many books including From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha, Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed, Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West, The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, and The Story of Buddhism.

Robert Sharf BERKELEY The D.H. Chen Distinguished Professor of Buddhist Studies and Chair of the Center for Buddhist Studies, he is the author of Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism and the forthcoming Thinking About Not Thinking: Buddhist Struggles with Mindfulness, Insentience and Nirvana.

Thomas Tweed NOTRE DAME Holds the Harold and Martha Welch Endowed Chair in American Studies and has a concurrent appointment in History; author of The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912: Victorian Culture; has served as the president of the American Society for the Study of Religion, currently president of the American Academy of Religion.

Duncan Ryuken Williams USC Chair of the School of Religion and Co-Director of the USC Center for Japanese Religions and Culture, he is the author of The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Soto Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan and the forthcoming Camp Dharma: Buddhism and the Japanese-American Incarceration During WWII; co-editor of several volumes including Issei Buddhism in the Americas, American Buddhism, and Buddhism and Ecology.

Jan Willis WESLEYAN Professor of Religion and author of Dreaming Me: An African American Woman’s Spiritual Journey, The Diamond Light: An Introduction to Tibetan Buddhist Meditation, and Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet.

Though there have been numerous series about Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and even one on Mormons, there’s never been an exploration of the American encounter with Buddhism.
Buddhist Film Foundation, Inc. (BFF) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization based in Berkeley, CA. Founded in 2000, BFF is the world’s leading resource for Buddhist cinema, presenting its International Buddhist Film Festivals (in twelve cities on three continents to date), distributing films through its Festival Media service, and organizing the Buddhist Film Archive at UC Berkeley with the Center for Buddhist Studies there. BFF is currently fiscal sponsor to over a dozen film projects in various stages of production.

**THE MEDIA INITIATIVE**

This film series is the core of a comprehensive film/book/web media initiative. Rights to Rick Fields’ book *How the Swans Came to the Lake—A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Shambhala/Random House) have been secured. Now being revised for a fourth edition, this groundbreaking classic is the primary general audience reference on the subject today. Timed with the film’s release, a photographic companion book will be published, and an immersive, interactive online platform will be launched. Study guides for high school and college classroom use will be part of an educational outreach program, with targeted efforts with Asian American and African American communities.