

## POPPING THE BUBBLE

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Right next to my home is the Heart Center, a large and comfortable house with many rooms. It has been in existence since 1972 and was originally created as a communion center, a place to share time and ideas with one another. It is as close as we could get to having a commune.

Over the years the Heart Center has been at times filled with all manner of people, some just visiting for the day or the weekend, others for a year or two, and even one who just appeared one day and stayed four years. My kids grew up with all kinds of different (they might say weird) people living next door. And for many years we also shared meals communally.

I can remember once we had living there (all at the same time) a swami, a Sanskrit scholar, the head of the Hari Krishna astrologers, a man who wrote some of the lunar equations for JPL, and often other folks who were just visiting. There originally were seven bedrooms, but in recent years I have commandeered a couple of them for other purposes.

One person who lived there for a year or more was the legendary astrologer Gary Duncan, one of the first astrologers to work with computers and the man mentioned above who is credited as contributing to the lunar equations for JPL, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Duncan was no-doubt a genius of some kind but being a genius does not mean everything you do partakes of a brilliant quality. In many ways Gary Duncan was very ordinary. For example, he had about zero patience and this little story illustrates how easily we can get carried away.

The Heart Center had two bathrooms and, as you might imagine, in the morning they were much in demand. At the time we had a very nice Tibetan monk visiting us. Now this monk not only got up earlier than anyone else, but he also got into the bathroom first, even before Gary Duncan.

Gary lived on a strict schedule and that included his being first into the bathroom. However on that day, when he went to enter the bathroom, it was occupied by this monk, who had (not knowing our custom of locking bathroom doors) had even left the bathroom door slightly ajar. Gary was nonplussed when he found someone else in the bathroom and by the fact that he was now thrown off his schedule.

Duncan stood outside the bathroom door wearing his bathrobe, toothbrush in his hand. Perhaps (I doubt it) he was at first patient, but after a minute or two he was definitely pacing back and forth in front of the door. And pretty soon he became even more agitated and began to go up to the door and call out. There was no response from the monk.

As the minutes went by Gary Duncan became more and more agitated, now calling out louder and louder until he had worked himself into some kind of rage. He did this all on his own. There was never any response from the monk. Gary ended up literally pounding on the door of the bathroom with all of his might, completely beside himself, until his fists actually forced the door open. And the very kind and gentle monk, who spoke not a word of English, finally came to the door and stood smiling at him.

Why do I tell this story? First because it is amazing to me and I also tell it to point out how we can get carried away, how the line that we draw in the sand in one moment, a line over which we tell ourselves we will not cross, gets drawn and redrawn over time until we are nowhere even near the point where we first drew it.

Things can get out of hand until we have escalated beyond anything reasonable. It is an exponential curve that takes us right out of our everyday world and into sheer craziness. Gary was literally beside himself, right out of his body, and no longer in any kind of control He had completely abandoned the steering wheel.

To me this is an example of how our emotions carry us away in the moment and how we can in a short time end up far from where we started out, perhaps at a place we never intended to go, and with consequences we never considered.

I know this happens to me every time I go to an auction. I get carried away in the bidding and when I get back home with all the stuff I bid on, it looks like a pile junk that eventually I will just put out in a yard sale. What happened? It is simple. I got carried away in the moment in my mindstream and ended up way down river before I could realize it. I lost any awareness I might have had. The same thing sometimes happens when I am bidding for something on eBay. My imagined need to have the item escalates in the moment beyond any real need for the item and I end up paying way more than I ever intended.

These are just some examples of how we can get carried away. In Asia in general and in Tibetan Buddhism in particular there are much more subtle and pervasive ways of getting carried away, ones with much greater consequences, and these are called Maras. As I find time, I would like to discuss maras with those of you interested.