

Whirling dervish proffers wisdom

By DAN MCGINNIS
Of the Emerald

What do you say to a whirling dervish who follows the teachings of an 8,000 year — old man, who holds four degrees from the University of Oregon, and who has taught convicts at the state penitentiary for two years?

You say hello of course, for the word dervish, or to use the correct form, darvish, means "calm and mellow person." Darvish is an apt description of Parthava Behesht-Nejad.

Parthava teaches a class in Iranian Daena twice a week on the top floor of Gerlinger Annex.

Darvish also means "enlightened being." Parthava says he is probably a darvish, and says with a fair amount of certainty that he is the only person in the Western Hemisphere who teaches and understands this ancient wisdom called Iranian Daena, founded by the sage Zarathustra around 6,000 B.C.

A visit to the darvish's class is an interesting experience.

Parthava begins his class with exercises and postures similar to those done in Kundalini Yoga. The class works on its deep breathing and sits for a meditation break between each posture. This is all warm-up for what comes later.

Parthava gathers the class into a big circle and turns on the music. It sounds like music the belly dancers perform to at the local Arabian restaurant.

The circle joins hands and begins turning like a ferris wheel, slow and grinding at first, then picking up speed as the circle stretches to its physical limits from the centrifugal force generated by 20 running legs.

This is the beginning of the darvish dancing, called Sufi dancing in the United States. In Iran, Sufi means people from the north who wear wool.

Parthava then divides the class into two smaller circles and places himself in the center of one of them. The circles turn and Parthava whirls. It looks like ring around the rose at first, but then you see the deep look in his eyes and you

know it's more than a children's game.

The music gets louder and faster, building to a strong, high, wailing sound of male voices, pushing the circles faster and faster, to make the big room full of this strange energy.

Parthava says there is an energy exchange within the circle. He says the circle is sharing energy because the people in the circle concentrate on the person in the middle. "If there is concentration, and if there is good balance within the circle, then the dance becomes effortless and we move into a higher state of consciousness," Parthava says.

Ten minutes before class ends each person starts whirling alone. They're crazed, or high, or they're thinking about throwing up next to the merry-go-round, or spinning at the tail end of a hard drunk.

Most of the class whirled for a good seven or eight minutes. Some tried to stop but couldn't until they discovered the secret of downshifting. One person said he felt if he tried to stop, his brain would make a 180 degree turn inside of his head and it would all be over. Another said she felt like an express train with eyes. Miraculously, no one vomited.

Parthava trained under the oldest (120 years) darvish in Iran and says he's seen them whirl and chant for hours at a time. He says his own vision gets sharper, and says he retains a good awareness of everyone in the class when he's whirling.

There are 3 to 5 million followers of Zarathustra in Iran. They are the fastest growing group in the country, but they must keep their practice of Daena hidden because of the intolerance of the Muslims, according to Parthava.

"I grew up in a Muslim family," says Parthava, "and they couldn't understand why I stopped reading the Koran when I began to learn about Iranian Daena. My mother has even offered me a large sum of money to come back to Iran, renounce my teachings and join the church, but I refused. It would be good publicity for the Muslims if I did this. Now they know they can't buy me," he says.

Parthava taught Iranian Daena at the Oregon State Penitentiary for two years. "The class went well, and my pupils started getting out on parole. The administrators didn't like this because if they lost more inmates they would have to start letting some employees go, like psychiatric people, so they created a situation in which I couldn't teach, so I stopped," he explained.

Parthava has a bachelor's degree in political science, but he says he has lost all his taste for politics. "Politics means taking sides and I don't want to take sides. I have leftist friends and rightist friends, and I have lost a lot of friends because of politics," he says.

Parthava says the Zarathustrian communities in Iran do things cooperatively. "Many of those who belong are intellectuals and artists who feel that pooling their resources is the best way to live." He says Iranians are a hyper, emotional people, and that they have benefited from the teachings of Zarathustra because it has calmed them down.

"I teach Iranian Daena because I want to do something for the students that will last longer than a few months." He says his class differs from other kinds of spiritual and meditation classes because he doesn't play the act of supremacy.

"In my class I float around a lot. Everybody floats around and everyone is together; there is no missionary work. If someone has a question about something, I let them come to me and ask because I believe it is a personal thing," says Parthava.

He is doing a doctoral dissertation on Iranian Daena. "In this country you have to have facts," he says. "You have to prove that what you are doing works."

Parthava says he will never sell himself like so many others have done with their practices and beliefs. He likens the importation of Yoga and other Asian religions to what happens when ten people pass an ice cube around. "By the time it gets to the tenth person there is nothing left."

Union raps Boyd letter

Local 3209 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has charged University Pres. William Boyd with violating "a sense of fair play" in a letter he sent to the faculty Thursday. In the letter, Boyd encouraged faculty members to vote against collective bargaining in a special election to be held Tuesday and Wednesday.

Calling the letter "a last minute tactic," AFT charged that the letter was sent close enough to the election that it left little time for any organizations campaigning for collective bargaining to reach the entire faculty with their responses.

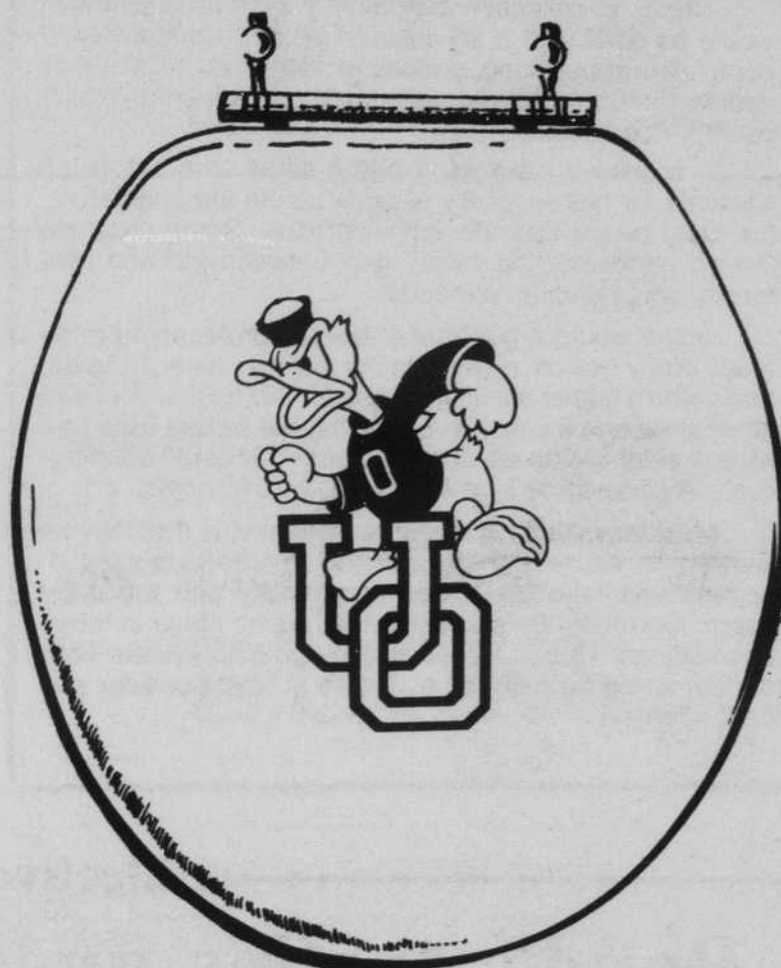
Boyd, however, says he told the faculty at its meeting Wednesday that they could expect a statement from him. Boyd also said he saw no problem with taking a stand on collective bargaining in spite of the fact he would be linked with management if the faculty organizes.

In the two-day election, faculty members will vote on whether to accept collective bargaining, and who will represent them at the bargaining table if it is approved. A copy of Boyd's letter and the AFT's response are on page four.

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Tree

(Continued from Page 1)

the surrounding hills and brought back many trees to plant around the mansion. One of these was the knobcone pine which is an unusual specimen of a native Oregon tree.

The knobcone pine is not the only tree in need of attention on campus. "A lot of trees on campus haven't had the right care over the years. Many of

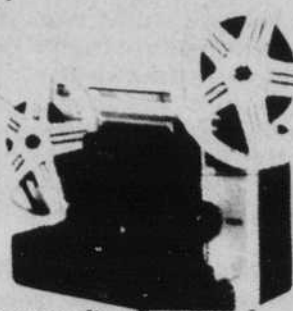
them need expert care," says Whitfield.

It was brought to Whitfield's attention through some of his students who worked on the grounds crew that some professor's sentimental feelings are making it hard for diseased trees to be removed. "The faculty should be open-minded about this. Trees don't last forever," notes Whitfield. "You can't go against nature that way."

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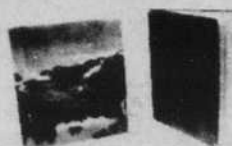


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