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INVESTIGATING PRACTICE

Shi-fu tells us that the Chinese term for practising Ch'an, *ts'an-ch'an,* means to investigate, engage or dig into the heart of the Ch'an tradition.

The hard work of practice, and the no-work, form the theme of this issue. Appropriately for Spring - the days are lengthening and brightening, time to shake off winter dullness, bring energy into our practice and get down to work! Anyone seeking inspiration for renewed dedication to practice will surely find it in Bill Pickard's moving letters. Written over three years to Eric Johns while Eric was training in a Chinese monastery and travelling; the letters are a concise and detailed guide to practice, a distillation of many years experience.

John Senior contributes two pieces arising from his own investigations into practice, an attempt to extract the essence of the Diamond Sutra, and a transformation visualisation in the Tibetan tradition for composing the mind prior to practice. Elizabeth Crook looks back over 30 years to tell of three separate encounters with Tibet and Tibetans.

A selection of poems explores the mystery that permeates everyday life, mainly in and around Maenllwyd, but there is a swift change of pace in Brian Groves' poem recalling a glimpse of paradise seen from the back of a motorbike.

John Broadbent contributes a moving obituary to his friend and colleague Barry Palmer. An unusually long book review examines the place of Zen in contemporary thought. A demanding investigation this, and one that will repay careful reading.

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EDITORIAL FROM THE CH'AN HALL
Making statues...

There appear to be two main ways of making statues. The first is to construct a supporting framework and then gradually to apply dollops of clay to its surface, carefully moulding them into the representation of a Bodhisattva or whoever. The flexibility of the approach allows very idealised forms to be presented in great beauty. The problem is that the finished product is fragile, easily cracks and is hollow inside. The second way is to take a log of wood or a block of stone and gently carve away the surface bringing to light a figure expressed from within. The sculptor's skill consists in negotiating with the underlying substance of the material so that the final representation is only in part the work of the artist and largely determined by the subtleties, distortions and inherent patterning within the material itself. What emerges is a disclosure of hidden potential.

There is a parallel here with spiritual training. Some people idealise a theme for its beauty or integrity and build up a frame of rules, prohibitions, injunctions and ritual practices upon which they shape a perfect image. The image may be beautiful and sustained for as long as the structure holds together but a sudden shock or blow may crack the perfect face or disclose an emptiness within. Followers of external rules who have not investigated their true nature for themselves are copyists, fundamentally followers of outer paths even if Buddhist ones. There is a shallowness of Dharma understanding here that can lead to upset and the appearance of the very opposite of an ideal image.

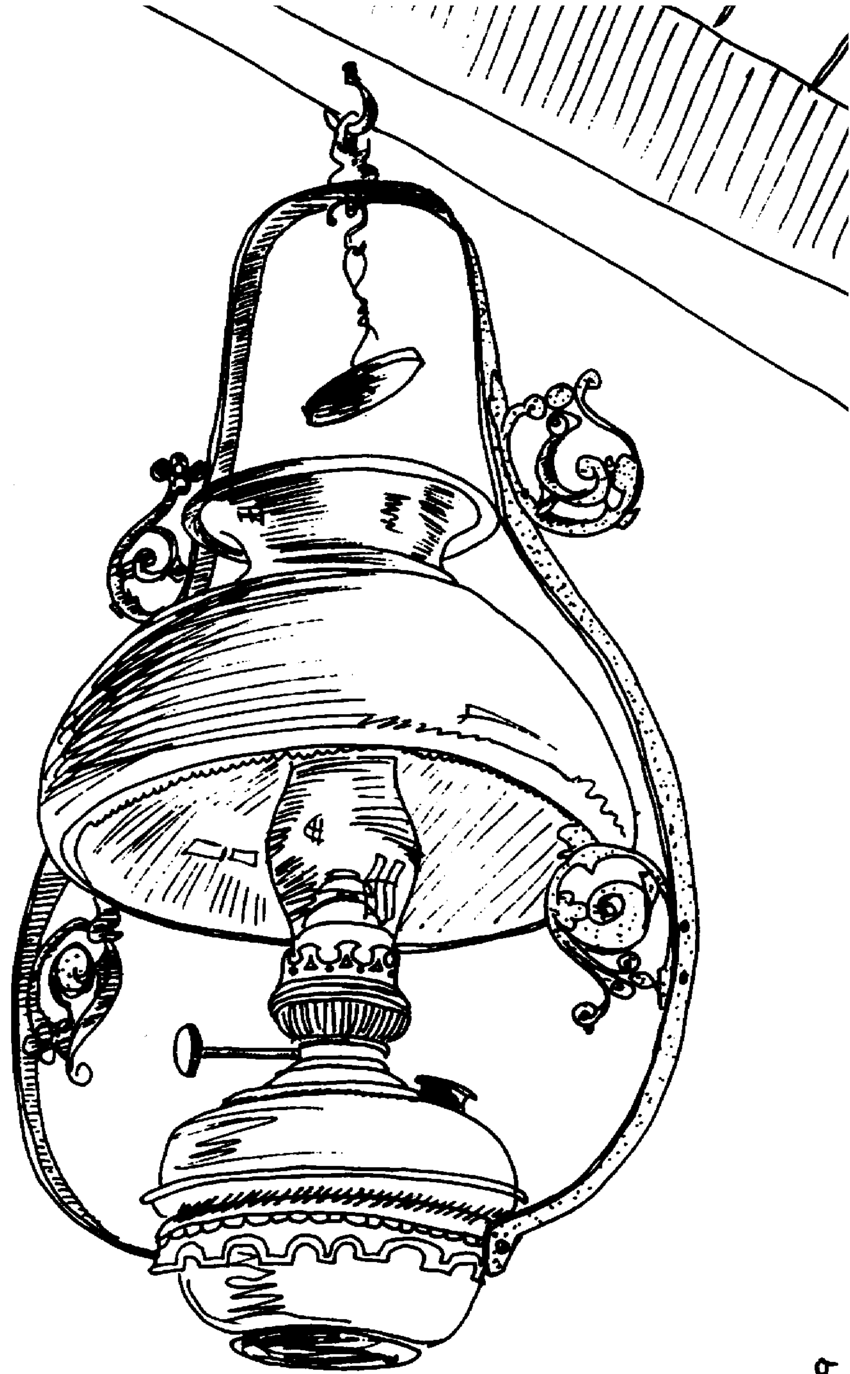
Others learn the hard way and realise that the image they seek is hidden within their own nature. No amount of application of external rules will bring this forth without a carving away of the surface of self. In reaching deeply within the *hua t'ou*, the Who? question, the true understanding of suffering gradually takes shape. Yet this shape retains the underlying patterns of karma, for these in truth are the very veins and sinews of the material to be worked. The result is thus inevitably idiosyncratic, not a perfect idealised figure but an often rough-hewn realisation from within, the forms of which retain beautiful distortions. The work has included a deep understanding, recognition and shaping. Knowing the shortcomings of his or her own material such a person is well equipped to help others on their own paths. Here there is no inner emptiness but a rock-like root.

When Jeff Love was teaching me how to lead groups using koans in the Communication Exercise, he once remarked to me that the most difficult participants were people claiming to be Buddhists! I wondered why this might be so. "Well," said Jeff, "their problem is that they think they know who they are... as a result of reading what the Sutras say or what some Dharma teacher has taught. They have never even begun to investigate themselves!"

Over the years I have appreciated increasingly Jeff's remark. Those who come on retreat from a confrontation with their own suffering or alienation investigate "Who am I?" with a searching honesty that is moving to encounter. Those who have adopted some Dharma ideology have terrible problems. One-time monks, for example, have been told what they ought to find but the external teachings always lead them astray. Having never recognised a Master, they have immense difficulty in examining their shortcomings and talk only of idealised experiences. At the Maenllwyd, officiously thinking they must know the answers - even though long disrobed, such a person may fail to look within. The question is either avoided or there are never-ending confusions. Nowadays, when I hear someone has been a monk, I feel pretty sure there will be problems. Sometimes such a person comes to reject the question and its relevance altogether and to resent my having faced them with it.

A true monk, long dedicated to exploring the path, has the advantage of being able to use both methods. The long-term training in rule-bound ritual eventually scrapes the surface clean and the true self begins to emerge. Monks and lay persons face the same task, only the context differs. Monks should not think they have any special knowledge but neither should lay people pity the monks' enclosed state. Each person's koan reflects their own karma. There is nothing to be proud about and nothing special to regret. There is the work to be done.

John Crook Ch'uan-Teng Chien-Ti


HR Feb. '99

PREREQUISITES FOR CH'AN PRACTICE[1]

Master Sheng-Yen

The Chinese term for practising Ch'an is *ts'an-ch'an*, which means to investigate, engage, or dig into (*ts'an*) the heart or living enlightenment of the Ch'an tradition. It is often said in Ch'an that the door to Ch'an is "no door," that the method of Ch'an is "no method," or that the practice of Ch'an is "no practice." There is a famous story about Master Nan-yueh and his student, Ma-tsu. Upon finding Ma-tsu sitting intently in meditation, Nan-yueh picked up a piece of tile and began grinding it with a stone just outside Ma-tsu's hut.

Ma-tsu, somewhat annoyed, asked, "Why are you doing this?"
Nan-yueh replied, "I am polishing the tile to make a mirror out of it."
In ancient times, mirrors were made of bronze and had to be regularly polished so that they would reflect.
Ma-tsu said, "That's ridiculous, you can't make a mirror by polishing a piece of tile."
To which Nan-yueh Huai-jang retorted sharply, "If you can't make a mirror by polishing a tile, how can you possibly become a Buddha by sitting in meditation?"

On another occasion, Lin-chi was sleeping soundly at the rear of the meditation hall, while the head monk sat sternly in meditation at the front of the hall. Master Huang-po came in and lightly tapped with his staff on the meditation platform where Lin-chi was seated. For a moment Lin-chi opened his eyes, looked up, and then went right back to sleep. Huang-po tapped the platform again and walked off. When he came to the head of the hall and saw the head monk meditating intently, he struck him a blow and said, "What do you think you are doing with all your deluded thoughts? That man back there at the rear of the hall is the one who is really meditating."

Lin-chi himself used to teach that one should make no artificial effort in practice but "simply be an ordinary person with nothing to do." Ma-tsu taught that "the ordinary everyday mind is the Way." Ta-chu, a disciple of Ma-tsu, is recorded as having asserted that our mind is the same as Buddha. For our mind to seek the Buddha is as unnecessary as the Buddha seeking the Buddha. Likewise our mind is identical to the Dharma. To use our mind to seek the Dharma is like the Dharma seeking the Dharma. That is also unnecessary. Buddha, mind, and sentient being are not different. There is no Buddha outside of the mind, no Dharma outside of the mind and no sentient beings outside either.

When we read such discourses on Ch'an, it seems that Buddhist tradition of the three disciplines - purity in observance of precepts of the Vinaya, and the cultivation of samadhi and wisdom through meditation - has been turned on its head. Does Ch'an really involve no practice or no discipline of any kind whatsoever? Yes, in certain respects Ch'an truly requires no learning, no practice, no effort whatsoever. If it did depend on such things, then it would not be Ch'an.

However, we are very active and artificial people, with far too many things to do. We must have discipline to help us put an end to deficient habits. For this reason it is not entirely correct to say that Ch'an involves no practice. There are indeed principles that must be followed.

Shen-hui, a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng, said that the precepts must be used to discipline one's actions. Likewise, recitation of Buddhist Sutras - especially the Diamond Sutra - and cultivation of samadhi should be used to eliminate defilements and calm our restless minds. Only then will the wisdom of no-thought that is inherent in one's original nature truly manifest.

Virtually all the major Ch'an masters and their followers observed the traditional Hinayana precepts of the renunciant and the Mahayana Bodhisattva precepts. There have been famous householder practitioners of Ch'an, such as P'ang-yun and his family, But even though such persons' experience might have been deep, few had much impact as teachers of Ch'an. Because they were laymen, major communities of practitioners did not develop around them and their sphere of influence tended to be limited.

We also have examples of Ch'an masters who deliberately broke the Buddhist precepts. The most celebrated examples of this sort - such as Nan-chuan's killing of the cat and Tan-hsia's burning of a statue of the Buddha to keep warm - are all isolated incidents, not regular occurrences. What is more, when one examines these events carefully, one finds that the actions of these masters were primarily didactic - intended to make a point to their students rather than to fulfil a personal whim. All in all, there are very few examples of influential Ch'an masters who made a regular practice of going against the precepts, and fewer still who advocated that their students engage in such behaviour.

To have received either the precepts of a novice or full renunciant has always been a minimum requirement for residence in a Sangha or practice hall of a Ch'an community. Thus, in most Chinese Ch'an temples the traditional Buddhist monastic precepts were strictly enforced. As Ch'an grew in popularity during the T'ang and Sung periods of Chinese history, eminent teachers such as Pai-chang Huai-hai developed additional codes for a comprehensive system of discipline and daily procedure better suited to the training of monks in large monastic centres. These rules, known as *ch'ing-kuei*, or "pure rules", supplemented but did not replace the original renunciatory precepts. In fact, moral restraint, strict community routine, collective worship, seated meditation, and regular discourses by and interviews with the Ch'an master are all essential features of the programme described in the pure rules.

What, then, are we to make of the assertion that "practice is no practice" or of the iconoclastic stories that we cited above? These teachings have real significance only for persons who have been immersed in the institutions of Ch'an training for a long time, or else persons of very unusual capacity. Indeed, the grinding of the tile had such a profound impact on Ma-tsu only because Ma-tsu had already dedicated so much time and effort to meditation. To any other person they might prove meaningless, if not downright misleading. For this reason, such stories - no matter how frivolous they may sound - must always be viewed within the solemn context of Ch'an training. To do otherwise is to seriously misrepresent Ch'an.

The beautiful lotus blossom grows from putrid muck, but it is the blossom itself that we prize, not the filth. That is to say, even though one may be forced by circumstance to defile the precepts, it is purity that one should continue to prize. Those who are unable to control themselves should keep the precepts and fix their gaze on positive spiritual qualities.

In the case of saints who have realised liberation, the precepts are indeed irrelevant, for their minds are pure and are no longer afflicted by the passions. Needless to say, this does not mean that they will wallow in the muck without restraint. Quite the contrary, purity and liberation remain the supreme goal, but it is the purification and liberation of others that becomes the focus now. Circumstances may warrant going against the precepts but purity and liberation will still be the main concern. The necessary course of action will be chosen out of clear deliberation and motivated out of compassion rather than personal desire.

The idea that there must be certain pre-conditions for the effective practice of Ch'an is really no different from the original Buddhist teaching of the three disciplines of moral restraint, samadhi, and wisdom. When the activity of body, speech, and mind is pure, the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are fully manifest. The genuine Three Jewels, in essence, are none other than the enlightened Buddha nature that is already inside you. They are fully manifest only when the three kinds of karma are purified. To purify the three activities of body, speech and mind, one must accord with the precepts and calm and clarify the mind through disciplined cultivation of meditation. Indeed, when the three deeds are pure, you, the Three Jewels, everything, are a single totality. If any one of the three deeds is impure the world will appear defiled, Buddha will have long ago entered nirvana, the Dharma will be empty words and paper, and the Sangha will be nowhere to be seen. Thus, when the basic conditions of the three disciplines have been properly met and one's practice has matured, the import of the Ch'an aphorism that "practice is no practice" and the examples of Nan-yueh and Lin-chi will then come fully to life.

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[1] This article is reprinted from *Ch'an Magazine*. Fall 1998, p32-35. Based on several lectures by Shih Fu, edited by Dan Stevenson, adapted for NCF by John Crook.

ON THE PATH OF DHARMA
Bill Pickard's letters to Eric Johns 1984-1987
Edited by John Crook

In NCF 18 Eric Johns described how he set out to discover the Buddha Way by visiting Bill Pickard at Mousehole in Cornwall where there was a small group living under his instruction in Soto Zen. During the subsequent years of Eric's training as a monk (Sik Hin Lic) in Hong Kong, Korea and Japan, Bill sustained a flow of letters to him, acting very much as an older spiritual counsellor to a young man on the way. In many ways his letters recall the spiritual counselling offered to a young priest in 'The Cloud of Unknowing' written by an unknown spiritual director in the Middle Ages in England. Eric showed me these letters suggesting that they could be the basis for an article in NCF and to this Bill readily agreed.

I have edited the letters to bring out teachings that will be useful for all who travel the way, whether monk, nun or lay person. The letters are very warm in tone and must have been a great support to Eric who was usually the only Westerner in his monasteries. I have removed the more personal comment, discussions of Masters and acquaintances, and matters extraneous to the issue in hand. Bill wrote on small blue letter forms in a neat spidery writing and had to pack a great deal into limited space. The admirable condensation of his views under this strict discipline give us all some very pointed directions in our quest for understanding Ch'an. Ed.

5 April 1984

I will try and give you some hints on how to use the *hua t'ou* in meditation.[1] It is not easy or simple; after all, like all Zen training, it is mostly a question of what you shouldn't do! Of course you will have read Hsu yun's remarks on its use in Charles Luk's books, so you will understand that a *hua t'ou* signifies the state of mind before a thought has started: so it is the state of mind one is in when one's thoughts, inner chatter, picture making, dreaming in zazen have stopped.

What I do is to start by following my breath till the mind stops producing any pictures or thoughts; even the awareness of the actual movement of the breath has faded from consciousness, so there is only an awareness of emptiness. At this point you must remember that this also means you must not continue 'looking' for something called a *'hua t'ou'* either; for your thought of the *hua t'ou* is now also a barrier, a hindrance! But still you may feel a sense of doubt at this point. This is natural. If any idea or thought, or perhaps even some kind of vision, comes into your mind you must take no notice; but the moment you realise that you are aware of it, bring your pointed concentration back to that mental stillness. At first you will not be able to hold this for even a second; but if you keep on with determination, these seconds of mental stillness will increase.

So the *hua t'ou* is really another name for what I have usually called... the 'zazen mind'. Don't worry about the Great Doubt; that is the mental state we are all naturally in before we realise that all our words, thoughts about meanings, mental pictures etc. are themselves this doubt. When we know that we cannot know, the doubt slips away.

Don't get impatient with yourself. Don't think about progress. Simply keep on bringing your attention back in zazen to that state of mind when you have no mental activity going on. Once you can experience the 'feel' of this one-pointed concentration you will find it easier to get back to it. Simply to become the breath, in and out, no other thought, idea, mental picture in your field of consciousness at all, is for me the quickest way to the *hua t'ou* state.

There are various levels of consciousness that you will become aware of; but to all of them you must pay no attention. Don't expect things to happen. Drop, and keep on dropping, everything that comes into your mind. Return always to the 'feel' of your breath, till that moment comes when you will really know that there is nothing to 'know' with your mind. You have all that you need just as you are.

5 May 1984

You must be guided very much by your intuition as to the rightness, for you, of the teaching and the teacher you decide to follow. He must feel right for you. If he is a real teacher and he knows your potential, and knows he is right for you, he will accept you. But if he does not, it may well be because he can see you must go to someone else. Teachers who appear to accept everyone, and Eastern teachers who accept every Westerner, are often more concerned with the so-called prestige a Western pupil is supposed to bring them. Simply prepare yourself so that you are ready when the right teacher is available: when the pupil is ready the teacher appears.

15 May 1984

From my own practice I know it is good advice to cut out reading when really engaged in intense meditation; and what reading you do needs to be selective, probably only Sutras, and probably again only one or two of those: the Heart Sutra, the Diamond Sutra and the Surangama to help with psychological problems. Once you can communicate with your teacher you must be guided entirely by him; while always remembering that even Shakyamuni tells us we must not take even his words as correct for us till we have experienced the truth for which the words stand. This is why we must have total trust in our master.

After you have been meditating rigorously for long hours, for many days, you will no doubt enter a stage where you will probably be filled with doubts, you will feel stale, everything becomes cloudy, you may even think you are in the wrong place or have the wrong teacher. This is the testing time. Everyone goes though this stage at some time. You may feel depressed, homesick, lonely. It is not something peculiar to you and your situation. I reached a point where I nearly killed myself; but I was alone and had no teacher.

30 May 1984

Do you still have the *hua t'ou* in the pit of the stomach, the 'Who?' as your whole field of consciousness, turning the mind inwards? What is the state before even the 'Who?' is asked? Where does that 'Who?' come from? When the doubts or questions fill your whole content of consciousness, there will come a moment when everything stops; hindering thoughts stop, and there is only a stillness, you are one with the question. This is no longer your usual consciousness. You and 'Who?' are one. There is no sensation of body, no consciousness 'of' anything. And of course this is the state of mind before a thought arises; in other words it is the *hua t'ou*. It can be endless space, a brightness, a kind of great joy, it turns the world upside down. There is nothing you can say profitably about it, but you know it.

26 June 1984

Every situation, at that moment, is perfect for our practice; just as every sense intrusion such as pain, noises, mental creations, are subjects for meditation. All we have to do is drop all the hindrances, preconceptions and attachments.

You will find you will never come to the end of doubts. But doubts are the driving force that set you on your path, and that will keep you on it. As you deepen your meditation you will find that your sense of doubt becomes more subtle; it will be seen to be less about external concrete concepts, opinions, situations and much more to do with moral attitudes, a sense in which nothing can be distinguished or be said to exist apart from anything else. Doubts never end but in the end become of themselves also void; these are the doubts not subject to answers. Having to examine doubts (in order to answer others)

clears the ground of our minds, so we can be free of clutter; or at least some of it. The subtle doubts are of a different kind.

You are right about robes being powerful; but don't forget they can also become a barrier, a hindrance, if we live behind them. They focus attention on us; they can make us feel special. The fact people expect a special kind of wise answer from you will show you this. Don't let this fool you into thinking you really have what others may expect. Answer always from your heart, from the truth you know for yourself. Remember in the end the real question, which is also the real doubt, can only be answered by silence. The Buddha showed us that. Just because one may be wearing robes, be he Easterner or Westerner, does not mean he has travelled very far on the spiritual path. A real teacher will be hard to find because in the end he will only be found within! That is hard to accept but the Buddha also told us that.

I think it will be wise to discuss your meditation less with other monks and only with your teacher. Others may not understand, conversation can be confusing and raise expectations both for you and them.

22 July 1984

Ah! I know how you felt, and I am so very happy for you. Of course one is beside, or outside oneself at first, or simply with no self. It's wonderful, so obvious, and quite impossible to put into words. And of course one has to calm down after a while. But no matter; now you know it's just this, your view of things will never be the same again. Your real training starts here. I share your joy.

Now you will find deeper meanings in the Sutras. You have the answer and no one has anything to 'give' you. The need to keep rushing about the world simply ceases. Yet the need to go on deepening your insight never stops; for all is instant change and flux, including what you are, how you are, the situations around you. Life is constant practice. Every moment is new and pregnant with possible births.

Your old friend still has a suggestion to make. Forget the first experience and do not expect the next insight to be as big. Each moment is just it. There must be no smell of Zen, and that only happens when you are unaware that 'just this', be it a deep insight that lifts your heart filling it with a love for all things, or the dreary drudgery of occupations you don't like, is all one. You must learn to hide your discovery; don't let even a hint be known, or that subtle poison, spiritual pride, creeps in. Even present joy must be let go. Nothing very important has happened. Be happy, be sad, with all your might; the next moment is new.

One does each thing as new because one has to do it. Nothing special. One does zazen not knowing, one sits because it is the next thing. That is Zen samadhi. All the multiplicity of the flux of the Universe is the One, and that's also the present moment, writing this, reading this. Nothing special. Wonderful! No stink of Zen. Nothing holy. You are a Bodhisattva and have all the beings (who do not exist!) as numerous as the sands of the Ganges to save. Keep on doing this and never give it a thought. That is how we pay the debt of gratitude. It flows from the heart and we don't know it with the head at all

19 September 1984

With regards to our Bodhisattva vows: if from the first not a thing is, who takes the vows or precepts and what beings are there to be saved? The idea that there is a 'you' who will take these vows; that at a ceremony these precepts of a Bodhisattva will be 'given' to you; that then you will for all time try and 'keep' them, is simply a simplistic view of the meaning. There are no beings to be saved, and nothing that is a Bodhisattva, for all is One. Form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form: this is true of everything. But still, as the very emptiness is also form, so, though no such being called a Bodhisattva can even hold an idea of saving any beings, that 'no-person' must, by his whole way of life and attitude,

create around himself the atmosphere where such 'no-beings' can wake up and realise that which is! So, in a dualistic sense, which is no-sense, beings can be saved. Ask "Who is there to be a Bodhisattva?" Truth is beyond words but there is an insight that will, moment by living moment, infuse your presence with the atmosphere that will help all (no-) beings. Even the summit of human aspiration is a concept; but we can all try by great attention to live in compassion for all beings. We are what we think. Yet who holds these views?

24 October 1984

I'm delighted to learn that you have had the ordination... even if it was a rather more noisy ceremony than you had anticipated. The only important part is what took place within you. The rest is froth and will settle...

The inner truth and insight of your meditation is all that matters. You have committed yourself to a great adventure that never ends. That is the transmission and each time you enter into samadhi in meditation this transmission takes place. The Bodhisattva is one who is living in a state of constant transmission, for the Buddha nature naturally flows through his every act. Nothing is self centred...

You may often find the tears flowing or you may see visions or get some 'Ch'an disease' manifestations. This is why it is such a help to have a Ch'an master, quite apart from the 'presence' that a right teacher can give your practice.

I am now 70 years old and have followed the way since I was 16 and each day is new and there's still no goal in sight.

24 November 1984

As you have asked me, I'll give you a few details of my early stages on the path. Like you I first became aware of the Dharma through reading a book when I was 13 or 14; it was as if I somehow had known about it all the time. I seemed to remember it. Then one day, I suddenly had the experience of my body and everything around me simply dissolving into a brilliant space that had no limitations and I realised that somehow I was not really separate or apart from anything. But I knew nothing of training or meditation nor that there were different paths to follow. I only read books on Buddhism and the vision got dim.

Then, during the war in Burma I was wounded and got malaria and was sent up into the Himalayas to a rest camp where it was my karma to go and stay with some English Buddhists who introduced me to my first master. He was a Chinese lama who was meditation teacher in a local Tibetan monastery; but was also a disciple of the Venerable Ch'an Master Hsu yun who was at that time still alive in China. He gave me the Precepts and introduced me to Ch'an meditation and for a month I had the privilege of sitting every day (night) with him. Later, through him, I was put in touch with Charles Luk.

On my return to England I became a hermit for two years, living in a tent on the cliffs here in Cornwall. After another experience of dropping body and mind and going through a difficult time because I could not have the guidance of my old teacher (who had said I must find my own path on my own), I discovered how kind he had been.

One day a Japanese lay brother came to visit because of a dream, and, through this, a Zen Roshi eventually came to England and I was ordained and given transmission in to the Soto sect of Dogen. Yet I have always lived as a layman and do not wear robes. I also sat for a while with the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa who also had my Ch'an lama Linchen[2] as his meditation teacher when he was a young monk. My ordination name was Myozen Daizui.

1 January 1985

You are right: deep concentration brings about many physical as well as mental changes. These are quite natural and there is nothing either special or 'holy' about them... As I think you realise, these various manifestations of auras, lights, demons and Buddhas are all fairly common. They are all projections from your own subconscious, or in some cases a kind of telepathic or joint sharing of the hallucination of someone else.

In meditation, when you have reached the state of really stilling the stream of thought and images, that reservoir of memory of which we are not normally aware seems to throw up these phantoms. It is the same place as that from where our dreams come in sleep. Sometimes they can seem to take on a life of their own and can be frightening; they won't go away. They won't go away because secretly the more egotistical surface consciousness becomes fascinated. This is certainly the case when hallucinations seem to suggest we are being favoured, for instance when it is a holy image, such as the Buddha or a 'divine being', who comes and seems to suggest we're making great progress.

So take no notice of any such manifestations. They are all illusions, projections of your own mind however 'objective' they may appear. This also goes for 'lights', 'voices', 'scents' as well. What they do show however is that your meditation is maturing... but don't 'stick' at this point. Many 'mystics' have done so.

A few suggestions now about this sense of evil, of being possessed by an evil power that apparently came from what should have been 'good', that is a Buddha statue. You are quite likely to experience a number of such paradoxical transformations of right and wrong, good and bad, light and dark. They will take many forms. Remember, all these concepts, values, judgements are within; they are all attributes of the self and must be seen for what they are. Remember that even the concept of 'Buddha' must be seen for what it is, a concept, idea, created by minds and so it is for all values. Precepts must become actualised, we must become living embodiments of them, Bodhisattvas who are not even conscious of being Bodhisattvas, otherwise we are not Bodhisattvas. In Zen we are told to 'kill' even the Buddha: that is we must not hold to the concept of Buddha as being other than what we are.

I have the feeling that you are still objectifying some of the experiences that you have or which arise in your meditation states. I mean that you are placing outside of yourself a kind of power, the 'power of your vows', or even your 'wish to teach Buddhism to others'. You are still giving off the smell of ego, of pride, even if in a subtle way. Who has this 'power of your vows'? Who wishes to teach Buddhism for the 'good of others'? All powers, all demons, all energies, are in a sense the natural manifestation of the flux we call reality; but when they pass through our senses and are filtered through our brains and become 'real' in consciousness, they appear to be apart, or outside, or other than we are. You should have no problems if you still your mind and return always to 'Who is it?' who experiences whatever it be - demon or Buddha.

You must always start from where you are and from who you are. You will always be who you are. We are all the result of our past karma; this cannot be altered so far as the past is concerned. It just is. Yet this very moment, this place, is where change also occurs. In this constant flux of the eternal present there is also change. Yet, even in all the apparent movement, our very self is the mental habit of moment by moment creating this illusion of an ongoing apparently permanent entity or being. All is one void, process, energy and at the same time quite beyond all our concepts of the mind. We will never know or understand, though we will experience.

I think, secretly, you are a little proud of what your 'self' or ego has achieved: it's all been mind blowing of course. But now your real inner journey must get underway. No doubt there will be many slips and the possible help of an English speaking teacher will help at such moments. If you trust your intuition and watch the tricks of the self you will have all you need.

I think you must bow in gratitude to your master Sik Sing Yat who, although he may not be Lin-chi (What vanity to tell him what he should have done!), seems to have guarded you well. Yes, I know the country you are passing through but what are dreams to trouble the incredible perfection and beauty of

this moment. The best mantra is always the one eternal question 'Who?' The answer is no answer but only the experience of 'Who?'... The only demon is within; that persistent little self. It fights to the end yet it is an illusion.

At your stage I don't think learning mantras is anything but a diversion. After all, your master told you not to play around with such antics. I rather feel you are showing too much interest in your mind's tricks. Yes, I also had my demons and not all are gone yet. Practice never ends. There is always a further mountain to climb. That's what it is all about.

I am sure you have been very impatient at times. We all experience this. It is of course yet another manifestation of pride, isn't it? I wonder why we make what is simple so very difficult?... I think you are at the point where you'll find the answers that are in the Heart Sutra within you. You know you are ripe for experience and I wouldn't read anything unless it is the Heart Sutra... in any case more a meditation than a reading. Please bow to Sik Sing Yat for me. I think your gratitude to him will increase with time.

1 March 1985

It sounds as if you are wise not to get mixed up with Westerners who are at popular temples in Japan. I think that since Zen became popular in the 60s and 70s the more comfortable Zen temples have become overrun with Westerners seeking quick and easy 'answers'. I am sure the serious monks and teachers must find them a problem at times. There will no doubt be many that are neurotic or very disturbed.

You obviously now understand that all the exciting 'states', 'visions' and other experiences that you had last year were stages of no consequence except that they showed your powers of concentration to be getting stronger. Do not become attached to their fascination or feel that you are somehow special or important because of them. There is no special 'god' handing them out to you, they are produced simply by your own effort in zazen. And all that business with the finger burning! Your wise teacher Sing Yat knew there was a lot of pride and vanity in that affair but worth it in the end for what you learnt. Some of us have to travel a stony path as we are so full of ego.

Soon you will find that there is only emptiness, both inside and outside; that you require no outside guide. At each moment and in each situation you will know how to respond adequately. Gradually you will realise that you are increasingly in an empty state, you will be aware of the working of your mind and the objects of your thoughts as somehow floating in space. Inside and outside are the same in the process. There is nothing static, fixed, with a separate reality. You will find yourself increasingly in the present moment fully and your past thoughts and deeds will lessen their grip on your habits. As Sing Yat said, "the real work is to forget the self, so one can benefit others". Others and self are one. The only disturbance is within.

14 November 1985

This rude, unhelpful, uninterested in Westerners, Zen master (of whom you write) sounds interesting. What reputation has he among the Koreans? No master can give you anything, except perhaps a little encouragement and a push now and then. I cannot know but perhaps he is a master from whom you have things to learn. Sometimes the nice, friendly, apparently helpful, master is not what we need. It becomes comfortable, safe, predictable. Maybe he is uninterested in Westerners because he doesn't consider they are there with enough inner commitment. If it is a question of life and death, then even the question of the master's attitude must be dropped. So it's not what he can give you or do for you, but what you can realise in yourself. If you think he's unhelpful it's surely because you expect him to be helpful; in other words give you something - help! You are well on the way; you have the tools; it's up to you. It's right there in front of you, whatever the circumstances. I know you can do it. Hard slog yes; polishing the mirror yes; till you realise there's not even a mirror.

Zazen is the gate. Nothing else matters. Just where you are is the place. Now is eternally the right and only moment. It's a question of life and death; your head is in the pail of water and all you want is air, nothing else will do. I know you have the strength. All your battles are with yourself; only you can conquer and win through. You have it all. Who are you?

? June 1986

I've been in Nepal for a month. Managed to step into Tibet, but things are not too happy there; though better than they were. Met one or two interesting Tibetans. It all helps to knock off the tough corners of one's ego box. Travelling in the Himalayas was the real testing. I needed to return to the high mountains again. Just to trek in such places, camping away from western life and conditions, living with the Sherpas, tough simple people, was a tonic. In many ways reluctant to return; but my karma is here, I know.

Had a dream about you; partly why I felt this was the moment to write. You'll probably understand what it means. I see you climbing steep rocky steps to a building on top of a high hill; could be a temple on the top, a Chinese temple. You're struggling to climb the steps because you are holding a goat and a tiger by two long ropes, and they are pulling back down the hill. You do not seem to want either of these animals, but you say you cannot leave them. Perhaps you can interpret this? I awoke somehow expecting to have news of you. The Bodhisattva's great delusion is that knowing all are Buddhas, he still goes around trying to help everyone realise that. Look after yourself.

30 August 1986

Your letter... has broken the long silence; for I had been wondering how you were getting on; or had you perhaps vanished into China, lost to our world? I can see you've been discovering many things. This is the perennial wonder and beauty of the path; that it is ever changing and will not end; certainly not in this life or on this earth.

I can feel in your letter, as much as in what you say, that inner certainty that comes with the true inner vision that deep zazen brings: seeing and experiencing the total ultimate emptiness of what we call 'self'; the total oneness of what we call reality. As you now realise for yourself nothing can ever be the same again. This insight, the total oneness and its paradoxical constant flux and change, must now become what you are; its not something 'you' have somehow become; its what you have always been!

Yet, equally, as there's no static, ultimate thing we can call 'you' to be, this has to be realised or woken up to moment by moment. In this sense, none of us ever achieve enlightenment; but enlightenment is when all our illusions (our wrong views) are dropped. We all struggle so hard just to be.

Yes, sex and drink and fasting simply are; not good or bad, but facts or aspects of reality, of the flux of existence: but how and when and how much they are experienced is what must concern us. Are they at this particular moment in time either conducive or a hindrance to our waking up? There is no value in a load of guilt; that can be not only another hindrance but actually an indulgence. So we make a mistake and indulge overmuch; greed of one kind or another overcomes us, we see this, acknowledge it to ourselves, and then, endeavouring not to break this particular precept again, we carry on into the next moment of this flux of time. If karmic harm has been created then we must expect to pay. Beyond this make no big deal out of it. We will all fail sometime.

Do not think too much about 'progress' in meditation; if there is real meditation, where is the 'you' who can consider it greater or less improved since the last time? The 'progress' comes when you are no longer apart from the process; when you don't even consider it something that is being done by 'you'. It is as natural and as inevitable as your next breath. The less of 'you' there is in your meditation, the more 'result' others will probably see in you; but 'you' wont know it!

I see you have arrived at the difficulty of living the meditation mind state from moment to moment: but you've stated the answer; no discriminating mind but complete attention to each moment, mind state, and action resulting from it. It becomes more and more subtle, always requiring awareness and vigilance. Much of the change that comes with the life practice is in the character. Without knowing it your perception and awareness become more acute. The practice will never end, though your intuition will gradually disclose to you a different dimension within which you experience it: the third eye is open.

6 December 1986

Even if you found your situation [*on a Korean sesshin*] rather chaotic at times with much switching around and even arguments, how good it must have been for your practice. That's the beauty of the way; all situations are the right and perfect way and place and time for practice. Just where you are, as it is, can be the right place. In fact there can be no other for it is where you are.

Tho' you know the silent place in your meditation you have by constant mindfulness to actualise it in your total being. The inner nature that you are, beyond the conditioning of your character, has to become the living, moment by moment, you that you potentially are. Remember the way is a constant progression with no goal. We shall never achieve or reach an end in our journey but must always be in a state of practice. By constant practice we slowly become more aware; if only more aware that we all have a long journey ahead. Even our Lord Buddha practised till his last meditation.

If you check your actions and thoughts with reference to the Precepts the fruits of what you do will be right for all situations. The precepts, the ethical concepts given us by our teachers, are our staff for the journey. By such constant reference we all have the guidance and the map of the way.

2 February 1987

The enemy within us is the habits we have accumulated both in mental baggage and as the results of our actions. The more we can develop the way of dealing with the present moment with the free and open mind that meditation shows us the less habit-controlled we will be. The practice has no end. Razor sharp awareness and vigilance is required.

You will no doubt have people suggesting all kind of attractive Buddhist projects that could use the money [*you have acquired*]. All of them may no doubt be worthy projects but I think you should take your time. Your idea of a retreat house is very good; but all such places require a strong purpose and well grounded individuals (not just one or two) to really carry on and not become a bolthole for little groups of rather inadequate people. Such places need a nucleus of people with strong convictions and the practical ability to attend to the organisational side. Many fine ideas and good intentions float around but come to nothing because the people are not practical enough...

As you ask me, I would suggest that you carry on with your practice, with the teacher that seems right for you, till you feel it's time to come back here and then let what will be right, at that time and place, grow slowly. Perhaps a small cottage where you can carry on your practice and let those who will, come to you and share your practice. Don't fall for that ego trip, "I am a teacher, I can teach you!" Even Buddha said he could only point the way. The heart of a 'centre' has to be right motive.

17 July 1987

You seem to be a traveller still, for every letter comes from a different place; but I sense there's also somehow a different person writing them. You sound as if in many ways you are slightly disillusioned with many things. Perhaps you should write more on this subject.

"Without really knowing how" you say, you are sharing an apartment with a young lady. That, I suspect, will be the cause of several aspects of karma, if it has not already been so. I am simply thinking of what you told me happened the last time you were in Japan.

I wonder why you have not attempted to find one of those few small temples where some kind of good teaching still goes on under one of four really enlightened Zen masters.[3] If you can speak a little Japanese you will be in a better position than the usual Westerner. I feel that you have an opportunity to open some gateless gates in Japan. What is the weightless Buddha of Nara? Daito lived with beggars under the bridges of Kyoto for twenty years and came back into the world of Dharma and founded Daitokoji. There's something there for you; an insight that you should be able to perceive and two strong karmic fetters that you must break. You have travelled so far, do not waste energy and time on anything less than realising the truth in you!

Why do I feel that there's some doubt, something unresolved in your letter? Is the life of the monk really the way for you? For being a monk or not being a monk has nothing to do with passing through the gateless gate. Fighting constant inner battles to keep a lot of vows can take up a great deal of energy. The only reason for keeping vows of celibacy, like abstemiousness generally, is that otherwise we increase the fetters that blind and enslave us. Even guilt when we do not live up to our intentions becomes an extra guilt and a thief of energy; and to make that last great leap from the top of the hundred foot pole will take all you are. Everything must be sacrificed. There will be no dickering there, no bargaining with truth.

Are you intending to return to Hong Kong and Master Sik Sing Yat or has the time come to move on? There can come a time when one should seek out new aspects; test out the depth of one's realisation in new situations, with different teachers. It is a very old tradition to do this and I suspect Sik Sing Yat may have suggested this when he first sent you off to Korea.

Another thought; don't ever forget that realisation of the Buddha way is not different from its actualisation amid all the temptations of our everyday life. So although we may be disillusioned with weakness in ourselves and in our teachers we must still seek for that one true teacher who will be there when we are worthy. It's then the Dharma takes root. Something is waiting for you.

Your brother in the Dharma

Bill

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[1] The *hua t'ou* meaning 'head of thought' refers to the moment before a thought arises, usually a question often derived from a koan story. The method described here was much favoured by Master Hsu yun. *See* C. Luk, *Chan and Zen Teaching*, (London, Rider), First series, p 23. Also: *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation* , (London, Rider), 1964, p48. Master Sheng-Yen often speaks of the methods of Hsu yun in his books.

[2] Perhaps Rinchen (Great Jewel): the Chinese do not pronounce 'R's easily . Ed

[3] Bill recommended Roshi Mumon of Shofukoji Temple in Kobe and Roshi Kyodo Sochu at Ryutakuji Temple near Mount Fuji.

Flickering Lamp Hotel
(To Carol)

Drifting clouds and in the purple light
white sheep stand emboldened 'gainst the green;
a flock of birds falls from the sky
hitting a tree in a murmuration,
the starlings are here again
alltogether fizzing and whizzing on the field;
ravens nonchalantly glide past
casting an eye on the farm;
a magpie lands on the back of a sheep.
Up there wet buzzards wheel
and somewhere in the ivy clad oak
last night's owl slumbers.

Beyond the high moors and the pine plantations
up a long gorge beside a lengthening lake
forgotten in the hills
the Flickering Lamp Hotel hides in the woods,
ivy clad oaks and dripping birches,
moss covered boulders, rushing streams, hart's tongued ferns.
The building, ordinary, nothing special,
front door ajar where the undimmed lamp
shows the way in
from the sound of water over the high dam
the silence of the unmoving lake
and the far off hawk's cries.

Power places in Wales are mostly small
hidden in woods, secret valleys, up rocky paths,
through bogs and streams, not easily found in the mountains.
Cwm-y-saeson, heather drenched in blood
Old Meg's grave high on Plynlimon's side
Taliesen's rock overlooking the ocean,
Ffynon garreg and Llangasty lake.
Find them
if you can !
Far from the weekending Brummy voices and damp
chapels of a sunny afternoon
holy wells in hiding from the world

drip yet with passion, blood, the veiled
bright-eyed cunning of the Welsh
and the roaring music stronger than the wind.

JHC

FROM A MEDITATOR'S PRACTICE

John Senior

John Senior has sent us two short contributions arising from his practice. The first is "an attempt to extract the essence of the Diamond Sutra in a form which I can read back to myself before meditation. I find its reference to familiar things like gifts, teachings, happiness, particles of dust and the universe give it perhaps more richness than the profound but often abstract Heart Sutra."

The second is a visualisation for use in composing the mind prior to zazen practice or Mahamudra.

John Senior follows a traditional Tibetan style in this elegant composition. He originally thought of "a representation of what material scientists would call a change from a continuous to a discontinuous phase as from vinegar dispersed in oil to an oil in vinegar dispersion. The current version arose because nectar in tar has appropriate connotations and for me it works well as a tape recording played back to oneself. I hope others may find joy in its practice."

The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion

A Bodhisattva vows to lead all living beings to liberation in the full knowledge that in so doing not a single being will have been liberated, for not one self, person, living being or life span exists as an inherent object to be brought to the other shore.

He practises generosity without resort to such perceptions as giver, gift or recipient, seeing that their basis is illusory.

He sees that no objects of the mind, even the teachings of Buddha, have any independent existence.

Only because virtue and happiness exist as dependent objects of mind can we talk of virtue and happiness. The virtuous act of explaining this truth to others brings the greatest happiness.

Likewise there is no stream-enterer, no stream, no once returner, no returning, no fruit of Arhatship, no Arhat, for to think otherwise would be to be caught up in the ideas of self, person, a living being and life-span as inherent objects.

Nor is there any attainment, for to create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact to create a serene and beautiful Buddha field; that is why it can indeed be called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field.

This, the teaching of the Diamond Sutra, the highest, transcendent understanding, is not in fact a highest transcendent understanding. And this is precisely why it is the highest transcendent understanding.

Likewise with particles of dust and universes: there are no independent particles of dust and no such universes; that is why there are particles of dust and universes all in a dance of mutual dependence; and this too is merely called a dance.

When a Bodhisattva gives rise to the unequalled mind of awakening he does not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects or objects, for that mind is not caught up in anything: there is no attaining of anything called the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, which is therefore why this view is called the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind

The fruit of the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind is realised through the practice of all wholesome actions in the spirit of non-self non-person, non-living being, and non-life span. Such wholesome actions are merely called such; that is why they are indeed wholesome actions.

All composed things are like a dream
a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightening.
This is how to meditate upon them.
This is how to observe phenomena.

Transformation Visualisation

Visualise a sticky black tarry mass, and throughout this tarry mass myriads of tiny drops of nectar.

Think of this sticky black tarry mass as representing your own mind. Just as the nectar is imprisoned in the tarry mass, so the unliberated mind is scattered, stuck, attached, inflexible.

As you watch, drops of nectar move towards each other and coalesce to produce larger drops: first a few, then many more.

As the drops of coalescing nectar become larger and larger you experience increasing movement and freedom.

When the drops of nectar become large enough they all touch each other and begin joining up, displacing the black tar. The black tar contracts into drops, surrounded by the mobile purifying nectar.

The black tar breaks up into smaller and smaller droplets which drift harmlessly through the fluid nectar just as, once upon a time, had done the seeds of nectar.

Now completely purified, let the untroubled pristine mind
rest in clear bliss-emptiness.

KITCHEN GARDEN

Kitchen

one discovers
the nature of things -
the firm woolliness of apples,
garlic's sensual stickiness,
toughness of dried dates;
how intricately peppers are seeded
onions whorled;
the pungent juiciness of coriander,
ginger's woody sap -
all known and new -
chopping in the kitchen.

Garden

After such gales
in the garden wall
still one nasturtium flower!
Guess what?
a whole rainbow
one side to the other.

Helen Robinson

VISITING TIBET: FROM DHARAMSALA TO LHASA (1962-1998)

Elizabeth Crook ('Didi')

Being in my mid-sixties, I am no longer young. I often reflect on my past life, the people I have met, and the experiences I have had. So far, I feel I have had a lucky and happy life. A child in World War II, I was alerted early on to the fact that humanity can be evil and cruel, just as it is also kind and loving. I used to have childish dreams of going to Hitler and asking him to change his views and make peace with all peoples. I always had the feeling that I could have been born anywhere in the world and that it was a lucky chance that I had 'landed' in England which has not suffered occupation by a conquering power with the attendant brutalities and suffering. I felt that I might just as easily have been born Jewish in Germany or elsewhere in Europe. I sensed something of how terrifying that could have been; how I could never have felt safe and free from underlying fear. I have always pondered these things and felt flooded with relief and gratitude for a life in a democratic and generally kind society.

As I grew older I believed in the French adage "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance". I realised that it was not only in Europe that tyrannical things happened. I felt horror at the Korean War, Vietnam, South Africa, Palestine, Angola... Then one day at a meeting of the Buddhist Society in Cambridge, I first heard of Tibet and the plight of the Dalai Lama and his people.

Although I had originally trained as a nurse, I never had much confidence in my abilities and felt helpless in the face of so much oppression everywhere. Yet I dearly wished I could do something. I now realised that there was no way I could visit a dictator and ask him to stop what he was doing! But the idealism of my childhood remained dormant.

I heard of the Service Civil International, an organisation working for peace and reconciliation with its headquarters in Switzerland. This organisation had originated through the work of Swiss Quakers at the end of the First World War and young people of several nationalities, French, English, German, some of them former enemies, went to help rebuild villages in both France and Germany. Their motto was "Peace through deeds not words."

They were prepared to work anywhere and together with anyone, provided they did not take paid work away from anyone. Their own work was minimally financed with a travel allowance and a minute amount of pocket money. Workers lived with the people they were assisting. Such projects were commonly in emergency situations or where extra hands were required. Often the longer-term work was 'trouble shooting', investigating problems, preparing reports and attempting to attract funds and a workforce. The main aim was the creation of a community of people from different nations, particularly coming from those where there had been legacies of hatred and fear. This was not an aid-giving organisation such as the Peace Corps (which was then just starting). Exchanges of people to work in different countries were common and took place regardless of the economic situations in different lands. Thus Indians and Japanese would come to England and we would go to their countries.

Working in Dharamsala, 1962

I was so impressed with SCI that I eventually took a deep breath and volunteered to work with them. In 1962 I found myself in India travelling to a place called Dharamsala! I was met at McLeod Ganj (or 'Mudly ganj' as the Tibetans pronounced it) by Mrs Tsering Dolma, the elder sister of the Dalai Lama. We walked up the mountain for about half an hour because the only way to reach the 'nursery' of refugee children was by foot. Dharamsala nursery was a large house with a red tin roof surrounded by the dense forest of the Himalayan foothills. It could once have been beautiful, a British Raj house no doubt. But now it was rough and untidy and the 'garden' was simply hard packed earth.

There was a second house nearby. Some one thousand refugees, mainly children, lived there. Two hundred boys slept in one room, arranged with bunk beds all around the walls and with mattresses covering the floor. The boys slept crosswise to a mattress seven on each one of them. The girls slept in smaller rooms in similar conditions.

Overcrowding was rife and of course infections spread like wildfire. Tibetan children were used to the relatively germ-free conditions of the Tibetan plateau and were vulnerable to the diseases of the Indian plains especially while travelling across them to reach Dharamsala. They had no immunity to the diseases of a hot climate. Many children died during a measles outbreak and from hepatitis from infected water (I also eventually got jaundice while I was there). Most children suffered from scabies, eye and ear infections, worms, dysentery. Many got pneumonia and other respiratory infections.

Didi Crook with Tibetan Refugee Boys

For a brief time there was no doctor, but for most of the time a Swiss Red Cross doctor lived down the mountain and she could be visited with a sick child. There was a severe shortage of drugs and medicines. We had to work within the sad realisation that there were limits to what was possible in the short term. In the longer term the Ockenden Venture, SCI, Swiss Aid to Tibetans, Save the Children Fund, and the Indian Government gradually offered help and children moved to other establishments (some to Europe) which reduced the crowding to manageable proportions.

My time at Dharamsala overlapped for a while with the presence of Doris Murray, a teacher sent by SCI to help with educating children. She was an enormous help to me, especially on my first arrival. Unlike myself she had been in similar working conditions previously and had built up her confidence about medical matters even though that was not her official work. I regret that we lost contact later on.

In those days no one went hungry. The Indian Government was very supportive. We had plenty of rice and vegetables. Yet, when I left, I realised I had not eaten meat, fish, eggs, cheese or fruit for a long while. I do remember the Post Office man in McLeod Ganj giving me a fried egg on toast to eat one day when I went there to buy stamps. That is India for you!

The Indian Gadi people, semi-nomads who wander the Western Himalayas with their great flocks of herds and goats, used to visit with meat for sale. This was usually a live animal. I loved the Tibetans for their response to these visits. As Buddhists they do not kill sentient beings and this was strictly observed in Dharamsala. One day they purchased a ram in order to save its life. It became one of many pets and I was often awoken by the loud crash of the ram's horns on my door, and the animal would come galloping in with a loud baa-baa-ing!

When I myself fell ill with jaundice, I remained in bed waiting for it to pass. I thought that eating some liver might help me recover. When I heard that some Gadi people were outside offering dead meat for sale (chops, offal etc.) I enquired whether on health grounds the Tibetans would feel it alright to get me some liver. This they did but they had no idea how to cook it. The whole liver was boiled in one piece and proudly presented to me on a plate. It was delicious! When I was very ill, Mrs Tsering Dolma allowed me to sleep in the Buddha room where butter lamps were always burning. It was so peaceful there.

When the Tibetan doctor (an 'amchi'), with whom I had been trying to develop a good liaison, heard that I was ill, he came and asked if I would accept his medicine. I agreed. He told me that I was very ill (and indeed I was very yellow) but that by a certain date the illness would be gone from my body. In fact, on that day, I went for a check-up at Kangra Mission Hospital and they confirmed that there was now no trace of the illness.

I learned how important it was to have good relations with other professionals including those from another culture. There was a need to drop the idea that only Western ideas were 'right'. The Red Cross doctor had become very angry with the lamas who had visited our little hospital room where the youngest and most sick children were. The lamas were chanting mantras and wafting smoking juniper branches in the air as incense. Understandably the doctor felt that smoke was bad for children with pneumonia so she sent the lamas abruptly away with no explanations. As a result of this ham-fisted action the young Tibetan girls who tended the children daily began to hide some sick children from the doctor. They had a greater faith in the lamas of their own culture than in Western approaches to health care. This led to serious situations.

Mrs Tsering Dolma was most concerned lest Westerners who occasionally visited showed too much affection to the children. This seemed hard but her point was that the children had to come to terms with their reality. She felt that for a child mourning the loss of its parents to be given loving care and affectionate hugs for five minutes, only to watch the departing back of a visitor soon after, never to return, the experience would be too painful and best prevented. Yet my heart was broken several times when I watched a small figure searching here and there and then running away to the mountain crying again and again "Ama Ama!" (Mother, mother). Once I awoke to find that a thin little boy had crept silently into my room and lay asleep on the floor beside me. I had been treating him the day before, and I believe he was desperate for mothering.

Mrs Tsering Dolma in Dharamsala

Many of these children were orphans, their parents having died during the Chinese occupation of Tibet, or they had been sent out of Tibet by parents who had stayed but felt their children would have a greater chance of life if they went to India. Other children did have parents in India but who were often working under such hard conditions, such as chipping stones for road making in the mountains, that they could not have their children with them. All Tibetans would wish themselves or their children to be near the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama lived a short walk away from us along the mountainside. I sometimes visited his place to meet Mrs Tsering Dolma and his niece. At one ceremony I was blessed by the Dalai Lama with a *khatag* (white scarf). Another time Mrs Tsering Dolma gave me a holiday by taking me with her to Dalhousie where we went horse riding together. I felt very privileged. When interpretation was necessary I had the help of a young girl who had recently left school. Her name was Kesang and I have only recently realised from reading the *Free Tibet* magazine that she was Kesang Takla, the recent representative of the Dalai Lama in London.

Mrs Tsering Dolma leads HH the Dalai Lama on a visit to the Boys Home

Pilgrimage to Kailash, 1997

After four years abroad I returned to England and realised that I was more concerned with social problems than I was with medical ones. I retrained as a social worker. Now I have officially retired and my life begins to feel somewhat self-indulgent. When I heard about my brother's planned pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, the famous Tibetan holy mountain hidden in a remote area of high altitude behind the Himalayas in western Tibet almost due north of Dharamsala, I planned to make this into a personal one-month sponsored walk. The pilgrimage would take us on foot to Tibet right over the high ridge of the Himalayas by way of the formidable Lhagna-la Pass in Humla, west Nepal and then on again around the mountain. Using my Christmas card list I managed to raise £1330 for this project. I would have to complete the designated journey solely on foot.

In fact the trek proved unexpectedly strenuous as the Tibetan winter arrived earlier than expected. Temperatures in camp were well below zero on many nights and we often walked through snow blizzards especially during our attempt to go around the mountain. I had to conquer very real fears on precipitous snow covered tracks, altitude exhaustion and fatigue. We failed to circumambulate the mountain because of heavy snow, even the local Tibetans refusing to take their yaks around to help us due to the danger of them breaking legs in the snow-covered gaps between boulders. Two incautious Germans, attempting to go round without a guide, died on the mountain while we were there.

After our attempt we visited a Rimpoche, the abbot of a small monastery on the route back through Nepal, who told us that it was the fortitude of our attempt rather than succeeding in easy sunny weather that was the important thing. Even people of great wisdom had a hard time on the mountain, he told us!

It was good to see the nomads of the Tibetan plateau with their strange spider-like tents, their herds of yaks and goats. Their way of being seemed to epitomise the freedom which should be the right of all Tibetan peoples. If it had not been for the occasional Chinese police post we could have experienced this wilderness area as being quite free of foreign influence. Except at the border crossing, we did not meet any Chinese on our journey. Yet, at the ancient ruined city of Tsaparang, we ran into a Government party. One of the Chinese officials looked pleased to see me and asked me from where I came. I asked him the same question in return. He replied "China". Without thinking, I said "Are you visiting Tibet or do you live here?" From the way I asked the question he must have understood that I thought of Tibet and China as two countries. I myself had not realised the implication of my question until I saw him avert his eyes, drop his head to one side and, without replying, walk on.

Trek to Tibet, 1998

Recently, in 1998, I again had an opportunity to visit Tibet, trekking there through the late monsoon rain of Nepal through forests infested with leeches. We used the base camp at Mount Everest on the site from which Mallory and Irvine had left for their attempt on the summit, never to be seen again. That mountain is huge! The vast ice wall took my breath away. It is important at such places to stop to feel the 'spirit of place' that dwells there. So many make so much noise in their chatter that they never feel it. There is a silence in all such places - one night near Shigatse in Tibet I looked up at such a moment and counted fourteen shooting stars in the space of five minutes.

Once over the mountains into Tibet the sun shone again from fresh clear skies; the puffy balls of white clouds, so familiar from Tibetan art, casting ever-moving shadows across the vast ranges of a brown, desert-like landscape. From the frontier we took a four-wheel drive vehicle and visited small monasteries en route for Lhasa, Shigatse and other places far to the east of our previous journey. I found myself getting increasingly depressed. Whereas last time I had experienced the warmth of the Tibetans and their sense of hope as the monasteries were being restored and monks returning (albeit with Chinese authorisation), this year, nearer Lhasa, everything felt very different. Even the villagers seemed keen only to beg for money, directly asking for it, and seemed to be interested in us only for that reason. The directness of human contact felt missing here. The children followed us begging even into the holy places and no monk came out to greet us. Even the larger monasteries at Sakya and Shigatse had the same cold feeling.

What makes the centre and the West of Tibet feel so different today? I do not know. Have the Chinese been more brutal in the central areas or are Western tourists to blame? Maybe too many tourists have offered money to villagers and children. On this main tourist route under strict Chinese control maybe begging is the only contact possible. Or was I myself different this year?

Even so it was moving to visit Lhasa. In Dharamsala, all those years ago, the children had painted pictures of the Potala again and again. Now I was actually seeing the Potala for myself. Like Everest it is huge. It felt quite wrong that while I could walk those endless corridors, see the meditation rooms, and enter his living quarters, the Dalai Lama himself was unable to live in his own house. It was the same in the Summer Palace which he loved so much.

There are many Chinese living around Lhasa. Chinese farmers and business people outnumber the Tibetans. We stayed in old Lhasa not far from the Jhokang, but even this hotel was run by Chinese with Chinese staff. I felt most joy in and around the Jhokang monastery. Here the Tibetans wore their own clothing, hairstyles and jewellery with pride. The place was full of people practising their devotions, prostrating before the great front doors, filing along the corridors murmuring mantras and worshipping before the main figure of Buddha. This is a 7th century statue damaged in the Cultural Revolution. Before he died, the late Panchen Lama found the missing upper part of the statue in China and brought it back. Artist monks have now come to begin repainting the statue in gold. Butter lamps burnt brightly, monks were buzzing around smiling, communicating easily with one another and with us. There was an enthusiasm in the air. Once more I experienced the warmth of the Tibetans and began for the first time to relax. A group of monks began passing me on their way to bless the repainting of the statue. But then my sinking heart noticed that they were headed by a Chinese policeman in full uniform. Even here, in the depths of the Tibetan's holiest monastery, the necessary stamp of authorisation was being made only too apparent.

WELSH MANDALA

Akshobya.
Dark light before dawn
no wind and in the silence
a fox barking on the hill;
suddenly in the candle lit room
the cold landscape unfurls
invisible rocks, burrows of badgers
trolling the turf for bulbs and insects
the starlit dome, dusk before dawn
Blue immensity.

Ratnasambhava.
Sunrise, far to the SSE
almost at the point of turning
a midwinter sky lined by the tracery of trees,
northern thrushes search the drab field
four, five steps in a run, stop,
look-about and on again
occasionally the unwary worm
sun blinking sky bell chanting
in the cold season.

Old lady in the village shop
hairstyle not seen in a hundred years
dropping in for her 'weekly'
emerges from the hills, her man
the shepherd, dour, grey as the rocks,
immovable, sunray hidden in his heart
drove the landrover, mud covered,
sheep shit and collie in the back.
"G'morning" I say
"G'morning to you"- they turn smiling
extraordinary innocence
in their eyes.

Amitabha.
Cars, lorries, sheep liners moving up and down the road
stopping at pubs for a cheery one
where the coals glow, damp logs fizz
mid-daying the sun laced light
on the grey-grass hills
dark firs sentinel beside the farms
cheerful sheep eyeing the black foraging birds
red god firing a thousand hearths.

Today, Mrs Sims, the Post Office lady
bustles around in the rain to open the door.
"Horrible weather!" she says,
"Starting a cold too -"
Two letters for Poland - I tell her
"Poland is it then?" she eyes them doubtfully
"Where's that then? Europe is it?"
"Not quite - a bit beyond - but will be someday!"
"Ah - yes!" she finds it in the book,
triumphantly "43 pee then it is
twice over."

Amoghasiddhi.
Already in the early afternoon
light fades grizzling the land no shadows now,
A giant owl perches on a fencepost - no
just a fencepost really,
presences swarm in the groves
the crannies of the hills,
the old Welsh spooks, the powers
reaching the not-quite fearful heart
greening in the dark light
fading, yellow flames
in the village houses far below.

JHC December 1998

OBITUARY: BARRY PALMER

Among the many who have come to the Maenllwyd over the years we count a number of social work professionals of the highest distinction. What brings them to the heart of Wales often seems mysterious. It is as if in these caring professions there is no adequate sharing among the professionals themselves. In a sort of loneliness they have to seek elsewhere and it is to the hills that they come. Barry Palmer and John Broadbent both belong in their distinctive ways to this category. They came a few times and that was enough. They both tell me their lives were changed by the experience. They had no need to take up Zen or Buddhism. But the shift began. The 'Who am I' question had happened and that was enough. Here John, formerly a professor of English at Cambridge and now an artist with a recent exhibition of painting to his credit, writes of his long association with Barry whose early loss is a tragedy for many. To celebrate his life we present two of his accomplished poems chosen for us by Jane Aron. (Ed)

Barry Palmer died on 29 October 1998 after a series of heart attacks, aged 63. He introduced me to Maenllwyd. We did not coincide there but it opened up both our lives into deeper streams.

Barry read science at Oxford and then theology at Cambridge with a view to the priesthood, for he had had early experience of evangelical Christianity. He decided against the church but went to work with the Rev. Bruce Reed at the Grubb Institute in London, which deploys the Tavistock-style study of group relations, often within religious settings such as churches, charities and caring organisations. This suited his cast of mind and he stayed there for half a career, working with the interaction of systems theory with psychoanalysis which drives the Tavistock method. It was, though, a time of mainly backroom activity.

On first acquaintance Barry seemed undernourished, as well as diffident; you could find this irritating in situations that called for banging about. Then you would begin to recognise the fine inner balance, his independent judgement, and, especially after Maenllwyd, the bravery that led him into new work and new love.

In his mid-40s everything began to change, some of it with the painful awkwardness of a chrysalis breaking open. Who can account for these changes? I don't even know what order they came in. Explanations are given in studies of the male life-cycle by such writers as Gould, Levinson and Erikson. I think most often of John Crook's take on Erikson in a chapter called 'The dialectics of change' in his book *The Evolution of Human Consciousness*: an inability to face crises produces either a foreclosure in which the crisis is denied or a moratorium consisting in a persistent but low-profile identity problem that remains unresolved. The moratorium reminds me of the character in a Jacobean tragedy who is stabbed on stage and says, "I have caught an everlasting cold". Is it the misery of the persistent cold that forces change? Peter Marris, in his great, neglected book *Loss and Change* (Routledge 1974), writes: "revolutions... happen when the meaning of human life has already disintegrated... from contradictions and anomalies... pervading society with a troubled, inexplicit sense of loss..."; thus the characters in a Chekhov play seem to prefigure the Russian revolution in the whole texture of their lives.

At any rate, Barry found his way to Maenllwyd. After that, he left the Grubb and set himself up as an independent consultant to institutions. This was risky but he was remarkably successful, packed with work to the last. One of the contracts of which he was most proud was with a synagogue community facing dissension. At the same time he was consultant in Dublin on the training of Roman Catholic priests. He began to write more poetry, some of it of high quality; and together with Colin Evans of Cardiff, and Jon Cook of East Anglia, and myself, he developed creative

writing workshops. He began to write more professional articles, and a book with Nano McCaughan. He separated from his marriage and embarked on a new partnership, to be tested by differences of distance, language, occupation; they overcame.

Within all this, and in a similar state myself, I asked him to join the staff of DUET, the first of a series of experiential workshops designed to help lecturers in English make radical shifts in their teaching. The workshop was experiential: the lecturers became students. One of the strands was a series of group sessions run on Tavistock lines - no agenda, but an interpreting consultant. Needless to say, there was tension and some resentment among the lecturers; and the workshop was scary to run. The group sessions especially needed firm control, and clarity about objectives.

Barry supervised them, with great success, complete calm and no casualties. His combination of science with humanities gave him credibility with the academics; but real authority came with his being so notably an intellectual person - even though not an academic he was for ever scrutinising. David Punter, professor of English at Stirling, friend and colleague of us both, has written about Barry: "What comes back to me most strongly at the moment is a facial expression: a curiously interrogatory tilting of the lip, as though to say, 'Good Lord - can you really believe that life is like that?' But that makes it sound scornful, and I mean the reverse, a kind of informed incredulity at the things people might get up to, or believe about themselves; but always without any sense that I, Barry, of course, know better than that; despite what was obvious, really, which was that he did know a lot more about people than most of us."

As he lay in his last bed in a stressed London hospital he made notes about the different vocabularies that nurses and doctors on the ward used to describe the same medical events in a patient; and wondered how that difference of language might mirror boundaries higher up in the system of the NHS. Much of his professional work was with health trusts, housing, the Probation Service, and with socialwork teams and managers, striving always to clarify, elucidate, encouraging confused people to look at the enterprise as a whole and to define exactly their own role within it. Behind that, he was himself in analysis, and counselling, for many years; and he attended to his own development by studying with a colleague the meaning that Lacanian analysis might have for systems theory, and by meeting with a co-mentor once a week, or once a month. To say nothing of his devout practice of meditation.

There is something in all this perhaps too good to be true; but it did not feel like that. I have seen him at the end of his tether, brought low, at a loss; laughing and laughing on a sailing trip (he could not sail, nor barely swim) which took us to Ithaca, the island of Odysseus; and then writing a wonderful poem based on a story at the end of the Odyssey. A god - or was it Tiresias? - told the ageing voyager to take a well-carpentered oar and carry it so far inland that the people there would never have seen the sea. Eventually he would meet a man who said, "Why are you carrying a winnowing-fan over your shoulder?" To that place death would come peacefully to him. When he sent me the poem, I painted a picture about it; but I had forgotten the story and in my picture Odysseus plants the oar in the earth and its blade bursts into flames. At his funeral one of the other poems that Jane Aron asked us to read aloud began and ended like a koan. It's coming up below...

John Broadbent.

TWO POEMS ON DEPARTING

Barry Palmer

The Three Sages

I asked three sages:
What happens when we die?

The first said: when we die
the spirit strikes off the fetters of
the flesh.
Beneath the stone we thrust
through darkness,
mole beneath wire and tower,
and beyond
the perimeter, make our break to liberty.

The second said: we sleep
until the time capsule of our acts
is opened, sifted, judged, and all we gave
is gold, and all we hoarded, ash,
and now is ever love or ever loss.

The third said: when we die
the body ceases selfing. Nothing
goes nowhere. Nature knew herself
in us, and knows herself in others.
Where does the fist go from the
unclenched hand ?

At a loss

He slipped away unnoticed in a low
black car,
With no luggage, only some flowers,
Without his cough, in the failing sunlight
of this November afternoon.

We have sung quaint songs to
glassy saints
And benefactors' urns, grasping
the old tunes
Like a handrail in fog. He has spared us
The plush obscenity of the crematorium.

Now the men from the market and
the golf club
Stand, stiff and helpless in their
dark overcoats.
The tears stand in the wings, awaiting
the cue
That never comes, to step on and fall.

Death is a street corner where the names
On the signs, as on these stones,
have faded.
No one asks the way, knowing
Each of us is a stranger here himself.

RETREAT REPORT

We are grateful to retreat participants for writing so honestly about their experiences on retreat. This gives us valuable help in understanding the retreat process. These reports also provide some insight into the difficulties and benefits of attending a retreat. We continue to publish these accounts anonymously. We regret that we are unable to publish everything that we receive.

PINE TREE IN THE SKY A Western Zen Retreat January 1999

I arrived at Maenllwyd, in the deepest despair I have ever known - the 'dark night of my soul'. Having been to an Introductory Ch'an Retreat a few months previously, I had some dim awareness that this was a place where I could safely be, that is, be allowed to be, in that dark night.

And indeed, I was in a place, and with people, who accepted my existence well before I could.

I had spoken to someone months ago, about the risk of Buddhism seeming to offer me another way to be 'saved' - a 'cosy duvet' as they called it. These idealisations of mine (sexual beauty, love, admiration, motherhood, a man, philosophies, psychotherapies, professional responsibilities and status) were all ways in the pursuit of safety; places in which to be saved from suffering by being needed. None of them were there in the dark night.

But neither, as John asked me, were there the judgements. A space had opened before me. A space in which just to be.

Over the days, in this space, I began to experience not having to justify my existence.

Even as I let go of myself, not knowing; I found the ground there. It held me up. I no longer had to hold myself up or to hold myself together. And as I allowed my focus to be inward, I experienced myself (my body, my limbs, and right out to my finger tips) from the inside out, not the other way around.

I could let myself be -

And I could let others be.

No-one had to be something for me.

I didn't have to be 'anything'. Didn't have to know, to solve this mystery. Just to BE in this world. Just another expression of this universe. And Oh, there too, the tall, beautiful pine in the deep, clear blue of sky.

There too someone weeping with gratitude.

Someone else uproariously laughing, perhaps with absurdity and relief.

Coming and going. Being there.

There too, someone avoided till the last, giving me so much.

I left, no longer feeling braced against failure. But opened to fulfilment.

And just before I left - I think I felt the difference between needing the guidance of a teacher wiser than myself, and needing someone or an 'ism' to save me. It is the latter which sinks me in my need to judge and feel judged - to justify my existence -

Of being who I am!

BOOK REVIEW

LANGUAGE AND FREEDOM: MEANING IN ZEN

Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*. Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions 13. Cambridge University Press (1998), 227 pages.

What is the place of Zen in contemporary thought, the relation of Buddhist metaphysics to philosophy and the value of ancient texts to thinking people today? These and related questions form the subject matter of this intelligent, subtle and provoking book. Dale S. Wright, Professor of Religious Studies, Occidental College, Los Angeles, provides a thought provoking read especially for those of us concerned with problems of representing Buddhism, and Zen in particular, within Western culture today.

Modern and post-modern perspectives

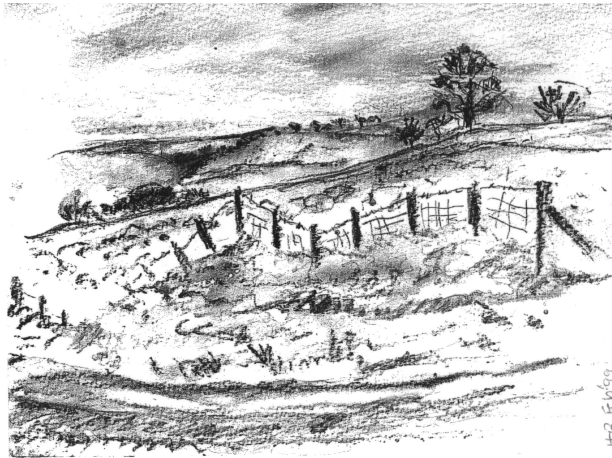
The starting point of Wright's argument asserts that there is a profound difference between the worlds of post-modern and modern thought. This requires texts written by Western interpreters of Buddhism prior to the 'post-modern turn' to be themselves re-interpreted in the light of current thinking. Without such a process the meaning of Buddhism in the contemporary context remains unclear and inclined to irrelevance. Wright chooses the work of John Blofield, in particular his translation of the *Transmission of Mind* by the great ninth century Chinese Master Huang-po (Huang-po Ch'uan Hsin Fa Yao), as exemplary within modern scholarship and provides a contemporary reinterpretation not only of Blofield but also of Huang-po himself.

John Blofield was a bold, spiritual adventurer who, after leaving Cambridge, went out to China in the 1930s and immersed himself in Ch'an culture and practice. Although deep insight appears to have eluded him, he became richly familiar with the Ch'an outlook and its textual documentation. Later in life he studied Tibetan Buddhism and lived in Bangkok. His translations from the Chinese are outstanding and popular while his autobiography makes fascinating reading. Blofield, Wright tells us, was a romantic very much in the style of the thirties. His approach to Zen was undoubtedly influenced by its earlier representation in the West by D. T. Suzuki whose 'spin' on the subject fitted the inclinations of the time. This viewpoint implied that 'oriental' perspectives, the mysterious East, could offer immediate access to a spiritual understanding that underlay all religions. This universal basis of spirituality was seen as culture-free and fundamental, a 'perennial philosophy' as Aldous Huxley was to call it. With its emphasis on direct experience beyond words and scriptures, Zen was interpreted as a major route to this experiencing of the real, the various terms for which usually began with a capital letter. Literature of this sort soon became challenged by 'scientific' historical analyses of texts in their socio-historical contexts which, as with Biblical criticism, adopted a sceptical, rationalist tone by-passing much of the inherent psychological insight of these writings. Such opposition still continues today when rational scholarship confronts the now often severely 'dumbed down' idealisms of New Age romantics.

Contemporary thought reveals that this romantic-scientific opposition was itself an expression of 'modernity', a schizoid world-view, which can now itself be examined in the context of the culture giving rise to it. This fresh, 'post-modern' perspective emphasises the contextuality of all philosophy. Whereas the "romantic quest" was to "behold spirit directly without mediation" through culture, so too did the scientific endeavour attempt to find an interpretation of history independent of context. The realisation that both perspectives share a common root in an avoidance of contextuality, turns the focus on how that root actually shaped the ideas of the time. Wright argues that any reading of a text cannot be free of its contextualisation within an inevitably culture bound, world-view of the reader. This insight leads us to question the very acts of reading, understanding and meaning-making. Blofield's interpretative bias itself needs deconstruction before we can again have a go at Huang-po himself. We

then approach Huang-po in the knowledge that we too are doing this within the context of our own time, through our own coloured spectacles.

Wright shows convincingly that such an approach fulfils the requirement of Buddhism's own commitment to an understanding of the inter-relatedness, the co-dependence or interdependence of all things and processes. The co-dependence of text, a reader's understanding and culture are all matters that reveal the prescience of this fundamental viewpoint. To start with, the text Blofield translated so well hardly consists of Huang-po's own certificated words. The text has gone through innumerable re-workings right from the start and each one of these reflects the perspectives and prejudices of the time. To get back to Huang-po himself, as Blofield thought he was doing, is a very uncertain process which, however, does not mean that fundamental perspectives in Buddhism's history are not present in the work attributed to him and highly relevant to us now



How do we read Zen?

A major paradox in reading Zen is the constant admonition against reading itself, rough treatment of valued texts, even of the Sutras, and the suggestion that were one to meet the Buddha on the road the right thing to do would be to kill him. Yet these viewpoints are themselves presented in texts, in language, in often authoritative argument. We understand these remarks as criticism of a scholarly, book-worming, dry and lifeless, academic Buddhism that failed to read out of the books the spirit of life itself. The Master 'reads' his pupils, not merely the texts, he 'reads' the circumstances of the times. "When reading becomes a metaphor in this sense, it is synonymous with 'interpretation' and beyond that, with 'understanding' itself" (p40). What then is an understanding of Zen?

When the rich, textual products of one culture infiltrate another it is inevitable that their 'understanding' is influenced by whatever comprehension of its subject matter is already prevalent. On arriving in China, Buddhism was largely interpreted through the prior understandings of Taoism. The same process is operating in the arrival of Buddhism in the West today. When we read Zen stories in which, in answer to a perfectly reasonable question such as "What is the meaning of Zen?" the master tweaks a nose or beats the unfortunate questioner with his staff, we tend to be bewildered or to imply some hidden sagacity to the master. We may then apply to the story an explanation in conventional terms with which we feel at ease. The fact is we simply lack the understanding of context, the behavioural code, which underlay such an interaction. Only through familiarity and reflection can we begin to perceive the verbal and non-verbal communication that is happening here.

Following Austin and Derrida, Wright remarks that, "utterances can only be understood within actual speech situations where shared assumptions enable interlocutors to make sense of each other" (p48). And the same is true of situations, for these are always expressions of on-going culture. Interpretation

is always based on pre-understanding and on the working out or floating with the various possibilities that this implies for interpretation. The implication here then is that any word, concept or story is 'empty' of any precise, culture-free meaning and is always relative to context. Once again the Buddhist emphasis on the implications of interdependence emerges clearly.

The absence of 'original meanings' or 'objectivity' in these texts becomes clearer when we examine their frequent use of allegory. When Huang-po is asked a complex question relating to some folk story about previous lives he replies by interpreting the story as representing the mind and its intentions or quest. In these texts we may see that the self who is interpreting or understanding them is "not just the subject of the activity but also the object as well" (p61). The 'Great Matter' of these texts is the self, the self who is doing the reading. When in reading Huang-po we eventually confront ourselves and our pre-understanding we sense "our immersion in the open space" of language (p62).

While Blofield often adds footnotes, today these only clarify Blofield's own interpretative stance based in his own cultural preconceptions. Today we may be more aware of the simple relativity of our interpretations and such a view must then itself be subject to reflection. Essentially this is what Wright means by the 'philosophical meditations' of his title. It is indeed a self confrontation to realise there is no end to this!

The language of Zen

Our discussion leads of course immediately to the question of Zen language. The importance of language in Zen is often ridiculed in the texts, yet again this is a device pointing to the limitations of conventional uses of the formal or academic language of Buddhist description. There is a theme to be discovered here which is open to discourse in surprising ways because it has no solidified meaning - the relativity and flux of life itself is being pointed to and it is usually the tool of language that is used in such pointing.

Yet Zen rhetoric takes many forms. The language of Zen in Huang-po's time made use of ordinary speech intensified to a special purpose. The coded usage here had to be learned through the experience of being in a monastery, in having contact with the users among whom the masters were pre-eminent. "Words give rise to the experience and then issue from it immediately and spontaneously. 'Awakening' has not occurred in the absence of language, but fully in its presence" (p84).

The moment of awakening is a rhetorical occasion when the words of one speaker elicit a response in another. Wright classifies the varying forms of this rhetoric: the use of strange and puzzling expressions; direct pointing in which gesture rather than words is the means of transmission; the use of silence where words might have been expected; the employment of sudden disruptive even seemingly aggressive behaviour. All of these means are part of a 'language' with a clear intentionality - to effect transmission. For practitioners, language is therefore both the trap of samsara and the mechanism of release. Practitioners "sought a transformed rhetoric of 'live words' and 'turning words' through which awakening might be evoked." Some great masters, Huang-po and Lin-chi, were so powerful in the use of these methods that almost all 'faltered' before them. The master cut through convention so drastically that interlocutors were often unable to find any response - and yet through being thrown out of conventional language they might suddenly perceive its emptiness.

Wright remarks, "The Zen master is one who no longer seeks solid ground, who realises that all things and situations are supported, not by firm ground and solid self-nature, but rather by shifting and contingent relations... he no longer needs to hold his ground in dialogue, and therefore does not falter when all grounds give way... His role in dialogue is to reflect in a selfless way whatever is manifest or can become manifest in the moment" (p101).

Commonly the spoken words merely reflect the actuality of the moment, words and actions are contingent on occasion, they fit or reflect the interconnections in play and neither attempt to impose upon it nor to explain nor describe it. They co-emerge with it.

An important feature of a Zen story or koan is thus the 'turning word' upon which the point of the event 'turns'. There are no fixed words of this kind. They arise in the moment and one of the tasks of a master is to realise and release them. These 'live words' act as direct pointers but to what? They cause the interlocutor or the practitioner to focus so unnaturally on a phrase, a word or a story that it opens out of the conventional, common-sense relations of the actual linguistic usage, thus breaking the hold that ordinary language has upon the mind. When this operates on self-understanding, the positioning of self concern within its habitual understanding is broken and, falling both into and out of relativity, its own emptiness is seen in a radical reframing.

Views of history in Zen study and Zen texts

John Blofield assumed that Huang-po spoke from a direct perception of truth that was pre-linguistic or extra-linguistic and that he would therefore not have an interest in history. In fact Chinese Zen, and indeed Huang-po himself, was always deeply concerned with matters of lineage and the accuracy with which transmission occurred. There is a vast literature that concerns itself with the historicity of transmission, much of which is myth or legend but which has a important function in legitimating practice.

These lineage records are essentially family genealogies of transmission complete with anecdotes, exemplary stories, methods of practice and rituals. Contrasting lineages are like branches of a tree which draw their strength from presence of the root. The ahistorical nature of experiential presence in Zen practice is thus always embedded in the narratives of the lineage. Enlightened identity is expressed in lineage identity and may include the occasional denial of the latter's importance for the sake of further transmission.

Contemporary historical study searches for the actual course of events and for documentation that may reveal the actual, 'true' history of Zen in China and Japan. From this perspective, lineage histories are simply bad history full of irrelevance, faulty timings, endless revisionism. The problem these lineages present for the practitioner in the present time are of a different nature. By idealising a certain approach, by a fixation of method and ritual, by an attempt at enlightenment as a resurrection of a particular moment in time, by a desire for unity and a specific identity in Zen, the capacity for a flexible relationship with the contingency of the moment - this moment - can be denied or made very difficult.

Yet, as Wright observes, a converse application of the Zen viewpoint to modern historical practices reveals the latter's stance as supposedly tradition-free and representing simple facticity yet lacking philosophical perspective and social responsibility. Such Western historians often fail in awareness of the extent to which historical study is reflexive to our time. This often comes about through a misuse of the natural science model in attempting to account for the origin and drift of human values.

"...both the Zen Buddhist and the modern, Western historical tradition deny implicitly some dimension of the impermanence of history, the radical mutability of temporal movement" (p117).

The encounter between traditional Zen historiography and Western methodology is already happening and as each begins to inform the other, particular traditions of historical reflection with contrasting purposes "may become... richer, more comprehensive and... applicable to cultural ends which are themselves open to similar transformation" (p118).

Exploring freedom and constraint

The Western idea of freedom dating back to the European 'Enlightenment' is closely tied to the significance of individualism in Western culture. There is always a dualism here, the individual is marked by his or her differentiation from others in society through the development of a unique identity relatively free from social coercion through self-possessed power and maturity. Liberation is conceived as the attainment of such distinction. This individualism plays a role in Western culture at a social psychological level to an extreme that differs markedly from Asian values with their greater concern with mutuality and social conformity.[1] In the West we have a dualism in our understanding of freedom that parallels the notion of a spiritual dimension independent from cultural constraint and definition. It

was therefore easy for Westerners to interpret Zen enlightenment in terms of a liberation from social constraint into a transcendent spiritual dimension providing a sort of ego-free power. And indeed Zen texts are full of statements that may be read in this manner. With a naive but conscious guile or perhaps unconsciously, D. T. Suzuki promoted such a Euro-friendly vision and thereby laid an acceptable groundwork for the Western fascination with Zen in its romantic form. Like other Japanese teachers, his views expressed within Japanese culture were far more traditional and authoritarian.[2] Beat Zen, Jack Kerouac, and many Western Zen romantics continued this illusory preoccupation which has, even so, undoubtedly eased Zen Buddhism into Western culture in much the same way that Taoistic interpretation assisted the entry of Indian Buddhism into China.

A more considered examination of Huang-po and other Ch'an writers of the classical period reveals however a much more carefully nuanced idea of freedom. Statements that appear to promote individualism are carefully hedged about with requirements to obey the monastic rules, to conform to monastic ways of life, to imitate time-honoured practices, to obey the master and never to query the inheritance of the lineage as represented by him. The implication is that the practitioner submit himself to a powerful authority. And yet it is within this very submission that freedom may be found and the rules discounted. Freedom here is certainly not autonomy, nor is it the throwing off of constraint. Nor does this come to an end with the acknowledgement of enlightenment. When the enlightened master Huang-po is asked why he still bows before the Buddha although he has reached non-attachment, Huang-po simply remarks that this is his custom. Lin chi having slapped his teacher, Huang-po, in the moment of realisation, then settles down to study under the master for many years.

Wright emphasises the point that freedom is always relative to some form of constraint. In the Zen texts, terms such as cutting off, severing, exhausting, breaking through, are related to obstructions, screening, holding, fixtures, limitations, fixed perspectives, enclosure or bondage. Yet the result is not an independence from the monastery or a separation of individual from custom. Rather freedom is found within constraint. There is a triangulation in play here, independence and dependence are transcended in a third stance involving an emancipation from both through forms of inner renunciation. This comes about through an acceptance of limitation on individual will "in order to make possible forms of freedom beyond those surrendered" (p123). And yet within this very emancipation the monk continues in his personal dependence and independence.

Dependence on the master may be seen as a form of imitation through which a process with effects visible in the teacher emerges also in the practitioner. Imitation here is not copying, which is roundly condemned in Ch'an writings, but rather a following of a path revealed by another in order to make one's own discovery in the course of time. Again, the abandonment of the Sutras is not a rejection of them but rather a digestion of their meaning to an extent that they need no longer be consulted. It is the

realisation of the essential 'emptiness' of phenomena that allows the 'burning' of the Sutras or the destruction of images and pagodas. The realisation that "form is emptiness and emptiness is precisely form", leads to the insight that monastic life and practice are empty of any objective value, are not anything of fixed merit and that, in the recognition of emptiness, there is no constraint in such a life either. Yet there is a path that has led to this insight, a path that seems at first sight the very antithesis of freedom. In the abandonment of self as independent, the interdependence of self with all things becomes clear. Within the insight of this renunciation any mode of being then becomes equal to any other.

Furthermore, the mode of realisation will not be of a fixed nature. Individuals will make their own discovery out of the uniqueness of their own experience, practice and karmic constraint. As time goes along and society itself changes so the mode of realisation shifts. In Ch'an texts we find old modes of enlightenment being updated so that ancient ancestors may be described as having realisations in the mode of the then present. Here again the Zen historian has often tried to fix too clearly the mode of transmission, ignoring Buddhism's own insistence on relativity. Enlightenment today will come about in its own way and the psychology of renunciation is likely to take many forms. Mere imitators of the texts beware!

In realisation, the pupil 'goes beyond' the master. Here we can see that, although the traditional path remains vital, without a new creativity embodying the specificity of the moment the tradition will itself die through non-renewal. The storyline of Zen thus never reaches a final statement, has no fixity, remains in the perennial space of an openness always partaking of and never independent from the now. Wright asks: how does the call to 'go beyond' also apply to us in the context of our reading Zen?

The Great Matter

The pivot of Huang-po's thought and indeed that of the whole Zen project is the understanding of Mind, yet it is at once clear that this word does not denote the simple mind that all of us have - the restless thinking consciousness. Mind, and here perhaps we might consider a capital 'M', is treated variously in Huang-po's writings as something that cannot be fixed either subjectively or objectively; as encompassing all things yet itself remaining unfindable; as like space or as a source; as a ground of phenomena. Mind is neither identical with the forms of knowing nor separable from them, yet: "In correspondence to conditions mind becomes things" (p158). The repeated use of 'as' shows the importance of effective metaphor here: metaphor pointing to a target that cannot be clearly seen as an object. Being the all and the everything in both the inner and the outer of experience it is necessarily also nothing in particular. The 'One-Mind' is at the same time 'No-Mind'.

Wright barely discusses the sources of such ideas. They derive from origins in the Tathagatagarbha tradition of the Indian Yogacara view almost immediately, however, undermined by the application of the Prajnaparamita and Mahayamaka perspectives. Since, in the latter view, the six senses, their objects and the relations between them, all lack any inherent selfhood and have no controlling agency they are all 'empty'. In the Zen texts there is thus an inevitable tension between expressions locating presence and absence in the appearances of Mind. The insight into what the nature of this all-encompassing but unlocatable mind may be is both the focus of practice and the subject of much intellectual activity.

Wright explores the manner in which Huang-po's text and Blofield handle this issue. Wright's philosophical struggle engages the texts in a very Zen style, refusing to allow any definition to harden into an idea which would exclude its inevitable contrary or which would bring about a premature closure in thought excluding further mobility. In accord with his post-modern dialectic he repeatedly demonstrates that no term can be taken as standing on its own outside of language or culture and again, through this persistence, he cuts down the tendency to do exactly this. Similar tactics are inherent both in some ancient interpretations and in some parts of Blofield's own account.

For example, while "everyday mind is the Way", too much of an indulgence in everyday behaviour would lead to a passivity very far from the quest described elsewhere in the texts. Again, the attractive notion that Mind means the experience of the pure 'presence' of the here and the now can imply

something outside the usual experience of time and space in an eternity set up as against temporality. While the experience of the present moment lies at the heart of Zen, this cannot mean that everything else has somehow disappeared; other aspects of experience such as the temporal nature of things have simply been set in the background for a time. Similarly, a focus on certain terms and their experiential concomitants does not mean that other modes of experiencing are negated - they are simply not then in focus.

The whole tendency to represent the Mind as any sort of id-entity is replaced in Huang-po by expressions implicating some sort of id-unity: a unity of diversity such that nothing is experienced in its separateness but rather in a merging in which everything is present as nothing in particular. Wright again and again emphasises that words and experiences are co-present in understanding. Such understanding is largely 'pre-conscious', shaped by and contained in old memories, stories and past behaviour of oneself and others. There is a 'storehouse'[3] of such resources that gives meaning to any event and which can take linguistic expression. Conversely, the recall of words can reset an experience in modes that are as much non-verbal as verbal. This 'pre-theoretical and pre-discursive' experiencing, while drawing on understanding, also re-forms it beyond the merely intellectual. Such action facilitates living within time rather than an endeavour to escape it (p174).

Indeed, if this relation between language, temporality and experience did not exist, it would be impossible for Huang-po to write of either experience or its presence now as an outcome of an event in the past - under the Bo tree perhaps. Paradoxically, his very words that point to 'direct awareness' are also understood by him as a doctrinal obstruction should the listener fixate upon them. And yet without them no transmission would be possible.

Wright says: "A dialectical relationship between the practice of thought and Zen experience is essential to the tradition. Thought pushes experience further, opens up new dimensions for it, and refines what comes to experience. Experience pushes thought further, opens up new dimensions for thinking, and sets limits to its excursions. The brilliance of Zen thinking is its tentative and provisional character, the 'non-abiding', 'non-grasping' mind. Knowing through thought that all thought is empty, Zen masters have explored worlds of reflection unavailable to other traditions - playfully 'thinking' what lies beneath commonsense" (p.179).

Whereas Blofield felt the 'Mind' to infer some 'absolute' hidden beyond the veils of ignorance, Huang-po and other authors in his tradition continued to insist on its immediate presence only distanced from us due to a tendency to adopt some idealising 'theory' closing ourselves off from the open freedom of staying with the flow of life. Yet to stay in such a space is scary, for the finitude of the self in its awareness of mortality then needs moment to moment acceptance. Traditional training in such awareness has required practices which are the outcome of exceptional life choices: to leave home; to live together with others in the acceptance of monastic rule, in the awareness of lineage and time, in discovering the co-arising of monastic and ordinary life and a sense of empathic compassion for all beings, and hence the insight that life is itself the ground of being.

"The ground is encountered, not as a separate relation, but in the midst of all other relations... practice is to cultivate the understanding and awareness that every relation to things in the world is simultaneously a relation to the ground of all things which has no 'existence' independent of the 'worldly things' through which it is manifest" (p189)... As the mind shifts in succession from one situation and object of awareness to another, the enlightened mind stays attuned to the 'one-mind' at the root of all things"(p 190).

Sudden and gradual

Wright argues that to be enlightened is to be responsive to life situations in an "open reciprocity" with them brought about by "certain dimensions of self-negation". In the history of Zen in China there were many disagreements concerning whether this understanding could be achieved by sudden or by gradual methods. Underlying these arguments were disputes between contrasting lineages basically political in nature. Careful reflection on the wording of the texts shows that sudden and gradual actually coexist in

training. While a monk's everyday self-understanding is gradually called into question through hearing the teachings and living in a monastery in the proximity of a master, it was often by a sharp re-orientation of the manner whereby the individual conceived of himself against the background of his life that he came to an insight recognised by the master. Such momentary insight needed then to be related to an ongoing way of life and manner of experience before it could be said to be mature. Hence after 'seeing the nature' many monks remained in training often for years. Such a release into insight has the character of a 'letting go' which may only come about after much resistance: to let fall a secure conception of one's own identity is fearful and requires a trust that can only develop within time.

Wright once again emphasises the co-action within this process of meditative practices that are non-discursive with those that involve critical and creative reflection in thought. Practice is seen as not different from ordinary life, indeed the latter is to be experienced within the life of practice. To stress one or the other would be once again to fossilise an attitude in a closed perspective, the need for a 'going beyond' is again vital.

"Emptied of previous selves, monks were initiated into processes of constructing identities by... reshaping the variety of patterns bequeathed to them through the tradition. Established convention and distinctive identity were not held to be in opposition since the established models were distinct identities, and since one's own act of self-construction would inevitably push in some new direction" (p214). Indeed, the very creativity of the master would inspire a bright monk to innovation arising spontaneously within the life of practice.

The tension between the poles of tradition and innovation through 'going beyond' has sustained Zen through numerous historical crises and must be a key source for reflection at the present time. Yet a 'turning' moment remains essential for any individual on the path. The quest is necessarily always reflexive. Who is it that practices? Ever since the ministry of the great master Ma-tsu this has always been the critical question and the response to it constitutes the turning moment. As Wright says, the contemporary versions of this questioning remain at the heart of the Great Matter.

Conclusion: Zen cartography

If we have understood Wright's philosophical reflections accurately we will be sensitive to the realisation that the end of this present reading is no end to understanding. Wright's text is itself relative to the deconstructive trend in post-modern thought for which the many parallels in Zen have become more obvious than could be the case for Blofield's generation. Are there, however, contemporary limitations to Wright's viewpoint? Apart from continuing the debate it is hard to answer this question.

Wright's text is clearly a product of a post-modern, philosophical mind, albeit one almost certainly having a background familiar with practice. Zen is like a landscape and Wright has provided a philosophical map in terms expressing a contemporary philosophy highly influenced by Wittgenstein, Austin and Derrida. The same landscape can however also be drawn by different cartographers. In particular, while Wright does discuss mind and experience eloquently, this is not through the eyes of a skilled psychologist.

In the Lankavatara Sutra we find a psychological model basic to Zen practice and experience. Extrapolating from this model and relating it to modern psychology provides another equally fascinating map in which cross-references to Mead, Winnicot and the object relations school of psychotherapy would be in the foreground.[4] Again a more phenomenologically based stance would take us onto maps scored with place names derived from Husserl or Heideger and placed in close relationship with ideas expressed by the great Japanese Soto master Dogen.[5] Furthermore the experimental psychology of meditation has much to inform us about the underlying mechanisms of attitude change and alterations in consciousness.[6] A contemporary scepticism may also lead us to examine Zen through Thomas Huxley's advocacy of agnosticism.[7]

In collecting these maps together those practitioners of Zen who are not themselves cartographers may get confused. Where are the mountains on a map of county boundaries? What is the density of sparrows in a map of the vegetation of Wales? Maps do not answer all questions. They give us literally and

deliberately a partial perspective. In the end, perhaps, we need to return to philosophising to gain an overview.

Wright teaches us not to allow closure on any perspective of Zen. There are always others in attendance. Zen in our time is Zen in our time - only just emerging from an Asian into a Western and increasingly global history. In China Buddhism went into a long eclipse under a neo-Confucianism that focused more on issues of social management and the economics of justice than it did on the dynamics of personal suffering. Indeed the economics of the monasteries were often hardly of value to the man in the paddy field.[8] Perhaps as these vital themes also emerge as paramount in the West the relation between Buddhism and our unhappy concern with a degrading environment should loom large lest what some may see as excessive introspection or self-indulgence leads to a lessening of current interest in the Buddhist view. Then again, when the vast majority of Western practitioners are lay people and never likely to become monks, close attention to a creative manifestation of Lay Zen is vital. This is likely to require a considerable questioning of ancient monastic practices in order to bring the essential clearly to the fore.

Staying in the open ground is in fact almost a necessity in the post-modern world of relativity where one can pick a religion off a shelf in the local church, mosque or temple; where one can choose from any number of systems of closure in a misguided and inevitably prejudiced search for escape into unworldly perfection. Zen tells us to fly by the seat of our pants in the world as it comes to us, staying open to its beauty, perversity and continuous flux, and finding that moment of global empathy in the loss of self-concern that yields compassion. If we are both personally and collectively to 'go beyond' the inherent suffering of human ignorance it will be essential to remember that while "setting the mind alive we do not put it anywhere."[9]

John Crook

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[1] See further: Neisser, U. and Jopling, D.A. (eds). *The Conceptual Self in Context*. Cambridge University Press (1997).

[2] Victoria, Brian A. *Zen at War*. Weatherhill, New York and Tokyo (1997).

[3] The alayavijnana of the Vijnanavada perspective of the Yogacara element in Ch'an.

[4] See: Crook J.H. *The Evolution of Human Consciousness*. Clarendon. Oxford (1980). Skinner, M. 'Spontaneity and Self Control', in Crook J.H. and Fontana D. *Space in Mind: East-West Psychology and Contemporary Buddhism*. Element (1990).

[5] Peranjpe. A.C. and Hanson R.K. 'On Dealing with the Stream of Consciousness: a comparison of Husserl and Yoga', in Peranjpe, A.C., Yo, D.Y.F. and Rieber, R.W. *Asian Contributions to Psychology*. Praeger (1985). Heine, S. *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen*. SUNY Press (1988).

[6] Blackmore, S. 1990 'Mental models and mystical experience'. In Crook and Fontana loc cit.

[7] Batchelor, S. *Buddhism without Beliefs* (1998).

[8] See: Gernet, J. *Buddhism in Chinese Society: an economic history from the 5th -10th centuries*. Columbia University Press (1995)

[9] Ref: The turning line from the Diamond Sutra that led to Master Hui neng's enlightenment.

IN THE CLOUD ON SWAN BANK'S TOP
Brian Groves

Brian has sent us his short book of poems entitled *After the Buddha and Others.* Most of his work consists of renderings of Zen poems, such as the Hsin Hsin Ming by the Third Patriarch Seng T'san (600AD), into a racy modern English. Brian has kindly allowed us to print one of his poems, and we have chosen here a more personal venture into the hills of Shropshire.

In Staffordshire near
The village of Forton
There is a bank
Called the Swan
On the top of which
In fifty seven
I sought to see Salop
But instead saw Heaven.

Those who then knew me
Thought it a bit thick
that it should happen to me
A confused agnostic
But happen it did
Without a doubt
But then I knew not
What t'was all about.

It was the height of summer
A beautiful day
With me astride my Bantam
Made by BSA
We thundered up
To Swan Bank's top
Such was our speed
The bike's exhaust
Did pop.

We were at the top
For but a trice
But in that moment
I saw paradise
And then the bike
And I went down
In the direction
Of Newport town.

I stopped the bike
We returned up the hill
For in that single moment
I experienced a sort of thrill
Nay! not a thrill
More of a rapture
Going back up the hill
I again it sought to capture.

But on arrival
Once more at the top
There was no heaven
Or paradise, just Salop
Now I know
But I didn't then
I had experienced
My first taste of Zen

Then on to Newport
My heart with joy glowing
Savouring my moment
In the Cloud of Unknowing

After the Buddha and Others is published by Potthaka Press, 59 Credon Rd, London E13 9BS (ISBN 0 953479900) 1998 at £2 including postage.

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