

NEW CH'AN FORUM

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SALVAGING THE SELF

At the last committee meeting of the Western Ch'an Fellowship, the members present resolved to consider the possible publication of selected items from the first 20 issues in a specially bound 'Millennium bumper edition'. To this end, back numbers have been hauled off shelves and downloaded from the internet. One committee member, at least, sat down with issue one and is slowly progressing through them all. What a very rich resource has been revealed by this overview. Have the succession of editors and contributors over the years fully realised what a stock of wisdom we have been building up, and what a depth of experience has accumulated in this journal over 20 issues?

Appropriately, perhaps, for this issue, we present one of Master Sheng-Yen's earliest lectures in America, while John looks back over his own years of training with Shi-fu, presenting extracts from nearly ten years' of retreats. What happens over this length of time, do we change over the years?

We must believe that we can all change, and for the better. In particular there is confrontation with suffering in Marian Partington's article. How can we resolve such issues?

Poems cover a huge range of human experience - Rebekah Kenton's gaze at the night sky contrasts with Hugh Carroll's glimpses, while, down on earth, Jo Horton looks back over 50 years and Carol Evans, for all who love to cook, and eat, reminds us of the power of simple things. The internet spreads out its web and makes a new connection, as Alistair Powell contacts us from Australia and comes to terms with his memories of Wales. And finally, having wept, you may also find yourself laughing out loud as one anonymous retreatant makes a frantic effort to escape from Maenllwyd's "solemn tea party".

The editors urge you to continue contributing to New Ch'an Forum. Issue 21 will be the first of our journal to be published in the new millennium and we encourage readers to consider what contributions they can make.

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EDITORIAL FROM THE CH'AN HALL

This Suffering World

There was a time not long ago when politicians talked about a new world order of peace and prosperity worldwide. It was the end of the Cold War and all seemed set fair.

We were soon to discover our illusion - the Cold War had frozen not only our good but also many of our bad instincts. Almost at once the new freedoms released the bullies, the torturers, the capitalist egoists, the environmental destroyers from all constraint. Once more we were forced to look into the dark mirror of human history and see that evil had never been far away.

In this issue we follow the Buddha's advice and confront suffering and the way beyond suffering in an unflinching manner. Human life may be a dream chamber but the plumbing needs attention. On a global scale, the names of places tell their stories - Vietnam, the killing fields of Cambodia, East Timor, Tibet, the Gulag, Northern Ireland, Algeria, Iraq, central Africa, the Caucasian states, Bosnia, Kosovo... the same story; national pride, racial and tribal intolerance leading to abuse, murder, genocide and the long trail of desperate refugees. Yet so often these endless tragedies hardly disturb us as, comfortably, we look at the horrors sliding across our television screens like shining poisonous snakes. Only when we are moved personally, with a shock touching the skirts of human misery, can we start to empathise and in the heart begin to understand.

Suffering may be great or small - yet it has the same quality however intense. In this issue, articles and personal stories reveal both the shadows of our time and the hope that training can hold out for us. Perhaps we have to suffer before we can begin the 'salvaging of the sacred' as Marian Partington suggests. Yet empathy for the great pains can arise from the experience of the small. The Buddha had little interest in the mystery of the universe knowing that discussion leads only to endless debate. His great wisdom took on the ills of humanity. Today his message is perhaps more important than ever before. Modern technology means the stakes are higher and the speediness with which we live our lives constitutes a great danger. The heart needs time to understand. Give it time. Please.

Ch'uan-Teng Chien-Ti

THE SKY AT NIGHT

Rebekah Kenton

*The Earth may not count
even as a speck of pollen
within the cosmic flower
of the Milky Way.
Out there could be a whole garden
full of such flowers,
blooming and withering.*

*The choreography of Shiva's dance
is written somewhere.
I try to follow the footsteps
with binoculars,
but the stage is too large
for me to comprehend
from the box seat of our balcony.*

*I was told by a shooting star:
the real fulfilment
of your deepest wish
is to give it up.*

WHAT IS CH'AN?

A lecture by Master Sheng-yen (1977)

In 1977 Shi-fu was at the very beginning of his teaching career in America. He was invited to give talks in various places and these were admirably translated. In this talk the crisp vision of Ch'an that Shi-fu was bringing from China and from the Japan of his final training is clear for all to see. As we set about creating a Ch'an suitable for Europe this lecture has striking and helpful cogency.

It was published in a small pamphlet of which probably only a few remain. Tim Paine was rummaging through the library at Maenllwyd when he came across it and spotted its excellence. It was in fact one of the inspirations for John's first visits to the New York Ch'an Centre. We are glad Tim uncovered it again and we trust our readers will find it equally inspiring. Shi-fu permits us to reproduce it here. Eds.

I wish to start by telling you that Ch'an is not the same as knowledge, yet knowledge is not completely apart from Ch'an. Ch'an is not just religion, yet the achievements of religion can be reached through Ch'an. Ch'an is not philosophy, yet philosophy can in no way exceed the scope of Ch'an. Ch'an is not science, yet the spirit of emphasising reality and experience is also required in Ch'an. Therefore, please do not try to explore the content of Ch'an motivated by mere curiosity, for Ch'an is not something new brought here [to the USA] by Orientals; Ch'an is present everywhere, in space without limit and time without end. However before the Buddhism of the East was propagated in the western world, the people of the West never knew of the existence of Ch'an. The Ch'an taught by Orientals in the West is not, in fact, the real Ch'an. It is the method to realise Ch'an. Ch'an was first discovered by a prince named Siddhartha Gautama (called Shakyamuni after his enlightenment), who was born in India about 2500 years ago. After he became enlightened and was called a Buddha, he taught us the method to know Ch'an. This method was transmitted from India to China, and then to Japan. In India it was called *dhyana*, which is pronounced 'Ch'an' in Chinese, and 'Zen' in Japanese. Actually, all three are identical.

Ch'an has universal and eternal existence. It has no need of any teacher to transmit it; what is transmitted by teachers is just the method by which one can personally experience this Ch'an.

Some people mistakenly understand Ch'an to be some kind of mysterious experience; others think that one can attain supernatural powers through the experience of Ch'an. Of course, the process of practising Ch'an meditation may cause various kinds of strange occurrences on the level of mental and physical sensation; and also, through the practice of unifying body and mind, one may be able to attain the mental power to control or alter external things. But such phenomena, which are looked upon as mysteries of religion, are not the aim of Ch'an practice, because they can only satisfy one's curiosity or megalomania, and cannot solve the actual problems of peoples lives.

Ch'an starts from the root of the problem. It does not start with the idea of conquering the external social and material environments, but starts with gaining thorough knowledge of one's own self. The moment you know what your self is, this 'I' that you now take to be yourself will simultaneously disappear. We call this new knowledge of the notion of self 'enlightenment' or 'seeing ones basic nature'. This is the beginning of helping you to thoroughly solve real problems. In the end, you will discover that you the individual, together with the whole of existence, are but one totality which cannot be divided.

Because you yourself have imperfections, you therefore feel the environment is imperfect. It is like a mirror with an uneven surface, the images reflected in it are also distorted. Or, it is like the surface of water disturbed by ripples, the moon reflected in it is irregular and unsettled. If the surface of the mirror is clear and smooth, or if the air on the surface of the water is still and the ripples calmed, then the reflection in the mirror and the moon in the water will be clear and exact. Therefore, from the point of view of Ch'an, the major cause of the pain and misfortune suffered by humanity is not the treacherous environment of the world in which we live, nor the dreadful society of humankind, but the fact that we have never been able to recognise our basic nature. So the method of Ch'an is not to direct us to evade reality, nor to shut our eyes like the African ostrich when enemies come, and bury our heads in the sand, thinking all problems are solved. Ch'an is not a self-hypnotising idealism.

By the practise of Ch'an one can eliminate the 'I'; not only the selfish, small 'I', but also the large 'I', which in philosophy is called 'Truth' or 'the Essence'. Only then is there absolute freedom. Thus an accomplished Ch'an practitioner never feels that any responsibility is a burden, nor does he feel the pressure that the conditions of life exert on people. He only feels that he is perpetually bringing the vitality of life into full activity. This is the expression of absolute freedom. Therefore the life of Ch'an is inevitably normal and positive, happy and open. The reason for this is that the practise of Ch'an will continually provide you with a means to excavate your precious mine of wisdom. The deeper the excavation, the higher the wisdom that is attained, until eventually you obtain all the wisdom of the entire universe. At that time, there is not a single thing in all of time and space that is not contained within the scope of your wisdom. At that stage wisdom becomes absolute; and since it is absolute, the term wisdom serves no further purpose. To be sure, at that stage the 'I' that motivated you to pursue such things as fame, wealth and power, or to escape from suffering and danger, has completely disappeared. What is more, even the wisdom which eliminated your 'I' becomes an unnecessary concept to you.

Of course, from the viewpoint of sudden enlightenment it is very easy for a Ch'an practitioner to reach this stage; nevertheless before reaching the gate of sudden enlightenment one must exert a great deal of effort on the journey. Otherwise the methods of Ch'an would be useless.

The Three Stages of Ch'an Meditation

At present [1977], the methods of meditation that I am teaching in the United States are divided into three stages.

Stage 1: To balance the development of body and mind in order to attain mental and physical health

With regard to the body, we stress the demonstration and correction of the postures of walking, standing, sitting and reclining. At the same time we teach various methods of physical exercise for walking, standing, sitting and reclining. They are unique exercise methods combining Indian Hatha Yoga and Chinese Tao-yin, and can bring physical health as well as results in meditation. Thus, one who practises Ch'an and has obtained good results will definitely have a strong body capable of enduring hardship. For the mind we emphasise the elimination of impatience, suspicion, anxiety, fear and frustration, so as to establish a state of self-confidence, determination, optimism, peace and stability.

A good student, after five or ten lessons here, will reach the first stage and be able to obtain results in the above two areas. One of our student's reports stated: "This kind of Ch'an class is especially good for someone like myself who, by profession or habit, has been used to having the brain functioning just about every minute of the day. I often find this Ch'an sitting

very helpful as rest or relief. So even for no greater purpose, this Ch'an class has been very useful and should be highly recommended." [from *Ch'an Magazine Vol.1; No.1*]

In the first lesson of each class, I always ask each of the students individually his or her purpose in learning Ch'an whether he or she hoped to benefit the body, or sought help for the mind. The answers show that the latter were in the majority. This indicates that people living in American society today, under the strain and pressure of the present environment, suffer excessive tension, and many have lost their mental balance. Some are so severely tense that they have to consult a psychiatrist. Among those who come to learn Ch'an, I have one woman student, an outstanding lecturer in a well-known university, who asked me at the first meeting if I could help to relieve her from tense and uneasy moods. I told her that for a Ch'an practitioner this is a very simple matter. After five lessons she felt that Ch'an was a great blessing to her life.

The method of the first stage is very simple. Mainly it requires you to relax all the muscles and nerves of your entire body, and concentrate your attention on the method you have just learned. Because the tension of your muscles and nerves affects the activity of the brain, the key is therefore to reduce the burden on your brain. When your wandering thoughts and illusions decrease, your brain will gradually get a little rest. As its need of blood is reduced, more blood will circulate through the entire body. Meanwhile, because of the relaxation of the brain, all the muscles also relax; thus your blood vessels expand, you feel comfortable all over, your spirit feels fresh and alert, and your mental responses are naturally lighter and more lively.

If one's object of study is just to acquire physical and mental balance, and not to study meditation proper, then one will probably feel that the completion of the first stage is enough; but many students are not content with this, and indeed, some from the outset are looking for the goal of the second stage.

Stage 2: From the sense of the small 'I'

The first stage only helps to bring concentration to your confused mind; but when you practise concentration, other scattered thoughts continue to appear in your mind - sometimes many, sometimes a few. The concept of your purpose in practising Ch'an is for mental and physical benefits. This is a stage where your concept is purely self-centred. There is no mention of philosophical ideals or religious experience. When you reach the second stage, it will enable you to liberate yourself from the narrow view of the 'I'. In the second stage you begin to enter the stage of meditation. When you practise the method of cultivation taught by your teacher, you will enlarge the sphere of the outlook of the small 'I' until it coincides with time and space. The small 'I' merges into the entire universe, forming a unity. When you look inward, the depth is limitless; when you look outward, the breadth is limitless. Since you have joined and become one with universe, the world of your own body and mind no longer exists. What exists is the universe, which is infinite in depth and breadth. You yourself are not only a part of the universe, but also the totality of it.

When you achieve this experience in your Ch'an sitting, you will then understand what is meant in philosophy by principle or basic substance, and also what phenomenal existence is. All phenomena are the floating surface or perceptible layer of basic substance. From the shallow point of view, the phenomena have innumerable distinctions and each has different characteristics; in reality, the differences between the phenomena do not impair the totality of basic substance. For instance, on the planet on which we live, there are countless kinds of animals, plants, minerals, vapours, liquids and solids which incessantly arise, change and perish, constituting the phenomena of the earth. However, seen from another planet, the earth

is just one body. When we have the opportunity to free ourselves from the bonds of self or subjective views, to assume the objective standpoint of the whole and observe all phenomena together, we can eliminate opposing and contradictory views. Take a tree as an example. From the standpoint of the individual leaves and branches, they are all distinct from one another, and can also be perceived to rub against one another. However, from the standpoint of the trunk and roots, all parts without exception are of one unified whole.

In the course of this second stage, you have realised that you not only have an independent individual existence, but you also have a universal existence together with this limitlessly deep and wide cosmos, and therefore the confrontation between you and the surrounding environment exists no more. Discontent, hatred, love, desire - in other words dispositions of rejecting and grasping disappear naturally, and you sense a feeling of peace and satisfaction. Because you have eliminated the selfish small 'I', you are able to look upon all people and all things as if they were phenomena produced from your own substance, and so you will love all people and all things in the same way you loved and watched over your small 'I'. This is the mind of a great philosopher.

Naturally, all great religious figures must have gone through the experiences of this second stage, where they free themselves from the confines of the small 'I', and discover that their own basic substance is none other than the existence of the entire universe, and that there is no difference between themselves and everything in the universe. All phenomena are manifestations of their own nature. They have the duty to love and watch over all things, and also have the right to manage them; just as we have the duty to love our own children and the right to manage the property that belongs to us. This is the formation of the relationship between the deity and the multitude of things he created. Such people personify the basic substance of the universe which they experience through meditation, and create the belief in God. They substantiate this idea of a large 'I' the self-love of God and formulate the mission of being a saviour of the world or an emissary of God. They unify all phenomena and look upon them as objects that were created and are to be saved. Consequently, some religious figures think that the basic nature of their souls is the same as that of the deity, and that they are human incarnations of the deity. In this way, they consider themselves to be saviours of the world. Others think that although the basic nature of their souls is not identical to and inseparable from that of the deity, the phenomenon of their incarnation shows that they were sent to this world by God as messengers to promulgate God's intention.

Generally, when philosophers or religious figures reach the height of the second stage, they feel that their wisdom is unlimited, their power is infinite, and their lives are eternal. When the scope of the 'I' enlarges, self-confidence accordingly gets stronger, but this stronger self-confidence is in fact merely the unlimited escalation of a sense of superiority and pride. It is therefore termed large 'I', and does not mean that absolute freedom from vexations has been achieved.

Stage 3: From the large 'I' to no 'I'

When one reaches the height of the second stage, he realises that the concept of the 'I' does not exist. But he has only abandoned the small 'I' and has not negated the concept of basic substance or the existence of God; you may call it Truth, the one and only God, the Almighty, the Unchanging Principle, or even the Buddha of Buddhism. If you think that it is real, then you are still in the realm of the big 'I' and have not left the sphere of philosophy and religion.

I must emphasise that the content of Ch'an does not appear until the third stage. Ch'an is unimaginable. It is neither a concept nor a feeling. It is impossible to describe it in any terms abstract or concrete. Though meditation is ordinarily the proper path leading to Ch'an, once

you have arrived at the door of Ch'an, even the method of meditation is rendered useless. It is like using various means of transportation on a long journey. When you reach the final destination, you find a steep cliff standing right in front of you. It is so high you cannot see its top, and so wide that its side cannot be found. At this time a person who has been to the other side of the cliff comes to tell you that on the other side lies the world of Ch'an. When you scale it you will enter Ch'an. And yet, he tells you not to depend on any means of transportation to fly over, bypass, or penetrate through it, because it is infinity itself, and there is no way to scale it.

Even an outstanding Ch'an master able to bring his student to this place will find himself unable to help any more. Although he has been to the other side, he cannot take you there with him, just as a mother's own eating and drinking cannot take the hunger away from the child who refuses to eat or drink. At that time, the only help he can give you is to tell you to discard all your experiences, your knowledge, and all the things and ideas that you think are the most reliable, most magnificent, and most real, even including your hope to get to the world of Ch'an. It is as if you were entering a sacred building. Before you do so, the guard tells you that you must not carry any weapon, that you must take off all your clothes, and that not only must you be completely naked you also have to leave your body and soul behind. Then you can enter.

Because Ch'an is a world where there is no self, if there is still any attachment at all in your mind, there is no way you can harmonise with Ch'an. Therefore, Ch'an is the territory of the wise, and the territory of the brave. Not being wise, one would not believe that after he has abandoned all attachments another world could appear before him. Not being brave, one would find it very hard to discard everything he has accumulated in this life - ideals and knowledge, spiritual and material things.

You may ask what benefit we would get after making such great sacrifices to enter the world of Ch'an. Let me tell you that you cannot enter the world of Ch'an while this question is still with you. Looking for benefit, either for self or for others, is in the 'I'-oriented stage. The sixth patriarch of the Ch'an sect in China taught people that the way to enter the enlightenment of the realm of Ch'an is: "Neither think of good, nor think of evil". That is, you eliminate such opposing views as self and other, inner and outer, being and non-being, large and small, good and bad, vexation and Bodhi, illusion and enlightenment, false and true, or suffering of birth and death and joy of emancipation. Only then can the realm of Ch'an or enlightenment appear and bring you a new life.

This new life you have had all along, and yet you have never discovered it. In the Ch'an sect we call it your original face before you were born. This is not the small 'I' of body and mind, nor the large 'I' of the world and universe. This is absolute freedom, free from the misery of all vexations and bonds. To enter Ch'an as described above is not easy. Many people have studied and meditated for decades, and still have never gained entrance to the door of Ch'an. It will not be difficult, however, when your causes and conditions are mature, or if you happen to have a good Ch'an master who guides you with full attention. This Master may adopt various attitudes, actions and verbal expressions which may seem ridiculous to you, as indirect means of assisting you to achieve your goal speedily. And when the Master tells you that you have now entered the gate, you will suddenly realise that there is no gate to Ch'an. Before entering, you cannot see where the gate is, and after entering you find the gate non-existent. Otherwise there will be the distinction between inside and outside, the enlightened and the ignorant; and if there are such distinctions, then it is still not Ch'an.

When you are in the second stage, although you feel that the 'I' does not exist, the basic substance of the universe, or the Supreme Truth, still exists. Although you recognise that all the different phenomena are the extension of this basic substance or Supreme Truth, yet there

still exists the opposition of basic substance versus external phenomena. Not until the distinctions of all phenomena disappear, and everything goes back to truth or Heaven, will you have absolute peace and unity. As long as the world of phenomena is still active, you cannot do away with conflict, calamity, suffering and crime. Therefore, although philosophers and religious figures perceive the peace of the original substance, they still have no way to get rid of the confusion of phenomena.

One who has entered Ch'an does not see basic substance and phenomena as two things standing in opposition to each other. They cannot even be illustrated as being the back and palm of a hand. This is because phenomena themselves are basic substance, and apart from phenomena there is no basic substance to be found. The reality of basic substance exists right in the unreality of phenomena, which change ceaselessly and have no constant form. This is the Truth. When you experience that phenomena are unreal, you will then be free from the concept of self and other, right and wrong, and free from the vexations of greed, hatred, worry and pride. You will not need to search for peace and purity, and you will not need to detest evil vexations and impurity. Although you live in the world of phenomenal reality, to you, any environment is a Buddha's Pure Land. To an unenlightened person, you are but an ordinary person. To you, all ordinary people are identical with Buddha. You will feel that your own self-nature is the same as that of all Buddhas, and the self-nature of Buddhas is universal throughout time and space. You will spontaneously apply your wisdom and wealth, giving to all sentient beings everywhere, throughout all time and space.

What I have said reveals a small part of the feeling of one who has entered the enlightened realm of Ch'an, and is also the course which one follows in order to depart from the small 'I' and arrive at the stage of no 'I'. Nevertheless, a newly enlightened person who has just entered the realm of Ch'an is still at the starting section of the entire passage of Ch'an. He is like one who has just had his first sip of port. He knows its taste now, but the wine will not remain in his mouth forever. The purpose of Ch'an is not just to let you take one sip, but to have your entire life merge with and dissolve in the wine, even, to the point that you forget the existence of yourself and the wine. After tasting the first sip of egolessness, how much farther must one travel?

What kinds of things remain to be seen?

I will tell you when I have the chance!

IDENTITY: LOST, FOUND AND LOST AGAIN

Alistair Powell

The day is clear and with the crispness of early winter in South Australia. Honeyeaters hawk for insects outside my window, supplementing the meagre supply of nectar at this time of year. Across the valley, well-wooded slopes of blue-green eucalypt rise gently to a low mountain range - quite unlike the bare hills of my birthplace in a South Wales coal valley.

I left Wales at a tender age, only just outgrown 'Wind in the Willows' and the magical world of hedgerows and deep woods. Migration is a harsh sentence for a young heart. It can break the continuity of a child's psychological and social development and impair the formation of identity with, and within, the cultural, community and physical landscapes. Separation from the old familiar world, compounded by a childhood resistance to the imposed one, can result in a confused self and a divided sense of belonging.

With such a background, what else but 'who am I' would be the koan of my life? When I began to follow the Buddha Dharma as an adult, the promise of an answer to my 'self' questions was a key attraction. Unwittingly I was adding another set of values, modes of expression and spiritual aspirations to my patchwork quilt of identity and further estranged myself from both my old and new countries.

So it was with considerable excitement that I became aware last year of the activities at the Maenllwyd. Idly sifting through a book stall, I had found a copy of 'Retreat' by Roger Housden¹ and the photograph inside of Master Sheng Yen and Dr. John Crook leading practitioners around a muddy field. I immediately searched the internet and found the site of the Western Ch'an Fellowship and more images of Buddhist practise in Wales. After many months, an international book search service found me a copy of 'Catching a Feather on a Fan'². and also 'Dharma Drum'³ (neither of which were available in Australia).

These images and words have breathed life into my stale practice. I feel I have discovered a 'family' I never knew. A new dimension to the meaning of 'Sangha' is emerging - which was always a difficult area in my relatively isolated practice. I am beginning to see the possibility of moving beyond the need for labels. Notions about birthplace and nation state allegiance are just that: notions which bind me if I depend upon them to define and understand who I really am. The Wales in my head does not exist other than as self-centred thoughts drawn from a memory of distorted childhood perceptions!

If I may quote from a relevant part of 'Catching a Feather on a Fan', pages 40 and 41: "When we are young, we have to develop our sense of personal identity in order to take on the world. In fact without having a grasp of your personal identity, of who you are in the usual everyday sense, it would not be possible to train in Buddhism... Yet wisdom comes from going beyond the elementary constructions of identity, from investigating who this is that walks, talks, argues and quarrels... A major step in this progression is the discovery of the undivided mind, one in which the splits produced by discrimination are healed."

I am a long way from realising an undivided mind. In fact these recent events have triggered a state of delicious confusion and an eager curiosity to see where they will lead. Thankfully I am sobered by the practical wisdom of Master Sheng-Yen and know that this is just another turn in the road that will go on forever - towards a place I have never left and the self nature I always was.

¹ 'Retreat - Time Apart for Silence and Solitude' by Roger Housden, Labyrinth Books, published by Thorsons, London 1995. ISBN 185538-490-6. Some of the photos in this book are incorrectly titled; John is not, in fact, in this picture.

² Element Books. 1991. ISBN 1-85230-194-5.

³ Dharma Drum Publications. 1996. ISBN 0-9609854-8-4.

Glimpses
Hugh Carroll, 1996

*The present,
spliced infinitesimally between
before and after,*

rarely seen...

*At the cinema, mid film,
I glimpsed the street,
through a slowly closing,
fire exit.*



*The moon is just the moon,
I cry out to it, reach the top of my ladder,
and crash down,
as I must.*

*Windmills are just windmills,
striving to get to them,
to get away from where I am,
heather like the squiggles of brain tissue,
I sink into my predicament,
am I going to drown?*

*Home is just home,
and misery lolls in my chest,
much ventured and nothing gained,
stuck between worlds,
and yet,*

a hint of spider's thread,

tender silence,

holds me up.

A SHINING SILENCE

Marian Partington

Not many of us have to endure for years the disappearance of a loved one. To discover that the loss was due to horrendous murder is even rarer. Yet, in places like Kosovo or Kurdistan this experience is something of a commonplace. The anger, indeed fury, can reach out to strike down whoever or whatever is deemed responsible. Justice is not always easy to be done. Killing is easier. So the cycle continues. Feuds have not yet gone away. Marian began the exploration of her experience in an article 'Salvaging the Sacred' for The Guardian three years ago (published 18 May 1996). Here she continues her quest, believing that through the writing she can help us all. We support her in her endeavour. Eds

Lucy Partington, my sister, "disappeared" in December 1973. In March 1994 we learnt that she was one of the, at least twelve, young women and two unborn children murdered by Frederick and Rosemary West. The implications of this trauma for my own family, and for the society within which this crime manifested, are serious and deeply challenging. It leaves me with huge questions.

What are the roots of this human behaviour that has caused so much pain and destruction? How could it continue undetected for so long in a society that claims to be civilised? Is it possible to find a way forward that leads in the direction of healing for everyone who has been affected by this crime, including the perpetrators?

At a time in our world when the cycle of violence and abuse rages on, towards the end of a century when many millions of people have murdered, tortured, and abused each other or themselves, it feels vital to work towards understanding and transforming this cycle that erodes self respect and promotes cruelty. We must travel from a state of ignorance into a state of understanding. We must help each other to understand the violence that festers and erupts in all human beings, and to know the way towards compassion that heals.

If we do not know ourselves, how can we understand or know one another? How can we move in this direction if we have no guides, no experience of anything else? Ignorance involves the disease of separation, the pain of isolation, the destruction towards others or oneself that comes from this state which is focused on self-concern.

The way towards understanding takes risks. It stands through the seasons, the cold, the dormant, the rain and sun, swelling into a fruit that will be picked and eaten by others. It is there to be picked and shared. It grows with the knowledge of its picking, its rotting, its return to earth. It grows in the soil that feeds us all, the humus, our common humility in the face of death. The rotting piles of our mistakes, that led us to turn our backs, lock our doors, wallow in complacency, watch the violence and suffering of others on a screen, must be investigated. If we can experience the fact that this behaviour separates us from a real understanding of the enormity of our connectedness with all forms of life, we can aspire with passion to know and live a real progress that is manifest in acts of kindness and compassion.

In December 95 I began to write. Writing became my way of searching for meaning. I began a painful inner journey which involved going into the basement of 25, Cromwell Street and carrying Lucy's truth to the top of a mountain. Writing became a way of allowing myself time and solitude to experience my grief, by finding words and images as a structure for my own healing.

Sometimes I felt that I was risking the disintegration of myself without the assurance that a new whole would emerge. But I did not seem to have the choice to turn back. I knew that I

would have to spend days when the words were nowhere to be seen and the sky was dark. But gradually I found trust in this as part of the process of creativity and healing. I was rescuing and reclaiming Lucy's truth and finding a depth of compassion that I had never known. I felt that I was being given an enormous gift that I must share with others.

Five weeks before Lucy was murdered she was received into the Roman Catholic church. Her teacher was Jesus. During her terrible crucifixion did the words "Love thine enemy" hold any truth for her? Could she pray? I feel as if she has left me with that challenge.



There are many degrees of response to violence, abuse or insidious acts of disrespect. Expressions ranging from bitterness and the desire for vengeance to the less overt, but crippling emotions such as suspicion, lack of trust, anxiety and perhaps worst of all a complacent indifference. Everyday we see examples of individuals, races and nations wriggling in this vicious trap, struggling to heal a legacy of profound abuse: the parents and friends of Stephen Lawrence, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, South Africa, Kosovo. I am learning that forgiveness involves moments of hopeless despair, rage, grief, fear and yet significant insights that leave an encouraging glimpse of freedom. Forgiveness has its own pace and direction. I am learning to yield to its wisdom.

During my work as a homeopath I have observed many times that unresolved grief is often at the root of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dis-ease. The need to face and experience the parts of our selves that we would prefer to edit out, because they are too painful, the need to be listened to, are vital parts of this journey towards knowing who we are and being able to express our fullest human potential. Suppressed pain has two extreme outlets in our society: suicide or murder.

My work is about reclaiming my relationship with myself, others and all forms of life so that I can experience a deeper feeling of being alive in a way that connects me with the intensity of the present moment in a more spacious, encompassing, compassionate way. I am reaching towards a deeper understanding of the huge love and grace involved in that realisation of my spiritual potential, which comes in the nurturing of myself and those whom I need to forgive and be forgiven by.

This journey involves sitting with the darkest nooks and crannies within me, that are revealed as I hold myself in the light. I have to try and deal more honestly with the conflicts and

painfulness of coming into real unity with myself and others. I am learning about true ignorance in the Buddhist sense of being unskilled.

I was born three years after the end of the Second World War. As a child my nightmares raged with images of fear and human demolition. I inherited an undigested legacy of human atrocity. The karma of denial has to have an outlet one day. Had these pictures entered my blood through some strange inter-uterine process of osmosis? It is easy to define one's life with a drive towards order, routine and comfort; to construct a devotion to the perfect home, free from the threat of bombs and Nazis. How does my heart carry a residue of destruction, like the grain of sand in the heart of a pearl?

April 1994 my daughter Marigold wrote: "When Mum arrived with my grandparents it all seemed so false and unreal. The purpose of their visit was because Mum was getting anxious that we would be disturbed by the media presentation of the event. It was lucky that she came when she did because Lucy's picture and an interview with my granddad were on the 6 o'clock news. They had also dug up four more bodies over the weekend. They told us that they had spent two hours in the police station that day and that it was very likely that Lucy was one of Frederick West's victims. That night I had the worst nightmare I had ever experienced. I dreamed that I was trying to find someone's house and people kept directing me to 25 Cromwell Street. When I got there I opened a huge black door and fell down these concrete steps into a cellar which was pitch black. But I could just about make out the bones of the four skeletons. They weren't frightening, they were just lying down. Then two people with no faces turned on the light and tried to kill me. The fear was immense. I had this dream every night for the next week. I was constantly imagining horrifying things in 25 Cromwell Street. I took an obsessive interest in newspapers and television. It was in the headlines for weeks. Every day another body was being dug up."

Marigold was 16 years old.

Lucy and I used to enjoy reading and discussing T.S. Eliot together because we loved the concept of "the still point of the turning world" (*The Four Quartets*), the exploration of the intersection of time with eternity. Lucy's focus was on truth and beauty. She was single-mindedly and passionately exploring the deeper meaning of life; immersed in art, literature and religion. Somehow she was untouched by the impact of the 60s and yet very much in touch with deeper values which she expressed in a way that was "indelible" (to use a word chosen by one of her friends). She was emerging into adulthood with a powerful inquiring mind and a sense of vision.

During her last free evening, 27th December 1973, Lucy visited her physically handicapped friend in Cheltenham. She left in time to catch the bus back to Gretton. Her satchel contained my last present to her. It was a Victorian cut-glass jar, the right size to hold a night-light candle. It was the colour of amethyst, and could be hung on a Christmas tree or in a window by its wire handle, casting a soothing, pale-purple glow, resonant of sunlight shining through stained glass in a place of worship, meditative; or maybe the colour of the air at dawn, just before the sun appears. Lucy had been delighted with it, and talked of using it as her nightlight when she was back in her hall of residence after the Christmas holiday. Also in her bag was a book called 'Pearl'. This mediaeval allegory about the premature death of a pure maiden traces her father's grief and his journey towards the consolation in knowing that she was redeemed and saved, and that he can rejoin her only by resignation to the will of God and through death. Finally there was the letter of application to the Courtauld Institute of Art to do a postgraduate course in Medieval Art.

It was never posted. This is where, for me, it all goes into slow motion. The moment when Lucy, satchel swinging on her shoulder, hurried through the darkest of nights. There was a

national power cut due to the fuel crisis. She was intending to post the letter before the bus came. The moment when Lucy's life met its opposite.

I have learnt to value and respond to my dreams. In April 1994, several weeks after Lucy's bones were removed from Cromwell Street, I had a dream. In the dream, I had asked the pathologist what was left of Lucy. He told me to go and look "in that pink sack over in the corner". In my dream the sack looked like a present. I opened it and found what looked like a toy. It was a skeleton kit. Each bone was numbered like a pool ball, a coloured digit floating on a white disc. Next, the 'kit' assembled itself into a full size skeleton which stood before me. I felt the need to embrace it. As I began to put my arms around it I knew I was holding Lucy. The skeleton became Lucy, a palpable being. She moved closer and gently rested her head upon my shoulder. I awoke with the feeling of the joy of finding her, of being reunited, of being there for her. I knew that I had to find a way of acting this out, of cherishing what had survived of her physical body.

I arranged to go to Cardiff with two close friends to perform another ritual. It was time to rescue and protect, in some way, what remained of Lucy. We went in the spirit of love with a need to make the experience more real and personal. The Investigation Team at Gloucester kindly made the practical arrangements.

I would like to thank the dear man who allowed us to go beyond merely sitting in a chapel of rest next to a full sized coffin covered with a purple cloth fringed with gold tassels. I will never forget the look of understanding that came into his eyes when I emphasised that I actually wanted to place some special objects in with Lucy's bones. He unscrewed the coffin to reveal two cardboard boxes. The larger of the two was exactly like the boxes I keep my A4 files in, pale grey DIY 'Archive system', about 12" deep, 15" wide and 20" long. I felt a moment of panic. I pointed to the smaller of the two boxes, which was plain brown with a hinged lid, and asked, "Is her skull in there?" As he nodded and began to lift the lid, I was filled with the knowledge of what to do. A feeling of strength came over me. As we drew nearer I gasped at the beauty of her skull. It was like burnished gold and it was something that was part of Lucy that had survived to tell the tale. At that moment I was full of the joy of finding something that had been a part of Lucy after all these years. Not a glimmer of fear, not a morbid thought entered the experience. I lifted her skull with great care and tenderness and kissed her brow. I marvelled at the sense of recognition in its curves and proportion. I wrapped it, like I have wrapped my babies, in her "soft brown blanket", her snuggler. I pressed her to my heart. Before I placed her skull back I laid a branch of heather entwined with sheep's wool from the top of Plynlimon in the bottom of the box. I visualised the space and beauty of the wild mountain top, the brown peat, the sheep, the warm wind, the distant range of receding mountains, the top of the world with its feeling of freedom, close to the sky, a place Lucy would have loved, a place that evokes the Welsh roots of our ancestry, offering it with so much love.

When Lucy was 11 years old she had given me a little woven, woollen bag. It says a lot to me about her qualities then. In order to make the bag she collected pieces of stray sheep's wool from the fences and hedges, probably from a field known as "the top ground" where we kept our pony. Then she made the carders to tease out the wool by breaking off individual thorns from rose bushes and pushing them through two rectangles of cardboard. Next she spun the wool with a spindle made from a pencil and a cotton reel. Finally she made a small loom and wove the spun wool into my much treasured bag. The whole process must have taken days of intense concentration, patience and a determination to follow an idea through in practice. It speaks of her gentleness and her generosity, and her desire to get back to first principles. The bag is one of my most treasured possessions, I keep my embroidery threads in it.

During that Cardiff visit a step towards peace had been made. Through that experience I had the opportunity to transform the language from the crude butchery of the basement towards a poetry that we shared in our childhood. We were united again within the “still point of the turning world”. Something had been shifted.

After many rituals and the passing of time, I have laid Lucy to rest. I then found myself turning towards the basement and the Wests again. It was time to face my own potential to “write off” the Wests as inhuman monsters. After a Buddhist retreat I made a vow to try and forgive them. Yet, later that day, rage rushed up from my navel, dashing its heat and power against the inside of my skull, swilling, scouring, eroding like a river in flood. It had no logic, no reason, no means of expression. It was a murderous fury. Its energy was terrifying in its involuntary seizure. I pulled my hair, banged my head on the bed, screamed, rushed outside and stamped and clawed at the earth. I dribbled with impotence. I had experienced the meaning of apoplexy but while I was in its grip I had no words, just a roar that tore the membranes of my throat.

When words returned, anger and contempt riddled my mind. Why should I waste a second further on these monsters who were responsible for abducting, molesting, raping, killing, and chopping Lucy up and hiding her from us for twenty-one years? The enormity of the burglary and demolition of my sister and the suffering that followed in its wake, spreading its pain with the indifference and terrible destruction of an earthquake, ruptured the defence of my logic's premature compassion.



My heart turned away. An image of my mother entered. She was standing by Lucy's open grave, small and frail in her black coat with her white hair short and stiff like a skullcap. Her hands were holding a small posy of flowers from her garden, picked earlier in the morning. She moved towards the grave as if it wasn't quite her and it wasn't quite happening; this moment that we had all dreaded and longed for; laying Lucy to rest after 21 years of not knowing where she was nor what had happened to her. This business of forgiveness had to go on hold. It almost seemed obscene in this context. To think about forgiveness then would have been a betrayal of our need to grieve, to rage, to find a way forward. I had to find a place for my own grief and anger before I could open myself to the possibility of forgiving those who caused this terrible pain, for so many people. But the way forward that takes us out of the cycle of violence involves forgiveness. I must learn to be patient and trusting.

A few months later I had another dream. In the dream I had decided that I must forgive Rosemary West. We met on the edge of a park, by some railings with spiked ends. It was night, and dark, apart from the greyish orange of streetlights giving the sky a sleazy glow. We faced each other and I said (without looking at her face), "I forgive you". The words came out limp and monotonous as the litter that blocked the drain near my foot. It was a meaningless moment of misguided, arrogant hypocrisy. There was no response. She evaporated into the drain. The railings were spears of ice. The skin on my hands froze and tore as I tried to loosen my grip. How could I have been so patronising and pretentious, so premature? Forgiveness, what does it mean and how will it come?

In the next scene of the same dream I was sitting in a basement with Rosemary West and another woman who said that she was a mediator. West was scooping handfuls of flesh from a glistening pile of meat, as bloody and fresh as chopped placentas, on the floor by her feet. She was pushing it into small polythene bags. She lined up the bags. They looked like chicken giblets from the innards of frozen supermarket poultry. On the wall behind her there was a black space like a window with no glass in it opening onto a blackout night sky. She picked up each bag in turn, tossing them one by one over her shoulder into the black rectangular frame. She didn't turn her head to follow her actions once. Her eyes were all pupil that strained towards me like a sharp point trying to burst through a bin liner. She repeated a sentence to herself, the tone was matter of fact, like a chant without heart:

"I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back."

I looked at the mediator with triumphant illogic. Rose must be mad if she thinks that the sea is outside the basement. How can I speak to someone who is so mad as to think that the sea is outside the basement. I simply cannot understand or relate to anyone who is so mad as to think that the sea is outside the basement. My sense of reality has nothing in common with hers.

"I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back."

She could not see us. Her face was white and cold as china clay. She had no fire left. Her fingers clawed and stuffed, clawed and stuffed. The bags of flesh, purple, putrid. Over her shoulder, into the hole, one after another. But as I looked closer, sure enough, the number of bags was simply increasing. The words guttered on, jaws bared to seize the tail, jolted back on themselves, a tight loop, tightening like a noose.

"I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back."

The mediator had gone. I didn't see her leave. My focus was drawn towards the power of the sea. I couldn't hear it, but it wasn't swallowing those bags of flesh. The sea knows the rules. It would not absorb nor accommodate the rotting flesh. It would not allow it to disappear. There was nowhere for it to hide. Soon the room would be full of these neat transparent bags that refused to follow the rules of waste disposal. Rose was intoning a universal law. The words didn't seem to touch her, but they came out of her mouth. I could not know how long she must stay in this abattoir. Was I supposed to wait? What would I be waiting for? If I waited what would I learn? I did not have to stay there waiting for her to see me. But I was listening, witnessing her soul trying to break through. She could not hear herself, but I could hear her. She did not know who I was. She didn't know who Lucy was. What was there to discuss? I had witnessed her profound state of ignorance and denial. What did I want to happen to her? Did I have to be there in order for it to happen?

"I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back."

What does this mean for me? Maybe this moment in my dream is a chance to investigate my own need to run and hide and attempt to destroy the evidence of my own potential for violence and denial. It is a chance to face the fear that makes me want to leave. This monster

is also me. If I can understand and accept this truth, maybe I can be with Rosemary if she reaches a time of wanting that. Maybe one day I will feel strong enough to stay with her and pray. The fire might come back and her eyes might be able to see. But the realisation of the effects of her actions might destroy her. The sea will know when to stop retching and vomiting. I can trust its rhythm and its discernment. Forgiveness may come, it may not. All I have to do is to learn how to float like a gull; to scrape letters in the sand and watch the sea eat my words.

There came a time when I had to look at the reality of my own death again. This time it was presented to me in the context of my 'interconnectedness' with life. I found myself standing in a shallow stream, in the silent rhododendron forests in the Himalayas of Nepal, writing down these words:

"As a granddaughter, as a daughter, as a mother, as a sister, as an aunt, as a niece, as a cousin, as a lover, as a friend, I totally accept my death."

All the weight of my life fell away into the stream. I left it behind in Nepal. I just didn't need to carry it any more. At that moment, I could hear the roar of the silence around me. It released me to be no more than a vulnerable human being knowing the grace of love seen in that moment. I had tasted fulfilment. Maybe Rosemary West will find a glimpse of the fire in the setting sun before she dies.

At times I would like to be able to help her move out of the abattoir that led to the gangrene of her heart. I would like her to know the beauty of a smile, a tear, a tender gesture, a song. Maybe she has more time to listen to the birds in prison, more time to listen to herself? I would like to know what she does with her life now. How is she being helped? Will she remain in denial for the rest of her life? Is it possible for her to be redeemed? Is it time for me to listen to what she might want to say? Would she ever want that? Am I strong enough? Is it possible?

Buddhist retreats allow me to sit with my self in all of its endless preoccupations with selfish thoughts and investigate the roots of my anguish, until, mysteriously and unexpectedly, I experience the sacred reality of who I am. Grace is unveiled. I move into the larger self of the whole universe, where I experience the fact of my interconnectedness with all forms of life. In this place, I reclaim the depth of being that is all embracing. Here, forgiveness is spontaneous. May all beings know this place. I know that we are all part of a vast, shining silence¹.

Lucy is standing above us on a cloud with her feet astride. Her bare feet are visible and grounded, not swirled about by the cloud. And yet the cloud is not solid. She is wearing a knee length, white toga. Her legs and feet are bare. She appears like a mixture of an Amazon and an angel. Her hair is gold and frizzier than ever. In one hand she is holding a long flaming torch, swung away from her hip like a shepherd's crook or a staff. Her face is smiling and she is no longer wearing spectacles. In a way that could only be her, she is telling me, firmly and clearly: "Just get on with it, Marian."

Acknowledgements

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¹ The term 'shining silence' is a translation of the Chinese term for Silent Illumination - a meditation method. Yiu Yannang on a recent retreat pointed out to us the verbal nature of the term *chao* in *Mo Chao* and that it could be used as a gerund governing *mo*. The silence is not so much to be illuminated - but rather allowed to shine.

A CONCERT
Rebekah Kenton

*Hidden in this music
are inner octaves.
I can hear through the veil of silence
in the background
gods singing to humanity.
A lullaby
to a sleeping humanity.*

*It does not matter how many nadis
there are in your subtle body.
A Maestro will play all of them
as you are nothing but an echo
of his instrument,
a radiant resonance board.*

*But the Gardener
made a simple statement.
He said it all in displaying
just the top and base notes;
white and red
carnations.*

WORKING WITH A MASTER

John Crook

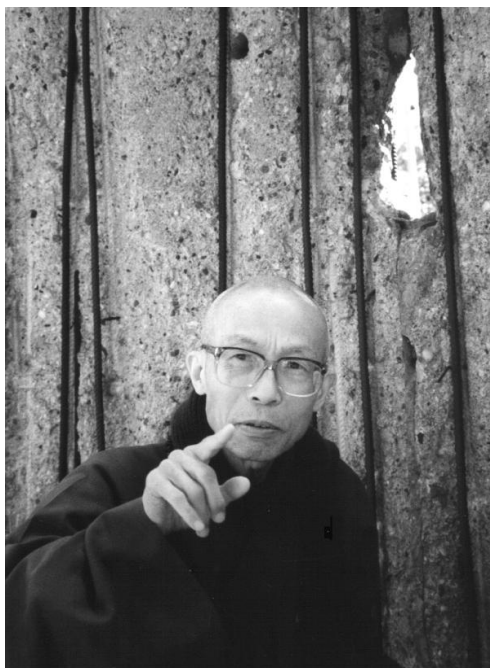
What is it like for a lay practitioner to work with a master over a period of time? A single retreat provides an introductory experience but what if one persists through a series of such events? This would indeed be a requirement if the aim was to train in Ch'an. Training takes time but does it take one anywhere?

To assist those for whom this question may be relevant, I attempt to answer it through presenting a series of excerpts from my retreat reports over several years training with Shi-fu¹. Shi-fu is keen that participants should write a brief report on their retreat experiences. I have certainly found this to be a useful exercise. What changes may I have noticed over the years?

Naturally, everyone's experience on retreat differs and the training with different masters doubtless also varies. However, I believe the pattern of Zen retreats has much in common wherever they may be and whoever directs them: one person's description can therefore give a rough guide, although not an exact one, to what you may yourself experience should you set out upon this path.

I first attended a Ch'an retreat in New York in 1986 but I had previous retreat experience from working in meditation privately several times at Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Scotland and from several retreats in Soto Zen at Throssel Hole Priory in Northumberland, one of which had been directed by Roshi Jiyu Kennett. Furthermore, I had spent time in the Himalayas with Tibetan yogins. My original encounter with Ch'an had been while serving as a national service officer in the army in Hong Kong 1953-54 when I had been introduced to a noted lay disciple of Master Hsu-yun and taken some teaching². I was not therefore exactly a beginner, but I knew that work with Shi-fu could well provoke a Dharma struggle through self-confrontation of an order I had not encountered before. I was not disappointed.

Of course this article does not show how far I have come, but rather how far I have yet to go.



Shi-fu at the Berlin Wall - April 1999

Conductor with a motionless baton *New York. May 1986*

I knew that the Ch'an meditation centre in downtown Queens in New York was in an urban area yet, as a country-living person from Somerset, I was not well prepared to find myself in a converted shop with a factory on one side and the cacophonous main street of a commercial area on the other. Furthermore, a major street junction with traffic lights was just down the road and a fire station up the way. Every hour or so a fire engine would come roaring through the traffic, klaxon sounding, come to a reluctant halt at the lights and blare away at them in fury. "Of course Zen is everywhere!" I reassured myself as I sat through my first vibrating hours of passing trucks, car horns, full volume radios and the chatter in at least five languages of exceedingly lively passers-by. As my back began to ache and my legs to hurt I made a vow that I would at least survive this thing and that that alone would count as a sort of success. The first two days demanded naked will as sweat from the local heat wave ran down my face and I sat damp from perspiration in my minimal clothing.

I struggled to apply the method I had learned at Throssel Hole - *shikantaza* - the just-sitting wall-gazing approach of Soto Zen. I was searching to understand what the great Japanese master Dogen meant by "without thinking". My head was full of scattered bits of television serials; painful memories; bits of old dreams; an endless random collection of pictorial sequences without focus and seemingly without meaning. The scattered mind merged with the traffic noise into a hellish bedlam punctuated by growing physical pain.

Shi-fu's talks were always helpful, starting me off again with a touch of hope. He suggested allowing thought to subside on an out-breath and leaving it alone on the in-breath to create a silent space. I found this practice beginning to produce gaps in my scattered mind which slowly increased in length, deepening into moments of profound silence. After some hours I felt a swirling energy rising from my belly which changed into a glow of gratitude and release.

The following morning I awoke refreshed and, in the silence of the dawn, the simple song of the American Robin in the little garden sounded in a deep and sustained stillness. In a now rare dream sequence, I found myself seated beside a dark tranquil pool in a deep cavern in the earth. There was a full orchestra seated on chairs there ready to play. I was the conductor with baton raised - but motionless! No sound.

Shi-fu gave a talk about *mu-shin*, no-mind. My head started up again in a chatter of argument. This was no picture show but a vigorous debate. Did I know what *mu-shin* was? Certainly some past mystical experiences suggested so. But were these no-mind or merely some form of illusion? I puzzled on about this, working myself up into fuss and worry about how far along the Zen path I might be.

Some hours went by locked in this foolishness but, suddenly, I realised that what I was into was a quest for credentials and approval. As an academic I have a list of alphabetical combinations after my name signifying my attainments. I wanted to add *mu-shin* to the end of the list! The absurdity of this destructive endeavour got to me and, as I began smiling to myself and accepting that part of me that wanted to strut about exhibiting attainments, a new release arrived. I had an interview with Shi-fu and shared all this nonsense with him. Clearly, I could not tell whether past experiences were *mu-shin* or not, nor indeed could Shi-fu. He was not me and anyway it was all in the past. Nor, of course, could Shi-fu tell me whether I would experience *mu-shin* in the future. I could however be grateful for those past moments and press on anew with my method. The whole experience had been a barrier constructed out of my own karma. As it collapsed, I noted the deep truth of Dogen's phrase, "*Whenever the opposites arise, the Buddha mind is lost*".

Yet my body was now troubling me sorely. Backache, due to a small knotted muscle close to the spine below the shoulders, was generating a widening area of pain. I had travelled

uncomfortably in the ill-designed seat of the aircraft flying me across the Atlantic. Sitting was soon so awful that I had to exercise sheer will to get through each half hour expecting it to end in an ignominious collapse. Periodic yoga exercises, rolling on my back in the breaks, back walking from a fellow participant and applications of one-handed massage became a desperate work programme to keep me going. The difficulty was not however overcome in this way.

At some point during the penultimate day, during a period of slow walking (*kinhin*), it suddenly struck me that my discomfort with the heat, my suppressed annoyance at the street noise and my anger at my back pain were all one thing - a burning rejection of being there at all combined with irritation at not "doing better". I saw myself as simply grumbling as if in some way it would get me out of the hole I was in. Yet grumbling at a self-imposed task was such a ridiculous activity that once again I was amused by this paradoxical and uncomfortable state of mind. I accepted as a blunt and obvious fact that I was just a fool seeing things the wrong way.

After all were any of these conditions bad? Neither the heat nor the sound of traffic were actually doing me any harm. Indeed, I was already aware that, in spite of them, an increasing clarity of mind was emerging. As I began to think in this way, a sudden turn-about in my feelings occurred. Everything that had been horrible a moment before not only became tolerable but acceptable - even inspiring.

As I sat down to face the wall after a break I found my world transformed. With my mind in stillness, I experienced the spaciousness of the room and the presence of others in it reflected there as if in a mirror. For a while there was the exhilaration of sheer joy. With some further hints from Shi-fu about body relaxation, I found it possible at last to let go of all these accumulated concerns as if they were all one thing - 'me' in fact. In the letting go of 'me', the world simply appeared as it was - all of the 'same taste', nothing special to praise or to blame. The experience seemed to reach from horizon to horizon without boundaries so that all the sounds and happenings were simply going on within it like the continuous flow of water in a river. The water was gently wearing away the stone and there was no need for hurry.

After the retreat was over, I spent a final hour meditating near the window of an upstairs room. It was open - and by now a road digger was excavating a ditch in the pavement immediately below. All the sounds were at full volume yet not for one moment was the inner stillness disturbed - in transparency the interdependence of everything flowed along. The hour seemed like a mere few minutes.

That evening I flew to Amsterdam. In the early morning I sat with my son and daughter eating pancakes for breakfast beside a canal. As we walked around, I found my breathing quietly centred in my belly and the stillness ever present in my mind. After every burst of conversation, it simply returned of its own accord. When at last I went to bed, I found I had been alert and active for twenty-seven hours, had crossed the Atlantic without jet lag and was continuing to feel a clarity of unusual perception. Only three days after my re-entry to my normal work schedule did recurrent worries begin to dim this way of seeing. I had truly learnt that *"to know all the Buddhas of the past, present and future, only perceive that Dharmadhatu nature is all created by the mind"*.

Dogen offering to Dogen New York, May 1987

I had come to the retreat bringing many tensions of my world with me; mental distress from a difficult domestic situation; remorse and shame at a seeming inability to solve such problems; a slightly frozen shoulder producing referred pain oddly in my upper left arm. Perhaps the physical pain was merely an emblem of pain in the mind?

As session succeeded session an increasing fatigue enveloped me, a deadly drowsiness with aches, pains and fidgety movement. My method of *shikantaza* was difficult to focus and punctuated by wandering thought, intense feelings of loss, grief and family distress. Whenever this faded away there were haphazard bursts of hypnagogic imagery in fragmentary visual 'clips' without apparent meaning. Even so each session was different and gradually some moments of calm emerged.

I began repeating the name of Amitabha, now and again stopping the repetition to gaze into the silence so created. This practice resembled the breathing technique I had used previously but the results were very erratic. Again I found myself pondering Dogen's insistence that meditation is neither thought nor no-thought but a state of being without thought.

In one of my more silent periods the words of the *hua t'ou* "What is Wu"³ arose spontaneously and it occurred to me that whenever 'without thinking' became established Wu was present. Just before Shi-fu called me to my first interview, the phrase "Dogen is offering to Dogen" arose, apparently meaning that out of Dogen's method a question had been given.

I told Shi-fu of this and he remarked that a *hua t'ou* or a koan could indeed arise spontaneously while practising *shikantaza*. He seemed to like the phrase about Dogen for his eyes shone. It had come from my sub-conscious, he said. As to my practice - "No problem!"

I returned to my cushion; the work was gruelling; sometimes I felt bored stiff and wondered why on earth I was doing all this. Could there be any benefit in so masochistic an exercise? I remembered a statement made to me by a yogin in Ladakh, "You must sit still within the boredom itself and wait for an energy to arise." I sat.

Silent patches continued to emerge and I felt grateful for them. Sometimes a hint of bliss appeared. "Ah", I said to myself "I am making progress!" and I considered asking Shi-fu for another interview. Yet, realising I had a strong wish to please Shi-fu like a schoolboy facing a powerful schoolmaster and wishing to impress, I desisted, waiting for this feeling, which felt rather silly, to subside.

Shi-fu's evening talk was based on the Song of Mind, just two lines of it:

*"Do not seek an experience of emptiness.
Full comprehension emerges naturally."*

This made striking sense and, in response to the charm and open friendliness of his presentation, smiling, playful even, so much the opposite of his stern, inquisitorial face in interview, I let go of my oedipal reaction and felt released from error.

On the third evening Shi-fu commented mockingly on the faint heartedness he had encountered in interviews with participants. Mockingly, he imitated the manners of the young Chinese women present who, like the rest of us, were complaining of leg ache, backache, headache, everything ache. "What is this?" he demanded. "It's not a retreat at all - more like a Day Care centre!"

I was stung by his remark. Whatever others might be doing I was determined that for me the retreat was a serious matter. However much it differed from the old monastic retreats, the horrors of which Shi-fu had alarmingly described, none the less I would do something. An angry determination arose as I contemplated my incompetence and faint heartedness. So,

immediately after the talk, as I sat on my cushion once again, I punched my right fist into my left palm making a loud crack and, powered by anger, plunged into meditation.

The first target was my fidgety body. I stared again and again into the various aches and pains, fully allowing myself to experience them and then commanding their departure. To my surprise, one by one they cooled down, giving way to a quiet sensation that was not uncomfortable. I went to bed feeling that mastery of the body was not impossible and that aches and pains were largely the product of an uneasy mind.

I also became focused on two further lines of the Song of the Mind:

*“When birth and death are cut off
the principle is seen”*

Shi-fu told us that this meant the cutting off of the moment to moment arousal and decay of thought. I could see deep sense in this.

I had a dream in which I had to cross a green landscape, wild open land, in which savage dogs roamed in packs and singletons. I had been given a sharp sword with which to cut them down so I set off with confidence. The dogs came close but none approached to molest me. In the early morning session I felt that this dream referred to my wandering thoughts and that the sword was Shi-fu's teaching. I sat with confidence.

It was a holiday morning; traffic was absent; the American Robin sang its evocative early morning song; to my surprise the pain in my body failed to appear and my body itself seemed to disappear. I was aware of its presence merely as a bag of guts plopped like a cushion upon the floor supporting a meditating mind. A strange image arose within me. It seemed as if a great grey mass like a tumour was filling out my stomach and gradually protruding from my body, almost as if I were a dividing cell. The experience was quite physical and alarming, a gross wrenching apart of something horrible in me that needed exorcism. As it separated from me, as a big round ball about a yard in diameter, it seemed to be made of grey paper. It was a wasps nest. I poked it with a stick and thousands of wasps poured forth and disappeared in distant air. A feeling of great relief filled me and my mind became tranquil like a mirror, simply reflecting all phenomena. I sat through two complete sessions without a movement.

After breakfast the same feeling continued but now the mirror felt rather tightly bound by its frame. Quite suddenly the frame dissolved and, with a vivid sensation of opening out, a loosening of constraint, a wide spaciousness appeared. The silent mirror now had no limit, there was no movement within it, no thought, no movement of mind at all, a sheer vastness which had not come in from outside but which had arisen with the disappearance of the mirror's frame. Words fail here for what words can stand for the wordless? I felt open to the entire Universe and, although the sights and sounds around me were all quite as usual, in the world where I had been I was not. There was no-one there. No wanting, nothing holding me for I was not there to be held. Happiness without attachment, for nothing arose to which attachment could exist. Gratitude, a continuing state.

I remembered Shi-fu's instruction to “Let the Universe do the work- not you!” and I felt at once that, where I had once been, there was now just this universal energy flowing of itself without constriction, time moving. I *was* time not *in* time. Wu was both the void of experience and the continuum of a flowing stream, both empty, both wide open.

At interview the experience was still with me for I was second in line and the experience had begun only fifteen minutes before. I described it to Shi-fu and added “Wu is universal energy endlessly flowing - it is also love.” Shi-fu said “Good. Very good. Now you can start practising ” I returned to my seat and almost at once the doubting, self accusatory, mind attacked me with every manner of demonic self persecuting thought and, for several sittings, I quite lost a hold on Wu.

I took up the phrase about birth and death again and could perceive how Wu was obscured not only by thoughts but also by their barely conscious bases that were generating diverse intentionalities and preoccupations not clear enough to take the form of thought.

In the afternoon, after a long series of prostrations, Wu returned. There was complete stillness and openness within a silent, sack-like corpse in and out of whose mouth flies flew as it breathed. I was this fresh corpse and a fear of such deathly emptiness arose together with so grim an image, a terror of losing all I held dear in the world, my pride, my intellect. Somehow, the image of the little blue iris growing in the garden came to mind and, "They toil not neither do they spin but who among you is arrayed like one of these?" I felt better, in touch with life once more.

Gradually, as session followed session I became able to track these movements of minding. The openness became lost not so much when thought arose but rather when attachments, old emotional needs, wants or fears were present. The presence of need, want or fear unrepresented by thought was especially subtle and signalled by bodily tensions, finger scratching, nail biting, fidgeting, the mind speaking as it were non-verbally. At these times there was a sensation of mental closure, as if being surrounded, hedged in. Yet, by allowing this state to develop fully, it began to lose strength, dissolving in the same way as bodily pain had done.

It was never possible to force an opening to occur, for this in itself represented an ego state. Yet, from time to time, a sort of letting go occurred, a putting down not only of ego states but of the entire self as felt in attachments. The putting away felt like something falling away - like sticking plaster being pulled from the skin but with no puller doing the pulling. With that the openness emerged again bringing a powerful sense of relief, "Ah - here it is again - how fortunate!"

This is a condition of total not-wanting. Death would be OK, entirely so, being neither good nor bad in itself. Only when this not-wanting has arisen does this openness flow. To say then "I don't know. I don't need to explain. I have nothing to discover, nothing to resolve and nothing to do, nowhere else to go absolutely at all." was somehow totally complete.

*"Whatever arises in the mind
gives rise to its own sphere."*

Liberation lasts only so long as one is absent, saying of oneself "Who is here? Not me."

"Sometimes we raise the eyebrows of old Shakyamuni - sometimes we do not" (Dogen)

Oh - look at that! Maenllwyd, April 1989

This was a busy retreat for me. I was guest master and responsible for the welfare not only of the participants but also of Shi-fu and the 'team' from New York on their first visit to Wales, Ming Yee and Gou Yuan Se. I was of course concerned that all would be well.

In many ways my experiences of sitting resembled those of previous retreats. At first I was delighted to sit and blissful moments appeared but then fatigue and scattered thoughts arose and the usual struggle was on. I wrestled with my karmic problems, my unsatisfactory relationships, domestic disturbances and my neurotic desire to please everyone, yet the calming effect of meditation soon released me and at such times, while fully aware of the actual realities of my surroundings, I also felt myself as if floating on a platform above the valley; that the wall before me was insubstantial and that my awareness was reaching out over the rolling spaces of the hills and valleys into some limitless beyond.

At my first interview, I told Shi-fu how my mind was forever seeking explanations, especially since, as a scientist, to seek so had been the chief education of my mind. Shi-fu remarked that for me the most useful path would be silence, especially since my practice of *shikantaza* had given me some grip on the stillnesses that can arise in the mind. He felt that learning Silent Illumination would deepen this practice further. I returned to my cushion fortified with this thought which gradually yielded a feeling of stability and stillness only occasionally broken by mind wandering and dreamlike images. With a quietened mind I felt free to review my life in the Dharma and I resolved to tell Shi-fu of those rare experiences which had appeared as if by grace several times in my life since boyhood and which I have always been reluctant to share with anyone because of their incomprehensible nature.

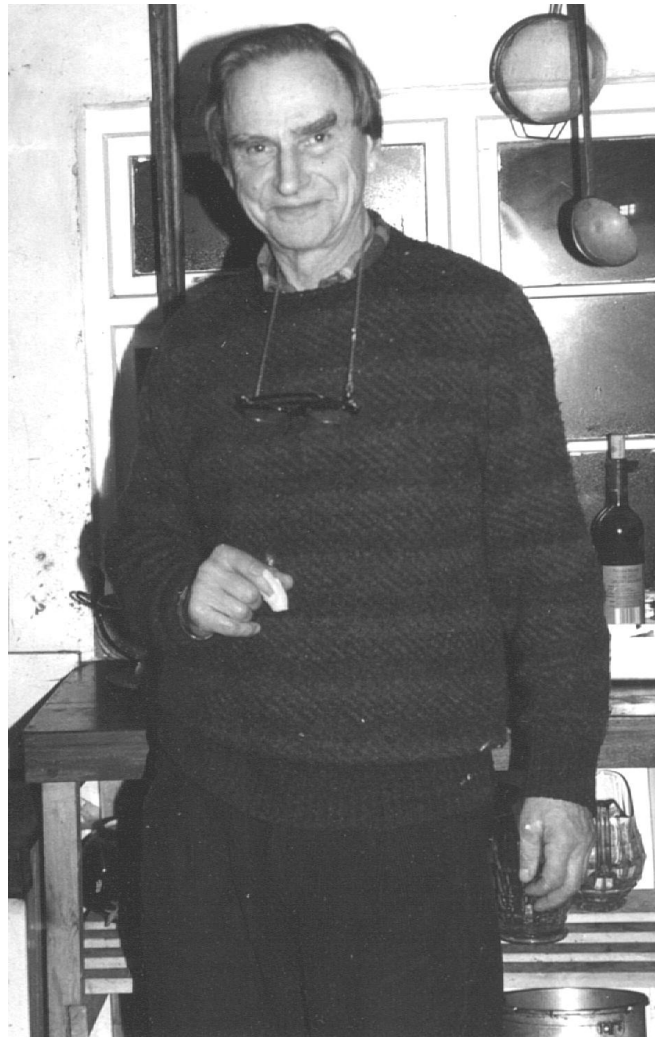
I gave him a straightforward account of one event that had followed a retreat at the Maenllwyd. I had been down the lane on the point of departure and had returned from the car on foot to a gate which I had forgotten to close behind me. As I swung the gate, I saw two Red Kites wheeling overhead in the frost-clear air of the sunny, winter day. Red Kites I had never seen near the Maenllwyd before so I exclaimed to myself with joy "Oh look at that!" As I gazed at the circling birds my mind suddenly fell empty, I was no longer present within 'my' experiencing. There was only the landscape and the circling birds, a sense of wonder and amazement. I stood gazing for about twenty minutes as the birds gradually withdrew and felt the experience slowly fading as thought reappeared and 'I returned to myself.' This was a re-awakening, a joy to have found 'it' again, for such an experience has only rarely appeared, often with years between.

I also told Shi-fu of another occasion when I was visiting Naropa's cave at Dzongkhul. We had spent three days in July 1977 crossing the immense icefields of the Umasi-la pass through the Himalayas into the Zanskar valley of Ladakh. As we were being given tea in the upper hall of the little monastery I had glanced out of the window. The mountainside opposite was falling away as icy water rushed down in a massive waterfall from the glacier above. Again emptiness of self came over me and the great space of the mountains seemed to fill me with itself. I wandered alone for half an hour up and down the flat monastery roof until I felt myself again gradually returning as thought once more created self concern⁴.

I asked Shi-fu what, from the point of view of Ch'an, was the meaning of these experiences. Without hesitation he told me that this was "seeing the nature" (*kensho*). I was overjoyed to receive his confirmation of what I had suspected but never been able to test in a direct meeting with a Zen master. Shi-fu also said that, from what he knew of me, he had already understood that I had had such experiences. He then said "Congratulations" and told me to make three prostrations before him, which I did with profound feelings of awe, joy and liberation. He also said that from now on he wanted me to run Ch'an retreats with his blessing and, as it were, as his representative.

While I experienced a great freedom, I also perceived immediately the responsibilities that this recognition implied for me. I also felt bewildered for what did congratulations have to do with simply experiencing the most basic nature of myself? I felt an odd shyness too for, while I was happy at Shi-fu's recognition, I did not want anyone else to know. In sharing with others minefields of potential miscommunication loomed before me.

After this interview the sitting sessions ran smoothly and clearly with a stillness of a mirror-like quality. One afternoon we did prostrations, carefully explained by Shi-fu. I experienced profound repentance, not only for immediate things but for the long perspective of inadequacies in my life. As the tears poured down my face, it seemed as if repentance must be endless. Oceans of karma from past generations seemed to sweep through me. It was as if this repentance was a beginning of atonement for previous lifetimes as well as for this one. The depth of feeling gradually changed to relief and gratitude towards the Dharma.



The naturalness of how things are *New York, November 1989*

On the first day I was happy, rediscovering old friends. The atmosphere of the premises in the new centre, a few houses down the road from the old one, reminded me of the good things of past retreats. There was a large and attractive image on the altar so I went up to pay my respects and to look at the Buddha - and the Buddha looked at me! As I gazed into that peaceful, if curiously distant, face it was as if a blissful harmony was transferred to me, a sweet peacefulness that seemed to permeate the room.

On this retreat I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese word *tsan* - meaning investigate, enter or go into. How was one to do this in meditation?

Soon the usual troubles began, past and present vexations, dissatisfaction and despair emerged one after another like a host of waiting demons. My body stiffened and my back ached. There were subtle motifs working their way below the surface subverting whole hours of sitting. Two devils in particular were distressing me. The first was telling me that my endless tendency to try to placate significant others could not be satisfied here. It seemed then to me that without feeling that I was pleasing somebody else, I could not feel happy about my own being. Here of course there were no others to please - unless it were Shi-fu and to try and placate Shi-fu was so obviously absurd that I could not even begin. Sitting before the wall there was only myself, and I had to learn to value my own way of being. The second devil was a

saboteur. In the middle of a peaceful kinhin a voice suddenly said "You don't believe any of this!" I was shocked by so traitorous a thought. My discomfort was taking its revenge on the ego's fortitude in enduring the process by denying the very belief that led me to value the work.

Furthermore, Shi-fu was presenting me with a very distanced appearance, checking my work in cleaning the bathroom on a work period and ticking me off for crossing my legs in relaxation during an interview. Afterwards he remarked that he understood that different cultures had different ways of sitting. It was just that in China to sit in that way seemed somewhat disrespectful. I was mortified by all this for it contrasted so strongly with his attitude towards my work on the previous retreat in Wales. I began to suspect that this was all a training procedure to test my resolution. Perhaps he would ask me to do some impossible task, just as Marpa trained Milarepa and Shi-fu's own teacher had likewise drilled him into self recognition!

I resolved that whatever he did or said would make no difference to my training. I would carry on regardless. With this I felt easier - even amused to try and spot what device he might throw at me next!

Shi-fu's talks on Master Hsu-yun's instructions on Ch'an meditation helped me greatly with my main quest. I had previously discovered that it was sometimes possible to detach from a painful thought and allow my awareness to expand to embrace the experiential moment, the nowness of the room, sounds and atmosphere, without the interpolation of thought. I began to practice bringing myself into the immediate presence of the place. As I did this, it seemed that the monstrous pervasiveness of ego concern began withdrawing into its lair, leaving the stage clear and unobstructed. It was strange how quickly this shift could occur. One moment my head would be in a fog of self concern, the next there I was in the room, clean, clear and present.

It seemed as if I was in a cage inhabited by troublesome monkeys. If I asked myself the question "What is troubling me now?" I could do one of two things. I could either perceive and name a basic problem, one of the monkeys, and worry about that, or I could look at it from the standpoint of the cage itself. This moves the locus of attention from the agitating monkey to the environment that surrounds it. The cage is not the monkey, it is uninvolved. However noisy the monkey may be, the cage is unaffected. Repeating this shift of attention many times led to an expanding and relatively enduring stillness. When I glanced at the Buddha now there was just a reflex of silence.

One morning the chanting of the ritual moved me to tears. All the tragedy and sorrow of the world seemed matched against the beauty of the passing scenes of life. Soon this sorrow changed into a growing feeling of bliss, deep, inward and physical in manifestation. At interview I asked Shi-fu the meaning of blissful experiences within the Ch'an perspective. Shi-fu said that such a feeling arises out of gratitude when there has been an insight into emptiness. Emptiness, gratitude and bliss are related, tending to arise one after the other in unpredictable sequences and with varying durations and intensities so long as the mind is one-pointed. Here was the invisible door out of the cage.

On the last night I sat till midnight. In the stillness of the meditation hall questions from Shi-fu's talks slowly circled. What was my original face before I was born? Before time what was I? If there was no time before time began, then there could only be space. But no - without time, no space. Simply the naturalness of the way things are. Wu is the inconceivable. Nothing to be said or done about it. Just the great NO of Joshu which seemed to be turning into my great YES. Did I say *my* yes?

Creating a fuss: seeing the stupidity *New York, November 1990*

I arrived from England bringing a relatively calm mind, gentler of late due to some lessening of vexations and months of improving practice. This was to be Shi-fu's fiftieth retreat in the USA and, on the Tuesday, I was to celebrate my sixtieth birthday. It bode well to be an auspicious time.

Yet I had also brought with me something else of which I was not at first aware. I had spent much of the year away from home with visits to Taiwan and Hong Kong and in two long expeditions to high altitude in the Himalayas, one of them in the deep cold of the winter months. I really did not want to go abroad again: rather I wanted to consolidate at home and write. Yet I had a programme of retreats to lead in Britain in the coming year and I knew I needed further training with Shi-fu, both for myself and for others.

Although the first day was peaceful, I had a growing sense of unease. I was unexpectedly bothered by the rules, by the changed diet, by the feeling that I might make some mistake. I reacted negatively to the powerful authority of Shi-fu himself and became puzzled because, since I had attended retreats before, I had not expected to feel so resistant. Finally I recognised that I did not actually want to be in New York at all - at least not just then. I felt a certain resentment, a feeling of duress, that I had had to come at that time when I did not feel ready.

The realisation helped. Since I was undoubtedly on the Western side of the 'pond', the only thing to do was to work hard and enter the retreat as fully as possible. Yet, even if my head was telling me this, my heart refused to obey. It began creating a dreadful fuss. My discomfort grew and grew and, rationalise with myself as I might, it went on and on.

I was horrified to find myself repeatedly judging my companions even though I knew nothing about them and I was trying to follow the isolation rule, deliberately treating the retreat as if I was the only one on it. I soon recognised that these judgements were actually attempts to bolster my superiority because I feared exactly the opposite. To myself I was exhibiting privately a crude arrogance based in my own insecurity, exactly as Shi-fu, to my added shame, was to discuss in one of his highly pertinent talks. At times I felt as if I was the only victim of the strict rules. I did not want to be bound by all these strictures and I felt as if I was being subjected to the imposition of unnecessary authority. Yet, after all, I reasoned, I had deliberately come on the retreat of my own free will knowing full well what retreats were like. I realised that my feelings were nothing other than a paranoid reaction.

I began to develop an acute sensitivity to Shi-fu's presence. It was as if I were constantly worrying about what he thought of me. I went through seemingly endless and ridiculous mental posturings designed to seek his approval, hoping, for example, that he would notice how well I was sitting and relaxing as soon as he left the room! Of course I knew all the time how totally absurd this was. I knew that Shi-fu's relation to me was entirely straightforward yet I kept reading into his facial expressions the implication that he disapproved of me. It took me rather longer to realise that this was because I disapproved of myself!

Of course I knew all about such oedipal feelings, not only from my own experience of them with previous father figures, but also because, as a research supervisor for university doctoral degrees, I had considerable experience of receiving and managing such feelings in young men working under my guidance. None of this knowledge helped in the least nor did the fact that being sixty to the day put me in the same generation as Shi-fu himself!

I had a disturbed and self-conscious feeling that I was not doing the retreat well, that I was a most inferior participant. The silence and isolation meant that I had no means of checking this out and no means of playing my usual games whereby I get others to like me by subtly pleasing them, a game at which I recognise my unfortunate skill. I became increasingly

anxious about everything, the possibility of being late perhaps at meals or wondering when I should go to the toilet.

Then there was the fatigue. The relentless effort to sit facing a wall with all this in my head exhausted me. The best things were the breaks in the programme for exercises and meals and of course the relaxing Dharma talks in the evenings. Yet I did have one great cause for rejoicing. I had very little discomfort from sitting itself. This was so wonderful a change from previous retreats that I reflected upon the possibility that it was the absence of physical pain that had set all this mental strife going. From time to time all these anxieties peaked in something close to a panic attack. I'm losing control, I thought, feeling desperate and seeking every inner means of steadying myself.

It was then that I remembered my mantra. Years ago I had received a mantra as the sound of my protective *yidam* in Tibetan Tantra. It had helped me cross passes in the Himalayas and to get me along precipitous tracks where I would have otherwise suffered from vertigo. Abandoning all methods, I plunged into reciting it. Wonder upon wonders, my mind, in the space of one sitting session, began to quieten and experience some peace. Something like the bliss of gratitude arose.

Shi-fu's talks were tracking my inner process with wonderful accuracy. He spoke of the lack of Dharma confidence, of the inner insecurity that gave rise either to fearful anxiety on the one hand or aggressive arrogance on the other. I followed his advice, classifying each bout of discomfort under a heading. I soon saw that all these headings stemmed from one single source. The common root was indeed an insecurity, a shaky self-confidence, that stemmed from childhood. Everything I had been experiencing came from this one source, me. I had brought it all through the door on arrival. If I was to *know the Buddhas of the past, present and future* I certainly had to *perceive that all worlds of experience were created by the mind*.

After each meal, I prostrated repeatedly before the statue of Kuan Yin in an upstairs room. I did these prostrations slowly, staying on the floor for minutes at a time. I understood clearly that what I had been experiencing was nothing other than a process of self-cherishing expressed in several ways. My ignorance of this was shameful, arrogant even, painful and depressing. What hypocrisy to think I could ever help others in the Dharma. I wept. I remembered those I had hurt, ancient sadnesses, failed relationships, the lack of love that feeds on fear. How could Shi-fu have authorised me to lead retreats in Britain when all this constituted so overwhelming a vexation?

But was it? I had an interview with Shi-fu. We talked of method. As to vexations. "Just tell yourself how stupid they are and put them down." he said. Stick to your method. Simple. Brief. No analysis.

During a period of group prostrations I relaxed into a minute attentiveness to every movement of the body. Hearing others weeping brought my own tears of sadness, regret and repentance to my eyes. Relief came. In silence there was only the movement of hands, knees and forehead. Gradually the rest of the body faded away. Hands flowed, knees bent, forehead touched the floor. It was like swimming, bodilessly, in cool water. Afterwards I sat on my cushion. There was nothing on my cushion. My body had quite disappeared. Above the cushion there was only an awareness in space; the thoughts that watchfully observed had no location; they were neither here nor there but hovering somewhere unlocatable. The thoughts were saying "So, here you are. All of this is me. This is where you start from - right now." In the now there was nothing but a vivid presence in which was peace.

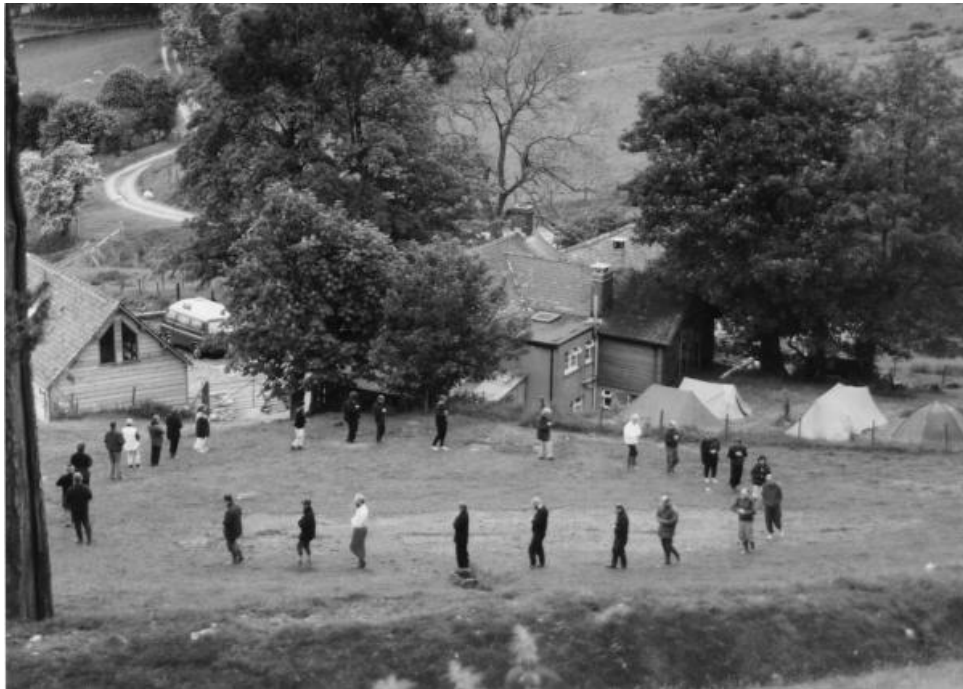
If this was Wu, what was Wu? I knew how to *tsan*⁵ a koan so I launched into it, gazing and gazing into that bright presence. What is it? What is it? Where is it? On and on to a central point locked-on to an absent target. Sound in the room. What is the Wu of that? Music from a

ghetto-blaster going down the street. Where the Wu in that? Stillness now in the early morning. Where the Wu in that?

It was the sixth day. The mind settled and hour after hour sped by. I did exercises to ease the tired body but I did not strictly need to do so. I sat on and on in focused peace. Sometimes *chi* rose in the head so high that I refocused the questioning in the navel. It steadied there. On the last day there were hours of silence often suffused by blissful joy. The dreadful traffic noise registered hardly at all and, when it did, it entertained.

I understood Dharma joy. It had returned with a new confidence. I became aware of my companions in a new way, feeling love and respect for the great efforts that were being made all around me, for the heroism, if I may call it that, of these determined people. I saw Shi-fu once more clearly as the great teacher that he is. In interview I told him of my calmed mind. "That's good!" he said. "Continue." And indeed I guess that's it. Continue. Learn again and again to accept but not before there has been re-cognition.

I start from here. Always from here. At such a moment, looking in, there is the world beckoning.



Lilacs in the cruellest month *Maenllwyd, April 1992*

"April is the cruellest month breeding lilacs out of a dead land." Elliot's words were with me as Shi-fu arrived the day before the retreat began. The weather was cold and light snow showers were dusting the hills, drifting past on the north easterly wind. Yet daffodils were out and, down in the valleys, the lilacs were indeed coming into bloom. Once again I was the guest master for Shi-fu's second retreat in Wales.

Everyone was helpful, some sleeping in tents or in the big barn where the cold wind blew through the holes in the roof. My normal room was allotted to Shi-fu as the Master and, on the first morning, I awoke to frozen snow on the roof of my tent. People got colds yet the retreat began to unfold like a musical performance or the setting sail of a ship.

Shi-fu began talking of Silent Illumination illustrating his theme from Hung Chih Cheng Chueh's poem. The opening words always inspire me, startling the mind into a kind of expectancy, reawakening memories of 'it'.

*Silently and serenely one forgets all words
Clearly and vividly it appears before you
When one realises it time has no limits
When experienced your surroundings come to light.*

As I practised, the sense of the poem became clearer and more present. *"Full of wonder is the pure illumination, like the dreaming of a crane flying in empty space, the still waters of an autumn pool.* The feel of the valley beyond the walls of the Ch'an Hall came into the room. The room was wall-less.

Where does the wonder exist? The words woke me up, the question becoming a *hua t'ou*. Was the wonder inside my mind? Not exactly. Was it outside my mind? Not exactly. Between the two? Instead of a bounded experience, there again appeared that boundless space in which the observer has no specific location. Sounds came and went merging in a present continuum outside any measurement of time. Only a not-ness was apparent that no words could fit; a not-ness of the usual; no habitual mental movement; Wu in fact? A wonder was simply here, now and wordless, a suspended note of music or a beam of sunlight falling through a window.

In interview I told Shi-fu of this but an interval of time had come between my vivid experience and my meeting with him. Something had happened for I was suddenly overcome by sadness at the passing of time, impermanence and the frailty of things. Nostalgia has been with me throughout my life. Shi-fu remarked that, while my first experience was clear and correct, my mind had "gone down" after it. Sadness is a product of attachment. There is nothing wrong with such a feeling but it is not wisdom. The task is to see wisdom again and again and to understand the nature of emotion.

During the Menshang liturgy Shi-fu would go to the door of the Ch'an Hall and scatter the offering outside. I felt as if time stopped, centuries disappeared and ancient China was with us. My respect for the Dharma deepened and my gratitude to Shi-fu sometimes welled up in tears. Watching participants returning to their cushions I felt deep compassion for each and every one and a profound respect for the confrontation with self that each was making. In the Dharma love blooms like lilacs in the cruellest month.

A Game of Chess with 'me' at stake New York, November 1994

Retreats are like games of chess that one plays against oneself. There is the beginning game, the middle game and the end game. In the first one settles in, endeavours to overcome the trepidation at facing another period of quite severe physical and mental hardship and to set aside both positive and negative expectations. In the second phase the struggle with self emerges, karmic predispositions appear in florid form, the body aches, there may be drowsiness and depression, all of which must be gone through as gates that are gateless. Finally, in the end game, if one is fortunate and has worked well, you come home.

Soon I was caught by the memory of a hua t'ou "There is no time. What is memory?" which I had first encountered years before in Hong Kong⁶. My mind became engaged in an intense investigation trying to penetrate the logic of this question. This was thought alright but not wandering thought, it was a racing mind intellectually engaged.

If there was no time, then all that has happened is literally no more. The past is dead; yet so often it seems that history determines the present moment as if all those dead persons were still with us determining our fate. False: the past is totally gone and since the future is not yet here there can only be this existing moment. All the shaping and conditioning of this moment springs from the recreation of the past. But if memory is only thought, what happens if thought, that colourful cognitive representation, that neurotic working out of unfinished business, is dropped? There is just the silent moment of existence, life but no-mind. What is that?

At that moment, I thought, there is only the unfolding of the Universe which like a bubbling spring of ever fresh water, never stops arising and changing at the very moment of its appearance. Time becomes momentariness when we freeze it into solid memories. I am no more than a fragment of this vast unfolding which keeps reinventing itself in the virtual reality of memory. When I stop there is just the flowing. I bowed to the Buddha. "No path!" I said and the Buddha seemed to wink.

In my racing mind there was a focused excitement of exploration. *Chi* was running high and as each inference fell into place there was a real shift in experience, a thrill of discovery and an opening to whatever might come next. Finally, with nowhere else to go, the wholeness, the gestalt, of reaching an end gave a sense of realisation and joy. Yet, I suspected, all this was no more than "namtok" as the Tibetans call it, illusory intellection in which the 'I' was preening its golden feathers.

In interview I tried to speak of this with Shi-fu. He was not impressed. Metaphysical speculation, however exciting and revealing, was not enlightenment. Was I experiencing doubts about my method? I returned somewhat deflated to my cushion. I was clearly not using my *hua t'ou* properly. I shifted to "What is NOW?" using the directions helpfully given by Shi-fu.

On the last afternoon Shi-fu told us the story of the monk who, lest he be beheaded, had to carry a bowl of oil over a set distance without spilling a drop even though startled by various threats and surprises. Shi-fu bade us do likewise with our meditation so I focused my *hua t'ou* and worked hard. Silence descended in a profound *samadhi* within which thought sometimes moved softly. Holding my *hua t'ou*, I seemed to be a helmsman of a small ship bidden to steer towards the peak of a distant mountain. Waves and wind constantly moved the bowsprit off the marker and, as I adjusted the wheel, the bows swung past the marker in the other direction. Steering is a constant flow of minor adjustment to the lively movement of ship and sea. I had a vision that the ship was my body, steering was my mind and that the two were linked in a flowing process in which the 'I' need not be present at all. There was simply the flowing expression of cause and effect in the endless selfless flow of a sea-borne dance.

As I emerged from this *samadhi* I felt the room around me, the cars roaring and honking in the streets outside, the voices in many languages of the passers-by. All this was the sea on which I steer the ship under the guidance of the *hua t'ou*. But no one was steering the ship, no one was sitting on the cushion, there was just a cushion-sitting under an open sky. Instead of being locked in meditation everything opened out in joyous freedom as I sat there, beyond meditation, marvelling at the view. As the last moments of the retreat passed it was as if the ship came home to an island harbour. Unobserved, I bowed quietly to the Buddha, to Shi-fu and the assembly.

*Nothing matters and everything must go,
yet love is having the heart touched
in the valleys of suffering.⁷*

Final reflections

Personal critique

What lessons can I learn from these reports that may be useful for a beginning practitioner? Firstly, on retreat one will indeed discover that one is not in control of one's own mind. Gradually, under the caring eye of the Master, you learn to practise with a method that calms the mind and establishes an awareness that includes refreshing and novel states of consciousness. Liturgical chant and prostration provide opportunities for deep feeling which is likely to include repentance and a renewal of forgiveness and hope. The whole process provides an often startling insight into the operations of one's mind.

It is also clear, moreover, that this process is not accomplished without a struggle with your own concerns; about who you may be; how you are regarded; what is comfortable or comforting to you and what stress may be supportable by you. Indeed, you may soon realise that the retreat is set up deliberately to challenge the self-referring mind by providing circumstances that challenge all its wants and desires for stability, security and sense of permanence. The challenges are tough and increase or lessen at the apparent caprice of the Master. You submit to his authority willingly, yet at the same time inevitably resist his power and influence. Who is he to order me about?

The participant is being challenged to recognise the validity of the Four Noble Truths. Life is suffering because desire is endless. Only when addictive desire is challenged at its source is there a hope of going beyond desire and finding freedom from habitual attachments. On retreat, desire is subtle: we are not speaking of major lusts after sex or chocolate but discrete underground movements; hurrying to a preferred place at table; wondering whether one needs another cup of tea and whether it should be Earl Grey, English Breakfast or Camomile; preoccupations with whether the Master approves of you; how near you might be to an experience of enlightenment; all this against a background of physical discomfort which you would dearly like to avoid. All these take over the mind and become barriers to insight. This is

no easy ride, it is rather a Dharma struggle, trying to see the truth of the Dharma in its experiential reality rather than reviewed perhaps sleepily in a late evening armchair. Only when the difficulties, errors, stupidities and need to repent have been passed through in acceptance can they be laid aside. Indeed the putting aside begins to occur quite naturally as the acknowledgement of one's foolish egoistic self becomes unavoidable and accepted. That is when meditation starts.

These retreat reports also show that similar patterns crop up repeatedly in successive retreats. There is no question of a sudden immediate enlightenment just because you have elected to sit facing a wall for a few hours. This is long term work requiring dedication over a period of years, even a lifetime. Yet there is a kind of spiralling progression. As one spirals onwards, there is a change in each returning spin. The anguished dreams and pointless madness of the mind's career begin to centre clearly in the problems that are the result of a personal past, a personal karma, the very nucleus from which self-concern springs. Again and again, one brings this karmic complex through the door of the Ch'an Hall. Again and again, it goes through its destructive paces but gradually a clearer insight into its nature emerges. The sense of self importance and protection diminishes. What does it matter where I sit, which tea I drink or whether Shi-fu is watching me? The body too gets trained, so that sitting is no longer a trouble, aches and pains become rare events. When you see yourself clearly, maybe you begin to find that rueful grin that is the start of acceptance. Yes, I am a joke, sometimes pathetic, almost always foolish, but, hey, this is where I start from.

Wilful dedication is needed on retreat and, with persistence, the mind indeed calms down. The way the mind works and leads you astray becomes clearer, depression gives way to confidence. Yes, after all I'm alright. A thrilling sense of freedom emerges. One returns to everyday life open and joyous. Working through karma to acceptance allows an integration of the fragmented and often rejected parts of one's mentality, recreating a unified sense of being in the world. Yet this is not completion.

One of the problems that began to manifest clearly as I progressed through several retreats was that my mind easily began to race under the influence of high *chi*. These were exciting times when the enthusiastic mind spun webs of intellectual insight, created poetry and imagery and became quite delighted in its manifestations. Shi-fu had indeed warned us that when there is too much "illumination", silence gets drowned out and the meditation becomes unbalanced. After such times I reflected: fun it certainly had been but none the less I seemed to be losing my way. Freedom did not lie in this direction: the dangers of an increasing self satisfaction and an addiction to high intellectual energy were becoming clear. Furthermore, I had the impression that, as retreats became easier for me through familiarity, this difficulty was increasingly present. All that stuff about the ship coming into harbour with no one at the tiller. Highly suspicious!

I began to do some short solitary retreats in the hills to watch my mind-games more closely. I began to be able to relax without excited elaborations in the silence of the Total Body Awareness and the spaciousness that followed its emergence. In those silences there was little thought, perhaps a movement or two on the back burner but nothing up and running. In that space lay a new sort of freedom; nothing special; just an open presence; just "being time" as Dogen might say; a freedom from the need to do anything; abiding in not knowing; a bare awareness that simply let the world go on turning, a sense of vivid enquiry. Perhaps in that lay the secret of the Buddha's smile.

At least I feel now that this is the clear path. With practice such freedom begins to arise at any time; thoughts just drop out and there it is; nothing in particular; nothing to talk about; a private intimacy that feels complete.

Enlightenment? What's that?

One is told again and again that for an enlightenment experience to occur the self has to be forgotten. How can you do this when it is clear that, when you want such an experience, the ego is unavoidably present? Enlightenment cannot be a product of thought and intention. It arises out of its own nature when it wills: it comes over one in its own time often in a moment of amazement. Unplanned, unexpected, nothing to do with 'me'.

What then is enlightenment? There is so much confusion around this term in the literature and also, it often seems, in the teachings, that careful contemplation is needed and the facts of the mind's journey on and off retreat need to be well understood. Enlightenment refers to two separable processes, firstly to the gradual emergence of a self-understanding that leads to openness and caring for others. Secondly, it refers to periods, often quite short, when all egoistic reference falls away, the mind and environment merge in a mirroring wisdom felt at once to be an ultimate realisation, "seeing the nature"⁸. In any generation there may be a few individuals for whom this state is stable and long enduring but for most, who are so blessed as to realise such vision at all, it is of short duration, even momentary and comes only infrequently and capriciously in a lifetime. The records of the masters indeed show that for many of them such an event was infrequent, yet it formed the root inspiration for their stance in life.

A simple conclusion follows from this. As Roshi Reb Andersen once put it "You can't do it!" If you, that is your ego, is present, *kensho* cannot happen. If you want it even a teeny bit, its possibility is entirely precluded. Training can achieve a one-pointed mind and that which follows from that but does not necessarily predict a self-transcending insight. One may indeed return to the market place from one's mountain cottage as an unfragmented person well capable of practising the Bodhisattva's way and helping others but without having had an enlightenment experience. 'Seeing the nature' cannot be won, you can only be open to a possibility. Maybe you become enlightenment prone, maybe not.

It is for this reason that the wisest of Ch'an masters have always insisted that training should continue after realisation. Indeed, after a brief experience of *kensho*, training is even more important lest illusions of grandeur and a return of self importance corrupt the path. As Shi-fu so wisely says "Continue, continue!"

After one retreat I discussed with him the fact that experiences of self transcendence occur not only in all religions but also among nature mystics and poets. It seems a universal property of the human mind however rarely seen. What then was special about the Zen enlightenment experience? What is the especial insight of Ch'an that gives Ch'an its peculiar claim to truth. Indeed, what is truth apart from opinion?

I had asked Shi-fu whether it could be said that *kensho* resulted from training. If you say 'yes' then it is possible to say that *kensho* is a goal of training but, if you say no, then training cannot produce it. In response Shi-fu remarked that, rather than as the result of some technique, it was training broadly in the Dharma as a whole way of being that facilitated the emergence of *kensho*. A transcendent experience within the Dharma is rooted in an understanding of impermanence and it is this that constitutes the especial claim to truth of Ch'an. Other similar religious experiences may be attributed to God or some outside agent and are therefore aspects of an 'outer path' with a dependency projected beyond human life. In Buddhism, Ch'an, life, the universe are all experienced as one pervasively interpenetrating, always moving, whole. There is no other. In *kensho* this is nature seen, yet what it is that is seen remains beyond any certainty of description, of any closure. There is only amazement within enquiry.

A dead mind?

On another occasion, Shi-fu had remarked that one of the reasons why the koan system had been created was that monks in monasteries had become no longer able to “maintain the dead mind” and hence masters had had to invent new ways of focusing. I said to Shi-fu that the thought that Ch'an requires the development of an extraordinary mind is a problem many people have. It appears that there is an everyday mind and an enlightened mind with training purporting to create one from the other. Yet, in his talks, Shi-fu had been insisting that there was only one mind, the ordinary mind of awareness. What then was this “dead mind”?

Shi-fu said that the dead mind was one that had become dead to attachments or, better put, a mind in which attachments had died. One should not differentiate this mind from ordinary mind for it is simply free from the dependencies that bind it to wants based in ignorance. Once freed, the mind becomes an awareness of clarity with unobscured insight into its own nature.

“Did this mean it had no thoughts?” I asked. “No”, said Shi-fu, thought remains. Indeed there is always thought however quiet it may have become. The difference lies in what thought concerns. Attached thoughts express themselves in wanting or not wanting and they move about quickly. There is division and divisiveness. In a calmed mind thought remains but there is less conflict and it moves slowly. It may even become so slow as to be undetectable, but it is there none the less, latent. Even under the Bo tree thought was present. The Sutras show clearly that the Buddha was aware of his experiences in a way that could be expressed in thought. The essence of the contrast does not lie in the presence or absence of thought but in something else.

I said, “What happens then in the moment of ‘seeing the nature’? Something has gone absent at this time. If it is not thought, what is it?”

Shi-fu replied that it was the self, or rather the sense of self, that had gone absent. There is then no self to which experience can be referred nor any self as a subject of experience. There is no self-concern whatsoever. Absolutely no wanting therefore. There is a pristine clarity of an awareness without any sort of desire for there is no cognisable basis for one who could want.

Shi-fu went on, “The ‘me’ is a sort of symbol, a script the thinking state invents to account for itself. It is just one, although a very major one, among many such scripts that appear to perception and thus to consciousness. When the mind puts it down, experience changes its quality, not so much its nature. It sees its own nature directly without a secondary activity of imputation and explanation.”

I remarked that when self-reference is present that mind appears in split form, self as subject, self as object. Understanding can then only be a form of explanation. Direct seeing means the end of dualism.

“The ‘dead mind’,” Shi-fu continued, “is a mind without attachment and, in seeing its own nature, it has no self. The enlightened mind is never the less the ordinary mind of awareness: thought, perception and all other attributes remain in place. The beginner’s mind can be an enlightened mind as soon as attachments drop away. The presence of a self-cherishing mind is the hallmark of Samsara while its absence is Nirvana.”

I said, “This then has nothing to do with *samadhi* or trance states of any kind. Dogen was right to insist on no fundamental difference between sitting and enlightenment.”

Shi-fu said “Only when a self-cherishing mentality dissolves of its own accord naturally and without willed effort can the insight occur. In a sense nothing special has happened - and that is why it is special. All one can do is the practice. Let the rest alone.”

I said, "Shi-fu, you make it all so easy!" One of the monks present remarked "That is the sign of a true master." Shi-fu just smiled, remarking that in our conversation he had had the strange experience of understanding what I was saying even though he did not really know the English words. There was, he said, direct communication.

¹ Some of these reports have been already been published anonymously in the Ch'an Magazine of the Chung Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture, New York.

² See Crook, J. H. 1997. *Hilltops of the Hong Kong Moon*. Minerva. London. Chapter 14.

³ Wu is the Chinese for the better known Japanese word Mu.

⁴ For a fuller description see Crook, J. H and J. Low. 1997 *The Yogins of Ladakh*. Motilal Banarsidass. Delhi p37-40.

⁵ Chinese: Interrogate, examine, look into.

⁶ See Crook, J. H 1997. *Hilltops of the Hong Kong Moon*. Minerva. London. p 139.

⁷ Author's verse from the liturgy of the Western Zen Retreat, Western Ch'an Fellowship.

⁸ It must not be thought that "seeing the nature" arises as a direct product of training. Often such an experience arises outside a retreat and only obscurely linked to the training undergone. At other times it occurs spontaneously outside any training but usually in some life circumstance that has something of the quality of self confrontation about it. When it does arise in relation to training it comes in different ways depending on that training. The intense methods of koan exploration in the Rinzai sect of Japan tend to produce the classic, dramatic and sometimes questionable breakthrough described, perhaps misleadingly, in popular literature. In the quieter, less driven, system of Soto it arises gently, almost surreptitiously so that the distinctions between a very complete personal integration in a deeply silenced mind and enlightenment are difficult to determine. Teachers are correspondingly careful about acknowledging experiences. In Tibetan Mahamudra again the realisation comes gradually as a result of concentration on emptiness (see Note 3 above). In all cases however the subject will know the difference from the ordinary mind however steeped it may be in *samadhi* states. Even in absorption in emptiness, when no clear feel of self is present, a sense of intentionality may be there. In realisation, it is not.

WHAT I'VE LEARNT OVER 50 YEARS

Jo Horwood

*I've been thinking, as I approach this day
What have I learnt and what will I say?*

*I want to share some things I know
Deep in my being, a cellular glow
10 things I'll share are important to me
Based in experience, so let it be.*

*First and foremost, I'd like to honour
The Design in my life, I no longer ponder
If all my life has just been all chance
Many coincidences, a random dance,
That doesn't make sense to my struggling mind
'Cos it seems there's a pattern in my life to find
Too many good things have happened to me
So I figure there's a Design that makes this be.*

*Next, I take this moment to reflect
That I love listening, and I think this aspect
Of my work is my most important skill
How to listen to Soul's voice, that other Will
How to hear the Spirit within the Man
This takes practice, and I know I can.*

*I've loved the way that humour changes
The dark into light, dissolves fearful dangers;
I've learnt that it's practical to forgive
Others' mistakes if I truly want to live
For often as not, the boot's other way round
And it's me needing forgiveness, that's what I've found
And I cannot get what I cannot give*

So it pays to forgive; it pays to forgive.

*I find myself more than ever in awe
Of Life's rich majesty, and I know there's more
For I'm very aware of the limits of my seeing
Things are not what they seem, I'm often agreeing
Agreeing there's inherent mystery in Life
And this makes me humble amidst my own strife
And in this humility, I somehow come to know
Something reassuring, and then I let go.*

*Many people have helped me, encouraged me on
Supported me, blessed me, inspired me to look upon
Fulfilling my own dreams of fully being who I am
And I thank all of these ones, from Roy through to Sam.*

*I've learnt a great deal living with my wife
And I honour her centrality in my life
I've learnt that when a marriage is in danger of dissolving
That it's possible to transform it, to keep it evolving
There's been joy and much growth in these last years together
Finding agreement with Lyell is getting easier and better!*

*I've been stunned by how much that I love
Being the father of our children, like manna from above
I love you deeply, Sam and Alice, that I know
And you'll take my love with you wherever you may go.*

*And I'll finish with the hardest thing I've had to do
That's been to accept I'm responsible, it's me, it's not you
I'm the one who must the responsibility take
For all of me and for all the choices I make.*

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.

WHY ARE YOU HERE? Western Zen Retreat March 1999

I felt an immense sense of fear and trepidation when I sent my cheque in for my first WZR. Previous to this my record at sitting was about 12 minutes, during which I would usually get terribly restless and my ankles would hurt due to the amount of sport I have played. On the other side I had spent years devouring books on Buddhism and quite a few other 'isms' too. My father had always been interested in Zen and was involved with Christmas Humphreys and Buddhism a long time ago but seemed to have dissociated himself from the group, I think because he hated clubs and organisations of any kind. He was a bit of a maverick intellectually and preferred to pursue his interests on his own.

My childhood house was full of books on Buddhism and Zen in particular. Now and again I used to dip into them to see if I could find out a bit more about where my Dad was at. He found it difficult to explain his fascination with these ideas to me. When I looked into the books I found them incomprehensible, like riddles with little or no meaning. Sometimes I would ask my father what he got out of it and he would reply enigmatically with something like: "Sitting quietly, doing nothing. Spring comes and the grass grows under your feet." Knowing my Dad, I took this as a recipe for non-action, something he was quite good at.

However after living for some years in Mexico and experimenting with hallucinogens I became much more interested in Buddhism; but while I continued to read a lot, my life became increasingly chaotic and intolerable.

So it was with this background that I arrived at Maenllwyd. I thought of packing the boot of the car with beer and fags, my two main addictions. I wrestled with whether or not to bring my tobacco, would I be able to sneak off and have a quiet beer and a puff? I decided against it since I imagined myself in the hall obsessing about my next fix. When I arrived the hall seemed very formal, I wasn't up to this, not advanced enough.

The retreat began. Sitting was very hard, all my old injuries came back to haunt me, they visited me one by one, even the ones I thought I had got over. On the second day I felt very bad, felt like I was being abused, very annoyed at John and Simon and the bloody click-clickity thing that woke me every morning. I check out how easily I might get my car out and discovered it was right at the back of the yard so that in order to move it a lot of other people would have to move their cars too; I gave up the idea. At this point I felt I had been kicked all over my back. Yet, on the next day most of the pain miraculously disappeared. At moments I felt as if I was floating. I even looked forward to sitting. I felt a bit trippy and was aware how this feeling came and went. It wasn't constant.

Then I decide I must look like shit. I must have a shave. But when? Yes - during the tea after the early morning exercises. So I rush upstairs leaving the solemn tea party, finally I have got a bit of space for myself! I am a desperate man. I turn on my torch - for there's no electricity here - I smear shaving foam on my face, pick up the razor when, horror of horrors, the bell rings and I feel completely stressed out. I shave in ten seconds, knock the torch over and swearing loudly I rush headlong into the hall. Thank God, I just made it. Then during sitting I

start to smile at how uptight I have gotten, for some reason I start to have a sense of humour about myself and also feel a bit kinder to myself. Perhaps the retreat has in some way worn down my resistance

I also experience frustrating feelings during the communication exercises. At one point I feel that if any one else asks me 'Who I am', I will clock them. I get called for an interview with John. He is very patient and says quietly "Why are you here?" I feel tears well up in my eyes, something about allowing feelings and intuition in too.

Funny thing about time. On the retreat I often lost track of what day it was, sometimes I felt I just had to ask other participants. I felt I was in some kind of alternative world. Some days seemed very long, others zipped by. When I returned home it seemed at moments that the retreat had only lasted a few hours, very weird. My six year-old son asked me whether I had been to the moon. I said, "Maybe".

What I am aware of in these weeks after the retreat is that I seem to have more space to live in, it is easier to just let thoughts and feelings arise and then go; a feeling that I am not the whole story and also the whole story too.



COOKING WITH LOVE - ONE MORE TIME

Carol Evans

We conclude this issue with a poem about cooking. But if you look closely it is more than that. We are the cooks of our day, our rising and our lying down. The quality of our cooking determines the way the days pass for us. Perhaps in this issue, devoted so much to suffering and the hard way forward, we should remember one thing. Maybe there is a simple doorway to the real - hidden not so far away. Cooking with love is a kind of answer. Eds

*Cooking with love, I put the lentils in the pot
A big blue enamel thing, thirty years old,
A wedding gift, badly chipped but going strong,
Made in Finland with a solid kind of beauty.*

*The lentils are little, orange and brown,
Nutty and hard, though I soaked them all night long.
I add the stock, bay leaf, nutmeg and clove
Cinnamon, salt, jeera and spice.
I cook and look deeply into the pot
and, stirring, I see a lack of colour
and throw in carrot dice, celery tips and pepper slices,
Garlic and ginger cut up small, red hot chillies seeds and all.
I stir and turn the succulent stew
Put in orange zest and lemon peel
For finesse and savour and to impress.*

*The kitchen window's blind with steam
The winter garden's bare and cold.
Scarecrow branches claw the leaden sky
Crows cry out and frost-hard ground resists their call.
I see no life or comfort there.*

*I turn my head away and stir the fragrant food
and dream of firelight, a huge table, a still room
and you and I together, eating with love and talking
one more time.*

BUDDHIST TOURS in prospect

John Crook continues to offer tours to Buddhist sites in the Orient. Thanks to help from Yiu Yannang, the projected tour in China can now be advertised. It is an exceptional opportunity for Spring 2000. A tour in Bhutan is also in prospect for Autumn 2001. We do not expect any Fellow to attempt more than one tour in a year, hence these timings. Suggestions for tours or repeats of previous tours will be examined. Please state your interests and get your names listed.

MONASTERY TOUR CHINA 2000*

An outstanding opportunity to explore Chinese Buddhism as it is today.

In eastern China lie several important sites for Buddhist history and culture. China reveres four famous Buddhist mountains and of these two sites are relatively easily reached from Hong Kong. The first of these is **Pu Tou Mountain** on a small island in the Zhou Shan Archipelago off the China coast south of Shanghai. The whole island is studded with monasteries and temples forming huge complex where 3,000 monks and nuns practised before World War II. Although communist destruction has caused much change, the place is re-invigorated by recent developments and has a wonderful atmosphere on an exceptionally beautiful coast. **Jiuhua Mountain** about 600 miles from the coast and near the Yangtze river is another mountain with active Buddhist monasteries and an important college. This was a Taoist mountain before the Buddhists came. In the 8th century it was dedicated to Ksitigarbha, the Bodhisattva who sits on the Maenllwyd offering table. Climbing steps to reach spectacular pavilions and by using the cable car we can explore the monasteries that ring these mountains. We also intend to visit a monastery in **Nanjing** and perhaps also an urban establishment in **Shanghai**.

The trip will include a stay in the scenic mountains of **Huangshan**, famous in Chinese poetry and painting for its fantastic beauty. This is not a Buddhist mountain but, steeped in Chinese cultural history, it is well worth a visit. The trip will begin with a stay in **Hong Kong** with a visit to the monasteries on **Lantau Island** and end with a short stay in **Shanghai** before flying back to HK for departure to London.

The tour will include interviews with abbots and monks, so far as it is possible to arrange these, and meditation sessions in monastic halls (Ch'an halls are commonly open to men only, but there is ample alternative accommodation for this purpose). Correspondence is underway to arrange such meetings during our visit.

Yiu Yannang, John's Chinese friend of many years, has done this trip and recommends it. He may accompany us on part of the journey. The trip by air and coach is comfortable and relatively easily accomplished with a tour company based in Hong Kong experienced in tours in the Chinese interior. Old India hands will find it relatively luxurious - or so we are told! John will act as overall Tour Director, providing Buddhist teachings and meditation instruction as desired, and leading discussions with monks etc. He will also have assistance from national and regional guides on site as well as the tour company manager.

Approximate schedule

Day 1-4	London to Hong Kong. City tour and monastic visits in Hong Kong territory.
Day 5-9	Pu Tuo island monastery in the Zhou Shan islands
Day 10-13	Huangshan scenic mountain
Day 14-18	Jiuhua Mountain monastery complex
Day 19	Shanghai city tour
Day 21	Shanghai to Hong Kong
Day 22	Hong Kong to London

Approximate costs: Estimated at current prices at about £2000 depending on air fares etc. to be determined. This price will be inclusive apart from tips (about £70 for drivers, guides, escort etc). Visa and insurance not included. (Single room at £285 extra).

Suggested dates March 25 - April 15 2000. Fellows and others interested should contact John as soon as possible to get on the preliminary list of seriously interested persons. We already have 7 names. We aim at a party of 15.

* This tour is not the one originally planned, but arises due to Yiu Yannang's personal investigation of available options. We owe him much for his advice in this matter. Western tourists have not yet begun this type of special touring, so we are pioneering new routes for culture-travel holidays.

Data Protection Act IMPORTANT Please Read

We keep the NCF mailing list and the WCF membership list on a computer database for administration and mailing purposes. If you do not wish your details to be kept on a computer database then please write to the Membership Secretary. There are sometimes circumstances where it may be helpful to use this database in other ways, and we would like your permission to do so. We would of course do so sensitively. The circumstances that we have in mind are to contact individuals in a geographical area e.g. (i) to attempt to form the nucleus of a new local meditation group or (ii) to respond to enquirers who wish to discuss Ch'an or WZR or meditation with a contact in their locality. If you would not wish your details to be released in such circumstances then please write to the Membership Secretary and your wishes will be respected.

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