

# NEW CHAN FORUM

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## Looking To The Future

This year we celebrate some thirty years of Chan practice up at the Maenllwyd and in our homes. The issues that created our Sangha and which occupied many of us as younger practitioners are opening now into other concerns. How can we ensure the future of Chan teachings with integrity? Should we create further institutions? How should those of us who are elders train to sustain the lineage in the future? How best to relate conventional wisdom with modern concerns? How to engage in interfaith dialogue? How best to consider our enmity, mortality and the karmic seeds we will inevitably leave behind us?

These are not easy questions. The world is continuously changing and our ability to cope with our material success is challenged by man-made disasters and pollution on an unprecedented scale. The very future of world civilisation is threatened. The Humanism of the western "enlightenment" is undermined by global policies of unilateral exploitation and religious evangelism of a notably ignorant and selfish partisanship. Some of us work hard towards a Buddhist Humanism to overcome the nihilism of western thought. These matters require an examination sustained by the practices of mind calming and insight. It is above all these practices that our charity must sustain if Zen enquiry is to make a difference in the world.

In group discussion, in emails, phone calls and letters key questions regarding training to teach and matters focussing on death have been especially prominent among us in recent months. This issue therefore looks back particularly to short works by our patron Master Sheng Yen to clarify our understanding of what we may term the classical Chan position on these subjects. Such discussions may then provide a valuable basis for our own thinking and debating.

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# **Editorial**

## **Looking to the Future**

**Chuan deng Jing di March 26, 2005**

*This text is based upon the Teachers Report to the AGM held at the Maenllwyd in February 2005.*

### **Current successes**

During the last year the Western Chan Fellowship has continued to function effectively according to its constitution and there have been a number of valued developments. The committee has also begun the task of considering the direction the Fellowship should follow in the long term. This discussion has arisen from articles in NCF by Jake Lyne and myself (NCF 27 Winter 2002) and from a request from Eddy Street following his election as Chair.

Most of our retreats at the Maenllwyd have been well filled or full and appear to have been successful in facilitating participants' understanding and practice of Buddha dharma. We continue to receive appreciative and often heart warming reports of retreat experiences and learning. In addition, a number of retreats elsewhere in the country have been well supported and generated some enthusiasm leading to more people coming to the Maenllwyd. In particular, the Medway Towns group under the leadership of Stuart McLeod has held very valuable events at an excellently equipped location. Our association with Gaia House has continued. Bristol has continued to present excellent weekend events for retreatants mainly in the South West. Short retreats are being held in Manchester and York. Local groups have appeared in Totnes, Stroud and become well established in Cornwall and York but our London (Hampstead) group has folded after Will Turner decided to cease hosting them. London remains a blank on the map for us and we need to establish a good group there. We also have no group currently operating in Scotland and the Aberystwyth associated group is operating only uncertainly.

I have led retreats in Poland and Norway where the local Sanghas continue to flourish. In Norway the Hrydaya group, under the leadership of Thøger Nordbo, has now run two retreats led by myself, and Simon will be going there this year. Plans are afoot for a retreat in Lithuania based on the Oslo group. The Norwegian group is affiliated to us and Thøger and others are attending our retreats in the UK for leadership training. We are gradually establishing a firm working relationship with the small Norwegian Sangha, which we encourage to develop through wider recruitment.

Last Spring, Simon, Hilary and I led a Western Zen Retreat in Pine Bush near New York for the Dharma Drum Mountain of Master Sheng Yen. Retreat reports in the latest Chan magazine (Winter 2005) show considerable appreciation of this event although numbers were low probably because of poor advertisement. This year we will be returning again hoping for better support.

Simon and I attended a conference of European teachers of Buddhism near Munich in September and were able to witness the divergence of views and practices in European Buddhism as a whole. The atmosphere was warm, cordial and we all clearly shared a profound faith in the value of the Buddha Dharma which came to underpin our emerging relationships. Compared with this rooted faith, the divergences of view and practice appeared of little significance. Such meetings bode well for future collaboration between the differing schools of Buddhism in Europe. In the UK, Sally Masheder is doing major service in this same direction as the Secretary of the NBO.

Simon and I continue to train Guestmasters at several levels (see NCF 30 Summer 2004). In fact we would like to respond to one or two more individuals who wish to participate in

such training. A problem here is that the number of retreats available for training purposes is limited and this is an issue we shall have to consider seriously in the immediate future.

### **Issues of Concern**

All of this is generally to the good and we can be happy at the way the Fellowship is functioning so far as retreat presentation and the teaching of practice is concerned. In other respects however there are some sources for concern.

The number of people becoming Fellows remains very small and the total membership of the charity is little changed from the time of its inauguration. It looks as if people may be personally inspired on retreats but not in such a way that a commitment to an involvement with the charity emerges. This means the charity remains dependent on the leadership of its founders who are inevitably getting older.

The gender ratio among retreatants remains strongly male oriented. This is especially marked in the figures for our up-coming three-week retreat where nine males (to date) are attempting the whole period but no women are doing so. We need to keep encouraging women to attend retreats because those who do so benefit equally as much as men do. Our senior women fellows need to consider this issue further and make proposals.

The WCF has numerous facilities for the teaching and practice of Dharma that are barely supported, indeed neglected, by both Fellows and others who attend retreats. For example, there are now facilities for personal or solitary retreats available both at the Maenllwyd and at the newly established Winterhead Retreat House in Somerset. Occasional use of these facilities happens but they are basically ignored to a point of neglect. Personal retreats up to eight weeks long are possible at Winterhead and retreats of about two weeks duration are possible at the Maenllwyd - for two persons in residence in each place at a time. The beautiful new Hut at the Maenllwyd has come on stream during the year. Summer retreats in the hut would certainly be a delight for anyone undertaking to do one. Only about seven persons have used these facilities for never more than around seven days in the last twelve months. Such retreatants have valued their experiences but this has not led to a wider use.

There is a very good library available for consultation at the Maenllwyd. Individuals could therefore carry out reading and writing retreats using the library as a source for study. Books are also available in my own library at Winterhead. Two persons have used their retreat time for study at Winterhead but so far the extensive library at the Maenllwyd remains totally unused.

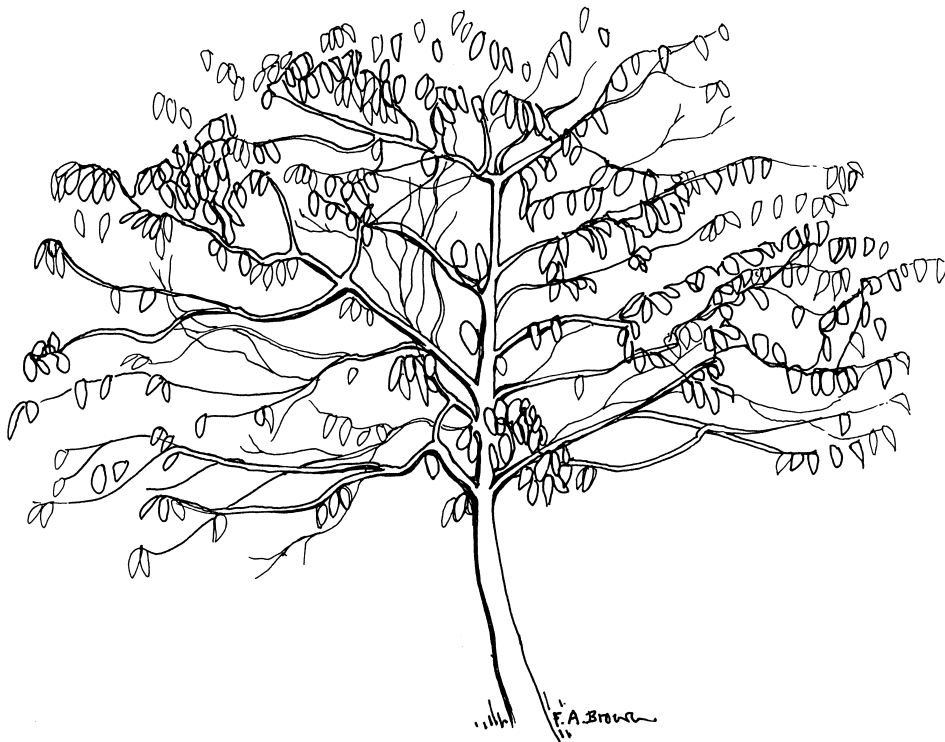
These considerations mean that Fellows and retreatants are not making use of the facilities available to them through the WCF. One conclusion would be that most people who attend retreats are beginners or people simply exploring occasionally the relevance of a Buddhist experience in their lives. However good a retreat experience may be, the demands of the Dharma may then subsequently be left aside as the claims of conventional life resume. Other, perhaps more regular participants, may be essentially Dharma "hobbyists" (to use Simon Child's phrase). That is to say, people who pop in and out of retreats much as one might pop in and out of a counselling room for occasional psychotherapy. This remedial use of retreat is of course entirely acceptable and helpful in these stressful times but hardly amounts to a commitment to practice or action in the true Buddhist sense. Those who use retreats as an adjunct to a seriously conceived and thought through daily commitment to the development of bodhicitta remain few. We are, none the less, fortunate that among those coming forward to train as Guestmasters are several insightful practitioners upon whom the future of the WCF will eventually rely.

### **Development Possibilities and Plausibilities**

These reflections naturally bear on thoughts regarding possible developments of the WCF. It has become clear that major European Buddhist institutions are founded on two

principles: firstly, a devoted group of loyalists who give up conventional life to live often communally as “home-leavers” in close affinity to a guru or lama, secondly, such institutions are housed in a communal dwelling similar to a monastic setting. Some such institutions have expanded by creating related institutions sometimes worldwide. They are major success stories with well developed “business plans” for their maintenance and profitable expansion.

In considering our future, one thought has been that we should to some degree follow this same line of development. There are plausible possibilities for property development at both the Maenllwyd and Winterhead but the detailed examination of such ideas reveal considerable complexity and solicitors advice would be needed. Alternatively the accumulation of funds for the purchase of a quite separate location could be envisaged. Either way a case is being made for the development of a considerable property fund to enable action to be taken in whatever way seems most appropriate. In principle I support this idea but there are problems.



Firstly our institution is not set up in this manner either in terms of a constitution nor in terms of the general motivation of Fellows or retreatants. Previously, plans for a local centre in Southampton along somewhat similar lines were completely disregarded by the membership. As we have seen, support for personal retreats is very limited. Certainly the idea of pushing towards something like a monastic-type solution is coming from the top. There is no evidence of any grass roots demand for it within the charity. Few show signs of leaving conventional life styles in some practice of “home leaving”. Those about to retire might well consider such a course of action however and this could be successful. Yet we should not risk getting ourselves into the business of creating a retirement home! While the idea of creating a sort of monastery does attract me, there is no doubt any move in this direction must come from would-be monks. I don’t see many of these around in our Sangha.

Secondly, although Fellows certainly express loyalty and a lot of kindness to me together with gratitude for the work I do, I see no evidence of a demand for me to function more in the role of a residential teacher. In any case, I am not at all sure whether I would like to undertake this - especially outside the context of the Maenllwyd or Winterhead.



One committee member has raised serious doubts about this whole line of thought. Perhaps it would be better to consider other lines of development, he suggests. It remains true that the WCF is a unique institution in the manner by which it brings the Dharma to many individuals. Perhaps we need to consider how this may be improved rather than changed to a different type of institution. The large scale financing required for property investment and utilisation would require a comprehensive and professional business plan managed responsibly by several competent persons. This would introduce a very different kind of government within the WCF and opportunities for personal rivalries around contrasting policies. Solving the koan Mu might move very much onto a back burner.

### **Models For Development**

Even so there are several models of development that we should consider. For reasons already discussed, the creation of a residential monastery seems unlikely to be supported. In any case, Ken Jones has reminded me that such Buddhist houses as already exist are by no means always exemplary. Dependencies on teachers and institutions arise, community life generates its own in-group tensions and divisions over policy. Personal antagonisms or prejudices fester. Authority may be heavy-handed or not strong enough. The goal of residential life may become lost in communal discussion. Yet alternative institutional patterns are provided by Gaia House, the varying forms of Sharpham College, the Golden Buddha project and so on.

One form of institution that might work would be a natural extension of our existing practices. It could be that in a suitable establishment with facilities for retreat and adult education a small group of retired “elders” (say two persons) could provide a core for the quality management of a system involving various patterns of residence (one day events, short term group retreats, personal retreats, longer term staffing). They would commit themselves for a year or two and receive support from a further small contingent of existing fellows (say 2 people at most) committed to residence for say four months at a time on a rotating basis within the fellowship as a whole. The programme would be constructed by the committee, approved by the Teacher and supervised by our Dharma Heirs functioning in some form of abbacy for the whole. I can imagine such a social structure working quite well in a constructed centre on the ground available at Winterhead. I believe such an experiment could work but again the drive for it must come from the membership and not merely from within the committee. I place this idea in the open for discussion.

In the mean time the most important thing is to develop the relations between our various local groups through “networking”. At the Leaders Retreat 2005 Ken Jones gave an eloquent presentation on what this would mean. In effect we have the roots of such a process well established. Some local groups already interact with one another, run retreats inviting outside speakers or facilitators and talk with one another. A more developed network of such interactions needs to be developed both formally and informally. Email linkages, visits between local leaders giving, in some cases, short talks or opening discussions and sharing common problems. The Dharma Heirs will endeavour to get around at least the larger groups hopefully to provide inspiration and Dharma instruction. We seek opinions on such developments and the committee empowered by the AGM will be making suggestions also.

### **Conclusion**

I think we do need to establish a fund for eventualities that might include substantial property development or even purchase but a great deal more thought needs to be put into the whole matter and some demand for it stemming from the fellowship itself has yet to be demonstrated. Development may however take many forms and perhaps what we need at this time is a more mature policy to underpin with funding resources to be made available to support local events, joint ventures and networking projects in general. This discussion must continue for we cannot simply rest on our attainments so far.

# Wild Fox Chan Masters And The Real Thing

**Lecture Spoken by Master Sheng Yen During Assistants Training Class December 2 1981. Lightly edited.**

*Several of our more senior members have been training in the Dharma for many years and some are naturally wondering how best to give back to others some of the benefits of what they have found. This is a complex question because it interacts with the demands of the institution and lineage within which we work. At least it does so if one wishes to transmit one's understanding to others within this framework*

*Chan institutions depend on Masters and other officers who carry the authority to teach at several levels. In The WCF these matters have been discussed in several articles and those interested should consult them to see our previous thoughts on this subject (NCF9: 1994, 2-5. NCF10: 1994, 15-20. NCF13: 1996, 9-20. NCF18: 1987, 13-17, 30-37. NCF24: 2001, 8-14. NCF27: 2002, 19. NCF30: 2004, 10). An aspirant begins by Guestmastering, trains to conduct interviews and eventually to run short retreats of a few days but not a full Dharma retreat. To run a full week of Chan one needs to receive a lineage transmission as a Dharma Heir from a lineage master, currently from Master Sheng Yen himself. There is of course at once a Zen paradox here. Anyone who wants to attain some such title may well be doing so for personal reasons that lack the neutrality of selflessness. Since the latter is an existential requirement for the necessary prior experience of 'kensho', any aspirant is up against a formidable obstacle. We recall the training of Milarepa and of Master Sheng Yen himself here. In fact Dharma heirs in Chan commonly receive the authority from a Master when they least expect it and without particularly seeking it. It is only through careful maturation in the Dharma that such issues become transcended.*

*In the WCF the authorisation to present Western Zen Retreats rests with their creator, that is the current Teacher of WCF, but very much the same considerations apply.*

*It must however be said that not all masters are sound teachers and some who have received transmission in the West have let down the side and their own teachers miserably. It is therefore essential for all practitioners whether teachers or disciples to consider carefully the signs of an adequate master or teacher. We say 'adequate' since all of us have our mundane characteristics. Can one see beyond these to the Dharma insight that must be present? At least we may learn from Shih fu as he discusses these tricky concerns of importance to all of us. His remarks apply not only to Chan but to all faiths where the temptations he describes arise. Whether a master, priest or lama, responsibility within preceptual truth is a vital requirement in authority. Those wishing to teach others need to consider such matters with clarity. Eds*

There are two types of people who teach others how to practice Chan. The first are those who have reached a very deep level of practice and who continue to practice very diligently. These may be considered "genuine" masters. The other type includes those whose practice has not been sufficiently deep. Although these latter people may have attained certain experiences, their experiences cannot always be maintained, nor do they continuously practice hard. At the time when they were practising, during their experiences, they could be considered "genuine". But afterwards, they can only be considered "false".

Among the false Chan/Zen masters, there is a group who make especially bad teachers. These people have studied under genuine masters who have had deep experience but who come to fail their students through their residual attitudes. Although these teachers were broadly genuine, they had not obtained liberation yet and were still attached to fame and following. For this reason, they were more inclined to give hasty

recognition to their students and to certify that they have had an enlightenment experience, in the hopes of gaining yet more disciples. If they did not do this many of their students might leave them and go to other masters. In this way a cycle of poor practice and mistaken understanding may be set up.

Out of their desire to be more famous and have disciples teaching all over the country such teachers may give recognition to disciples who have not had sufficient insight. Some years later, the master might also tell a disciple that he is ready to go out and teach others. This will do a lot of harm because the student believes his master's words, thinking he has had a genuine enlightenment and is ready to teach. He or she may then never consider the necessity of seeking deeper experience or learning from other masters. It follows that famous Chan masters in the public eye may be far from outstanding Chan masters. Nor is it always true that the disciples of such masters will become genuine masters themselves.

**Question:** How is it that these masters who are not genuine can still attract a large following of believers?

This is because the graceful manner they exhibit seems to be that of genuine masters. It is difficult for an ordinary person to tell the difference between a false and genuine master. Only those people who have reached a very high level in their Chan practice, who are insightful themselves, can know that a master is false just by exchanging a few words with them.

Through reading koans, or records of the sayings and actions of masters in the Chan sect, we can see that there is a definite formula, or pattern of words and behaviour, that characterises an enlightened Chan master in the written tradition. If someone has read these books widely, he/she may adopt the same style of behaviour and speech as the masters in these records, and people will take them to be genuine masters. There are many people teaching Chan who look very unattached, very graceful, charismatic, as if they are liberated. But many of them have great problems, because they are simply acting out a role in a script. Although externally their manner is close to that of genuine masters, what is going on in their minds is a different thing. The longer they play this role, the more skilled they become at acting. When they find success using one method, they keep using it consistently, causing people to have a lot of faith in them. They seem to have great determination, confidence, spontaneity. Actually their minds are perhaps worse than ordinary people. Such false Chan masters are just good actors. In the case of the best actors, their acting may be so touching, that it is difficult for the audience to feel them to be just 'on stage'.

In "Faith In Mind" there are two lines which say that when a person has reached ultimate enlightenment, his behaviour does not follow any definite pattern. He does not have to rely on any precepts or rules. Mistaking the meaning of the text here may lead to a very serious problem. According to the text, it seems that if a Chan master thinks he is deeply enlightened, and others also believe that he is an enlightened master, he need not follow any precepts. He can kill, he can steal, he can commit adultery, he can tell lies. He can do anything for the ostensible purpose of delivering sentient beings. Since whatever method he employs is "right", he himself will not accumulate any bad karma as a result. So it may be believed. This terrible misconception is not uncommon in China, Japan, and now in America.

Most of these "actors" have either never practised, or their practice was not deep enough. Possibly they have had an experience of enlightenment in the past, but at least they are not presently in such a state. Yet, since they seek the respect and admiration of their followers, they give an air, or project an image, that they are constantly in a state of enlightenment. And since most disciples like to think that their master is a very

extraordinary individual who is always dwelling in a state of enlightenment, this encourages them further to put on a false air. These people are no longer Chan masters, but rather kings of demons. There is a saying that Chan practitioners can very easily fall into demonic states, and this is one instance.

In fact, it is very rare to find people who are always in a state of enlightenment. Many of the koans, or records of the Chan sect, talk about the state of enlightenment. But there is little mention in the literature of the fact that, after an enlightenment experience, the state will disappear. It may be possible to maintain the experience for a few hours, days, or even months, especially if you keep up a diligent practice. However, to maintain it longer than that is very rare. For most people, the experience will simply fade, and then disappear, due to the fact that they must return to the distractions of daily life. Even if they don't return to daily life, their state of practice will follow a wave pattern, fluctuating up and down. It is most difficult for a person to maintain a thorough state of enlightenment and never regress to the end of their life.

There are three kinds of precepts for Chan practitioners. The first kind is called "individual liberation precepts." That is, if you hold one precept, then at least on that particular precept, you are proceeding towards liberation. For example, if you hold the precept not to kill, then at least you will stay away from the bad karma of killing, and on that one point you are moving towards liberation. The second kind of precept is called "samadhi precepts". The body and mind of someone who is in deep samadhi does not move. His mind is just fixed on one thought. Thus there is no way that he can break any precept. The third kind of precept is called "Path precepts." It refers to those practitioners who have reached quite a saintly level. At this level, their minds will be in accord with the right Path at every moment. It is not possible for their thoughts to stray from the Path, that is, to break any precepts. So they do not need to rely on any code of behaviour, or formal precepts, because whatever they do will naturally fall within the scope of the precepts. This is similar to what Confucius once said: By the time I was seventy, I could do whatever my heart desires and yet stay within the realm of propriety. This indeed is mature practice.

This concept of "Path precepts" is very different from the misconception that Chan masters can do anything they want, and break all the precepts. In China those so-called Chan masters whose practice is not sufficiently deep and whose lifestyles are very unruly and unrestrained, are said to show "wild fox Chan", or "false Chan". All genuine Chan masters will stay within the precepts. Especially if they are monks, they definitely must adhere to the monastic precepts. A Chan master must be equipped with wisdom, and it is impossible for someone with wisdom not to abide by the precepts.

**Question:** How is it that some people may not have any wisdom and yet they behave in such a manner that it appears that their behaviour is so clean and pure, as if they did not have any attachments, as if they are completely liberated? It seems that they must have some wisdom.

Yes, they do have some wisdom. But there are two types of wisdom: one is without outflows (called "prajna" in Sanskrit) and the other is with outflows (called "mati"). Wisdom with outflows comes from samadhi with outflows, not the highest, or transcendent, samadhi, but rather, a "worldly" samadhi. This kind of wisdom is still mixed with attachment, vexations, and the three poisons (greed, hatred, and delusion). These people are able to maintain a brighter mind, they seem to be more intelligent and clear than the average person, but they have vexation and attachment.

We must understand that any religion should have certain practical rules of behaviour that fit with the needs of human society. For a religious faith to be passed down for thousands of years, it must harmonise and protect the human standard of ethical living.

The founder must be a person with very high standards of behaviour and those who transmit the tradition generation after generation must be able to grasp this principle. Buddhism is such an example. Catholicism is also such an example. Up to now they have had a firm grasp of the proper relationship among people. However, in this country (the USA) in the present day, because society is not very stable, there is no fixed pattern of proper social behaviour. Out of curiosity people may follow certain masters or priests who do not seem to have any deep standards or keep appropriate precepts. They show insufficiently reflective behaviour that none the less gains them popularity. These teachers can at most create a minor boom or temporary following. There is no way that they can last for long periods of time. The only ones that will eventually last are those who abide by very pure rules of behaviour such as those prescribed by Sakyamuni Buddha.

Some arrogant Chan practitioners think that a liberated Chan master can do anything he/she likes. Even if they do supposedly very evil things, it is supposed they would not have to pay the consequences, because it is all for the purpose of helping sentient beings. This idea that doing evil things will produce good consequences seems contrary to our normal concept of good and evil. Chan practitioners in error may think good is evil, and evil is no different from good. This is garbage - a false understanding of the bodhisattva path.

Let me ask you a question: Do you think that when truly great liberated bodhisattvas commit evil karmic acts they will have to take the consequences? When bodhisattvas do these things, they do not have the idea of whether their act is good or evil. Maybe their behaviour came from compassion but none the less they have broken precept and this may have resulted in certain evil things. Maybe they have done these things to help sentient beings. Do they receive karmic retribution?

**Questioner:** From my point of view, evil is just a combination of greed, hatred and delusion. So I don't understand how a bodhisattva could do evil things.

Look at it this way - a bodhisattva may lock someone up or even kill him for the sake of helping many people. If this dangerous person was not stopped, he may kill many more people. So, in saving many people, the bodhisattva is doing a good act, but in killing the one person, he is committing an evil act. In principle, if a liberated bodhisattva chooses to come and go in the cycle of samsara, he must still pay for the consequences of his acts. There are deep koans for you to consider here.

Even genuine, enlightened masters have to be responsible for their actions, not to mention the false masters. No doubt they all have to take the consequences for mistaken action. Wild fox masters are not uncommon and by leading others astray they perpetuate error in the transmission of Chan. Responsible followers must by their actions and words always point this out. There is no such thing as the idea that Chan masters, priests or lamas can do anything they desire.

# Bird Dawn On Mendip

John Crook

*At daybreak come the raucous crows  
and jackdaws yacketing  
down from the wooded cliffs  
and tall, tossed branches  
of their nightly stay  
straight to our beech trees  
and chimneys too.  
In joyful disarray  
they shout down rude comments  
on a windy dawn  
peer at curtained windows  
telling us how to greet the day.*

*Only the ravens stay on high  
solitary upon the escarpment's sweep.  
Mates in tow they take the air  
and play in updrafts off the crags  
swoop and interweave  
the patterns of their flight  
until at last they perch upon a topmost bough  
and stretch their necks  
in honking chorus at the rising sun.*

# Capel Hagia Sofia

## The Interfaith Chapel of Divine Wisdom

John Crook

In early February, following the Silent Illumination retreat at the Maenllwyd, I spent a few days with Ken and Noragh Jones in their beautifully secluded home in the quiet valley of Cwmrheidol. Ken and I had decided to climb over the massive hump of Plynlimon to visit Ken's "cave" among the crags and his Kuanyin shrine in the valley nearby. But the morning dawned under dense cloud cover and we almost gave up. Knowing Ken was an old man of the mountain I none the less ventured up into the thick mists. Ken surprised himself by getting lost and we had left the compass behind, but by idling around a bit in the fog we finally located landmarks and came down the far shoulder into the one of the remotest, wildest, least visited cwms in Wales. We moved the small rock slabs from the entrances to the tiny, hidden shrines and conducted liturgies consisting of Buddhist devotions and some wild shamanic mantras in the style of Guru Rimpoche. For moments at a time the cloud lifted and the vast reaches of the mountain were adorned with mysterious light.

Next day we attended a remarkable little ceremony in the village of Pennal near Aberdovey famous during the brief rule of Glendower. Here Father Geraint ap Iorworth has established an interfaith chapel on the upper floor of his little house. It is dedicated to the wisdom common to all faiths as epitomised in Christianity by Saint Sofia. We assembled in church for an account of the reasons behind the event and then after a hearty meal of *Cawl* and rolls in the village hall we drifted along the main road to the little chapel bearing candles in the fading light.

I had been asked to bring my robes but in the absence of Hindus, Sikhs and orthodox Moslems I found that only Bishop Anthony of Bangor and I were dressed in style. "Showing the flag!" said Ken. Readings from Orthodox Christians, Quakers, Sufis and Buddhists in both English and Welsh followed the dedication ceremony led by Bishop Anthony. I read a lightly edited version of the Metta Sutta as prepared by Christopher Titmus. It seemed appropriate for such an occasion.

*May all beings be happy.  
May all be joyous and live in safety.*

*Let no one deceive another,  
Nor despise another, weak as they may be.  
Let no one be by anger or by hate  
Wish evil for another.*

*As a mother, in peril of her own life,  
Watches and protects her only child,  
So with limitless spirit  
one cherishes all living beings.*

*Love the world in its entirety  
Above, below and all around,  
Without limitation  
With an infinite goodness and benevolence.*

*Standing or walking, sitting or lying down  
As long as one is awake  
Let one cultivate loving kindness.  
This is called the supreme way of living.*

Such activities raise questions about interfaith work within Buddhism. It is not my intention to consider them in depth here for it is a multilayered question with experiential, ontological and philosophical components. There is however a text by Raimon Pannikar, which every one faced by an interfaith event should contemplate prior to participation. And this must apply to us as Chan practitioners. I offer it here, lightly edited, for your thoughtful perusal.

### **The Sermon on the Mount of Inter-religious Dialogue**

When you enter into an inter-religious dialogue, do not think beforehand what you have to believe.

When you witness to your faith, do not defend yourself or your vested interests, sacred as they may appear to you. Behave like the birds in the skies: they sing and fly and defend neither their music nor their beauty.

When you dialogue with somebody, look upon your partner as a revelatory experience, as you would and should regard the lilies in the fields.

Try first to remove the beam in your own eye before the speck in the eye of your neighbour.

Blessed are you when you do not feel self-sufficient while being in dialogue.

Blessed are you when you trust the other because you trust your faith.

Blessed are you when you face misunderstandings from your own community for the sake of your fidelity to truth.

Blessed are you when you do not give up your convictions and yet do not set them up as absolute norms.

Woe unto you theologians and academics when you dismiss what others say because you find it embarrassing or insufficiently learned.

Woe unto you, practitioners of religions, when you do not listen to the cries of the little ones.

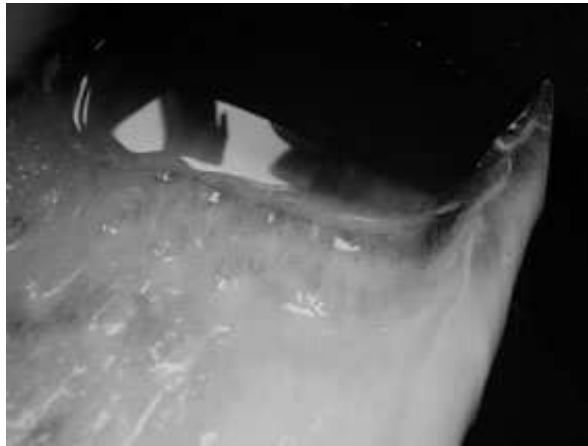
Woe unto you, religious authorities, because you prevent change and connection.

Woe unto you, religious people, because you monopolise religion and stifle the spirit which blows where and how she wills.



# On Clarity

Hughie Carroll



*Lucid waters mingling  
glittering mountain lake*

*released*

*the memories of glaciers*

*forgotten*

*the frozen dreams  
of ice.*

# Buddhism and Death

## Chan Master Sheng Yen

*Faced by the inevitability of our demise most of us would like to establish the truth of what happens next. Indeed what is death? Can one answer this question or is it essentially a koan? These matters seem to have become the focus of some interest in recent months and I was asked to address the matter in two talks "Death before Dying" to the Bristol Chan Group this winter.*

*At once the difficulty arose that earlier had made me reluctant to face the issues involved. There seem to be two layers of Buddhism, the conventional belief system, which to a great extent predates Buddhism, on the one hand, and the sophisticated insights of the Buddha and the Prajnaparamita tradition on the other. Shakyamuni himself seems to have spoken from a whole range of levels when discussing these matters. He was certainly a 'situationist' who used his skilful means to adapt to the capacity of his hearers. Perhaps at stake here is how well a listener can face the loss of faith in a permanence upon which he may rely for comfort. To remove such belief too suddenly would not be compassionate. Yet what is the truth in such discourses?*

*We can see Shih fu wrestling with these levels in the talk which follows. We have to remember that traditional Chinese Chan, which Shih fu discusses here, remains uninfluenced by modern humanist materialism and the relativities of post-modernism. Like Chinese and Indian cultures in general, contemporary Chan is pre-Freudian. Educated modernists in the West engaging these ideas in dialogue need to bear this in mind before jumping to too sudden a conclusion.*

*In noting the contrasts between traditional Buddhism and Chan, Shih fu helps us to a clearer understanding of the levels present in such traditional discussion.*

*We follow Shih fu's account with Ken Jones thinking on the subject of euthanasia. Much here to discuss and debate. JHC Ed.*

**Question:** How does Buddhism address the concept of physical death? What happens between death and the next life? What carries over from one life to the next? How should one practice in the face of death?

**Shih fu:** In every time and in every culture, death has been a very important issue for human beings. For most of us, the reality and seeming finality of death is frightening to face; and yet it is an inevitable event with which we must all come to grips sooner or later. However, the way that ordinary sentient beings view death and the way that enlightened beings view death is different. Furthermore, conventional Buddhism and Chan have different perspectives on death.

Conventional Buddhism speaks of two types of death - that for ordinary sentient beings and that for holy persons. Accumulated karma determines to what life an ordinary sentient being will transmigrate. If bad karma completely dominates, then the being will likely be reborn either in a hellish, ghost, or animal realm. If good karma completely dominates, the being will be reborn in a heavenly realm. If good and bad karma are relatively balanced, then the being will be reborn in the human realm.

The period between one death and the next life is called the Bardo in Tibetan Buddhism; Chan Buddhism calls it the Intermediate Body Stage. After death, human beings do not necessarily go through an Intermediate Body Stage. If a person's karma is overwhelmingly good, then he will go directly to a heavenly realm; and if his karma is overwhelmingly bad, then he will go directly to a hellish realm. Only a person whose karma is relatively balanced will go through the Intermediate Body Stage. Where and how this person will be

reborn, no one knows. There are many types of parents creating new life all the time. Where a rebirth happens depends on causes and conditions. An intermediate body could re-appear in the animal realm, the human realm, or certain heavenly realms.

For these reasons, it is considered helpful for the living to perform services to help alleviate the karma of the intermediate body.

If people perform services, chant, recite sutras, make offerings and transfer merit to the intermediate body, then the being is said to be helped. For example, if the being was to be reborn in a lower realm, performing services may cause it to be reborn in the human realm, and if it is destined to be reborn in poor conditions, then the transfer of merit may help it to be reborn in better conditions.

The intermediate body can do nothing on its own. It cannot practice and it cannot create new karma. It can only receive merit from living beings.

According to Chinese Buddhist scripture, the Intermediate Body Stage lasts, at most, forty-nine days (Tibetan Buddhist scripture says the amount of time can be longer). The amount of time varies for different beings and depends upon causes and conditions. When causes and conditions ripen, a being will be reborn. According to scripture, if, after forty-nine days, the intermediate body does not proceed to the next life, then it will immediately become a ghost or a deity.

If a being that does not proceed to the next life has weak karma, then its activity will be limited. It will appear only at certain times and in certain places. Such a being is called a ghost. If the being's karma is stronger, then its activity will span a larger area and longer time. Such a being is called a deity. However, nothing is eternal, and eventually these beings will reincarnate in other realms. While they are ghosts or deities, these beings cannot practice. They, like beings in the Intermediate Body Stage, can only receive the merits of living beings through services.

The second type of death involves saints. I often speak of saints and sages, so perhaps I should explain who and what they are. Saints are beings who have been liberated from Samsara. Sages have not yet been liberated. According to Hinayana Buddhism, a saint is a being who has reached, at the very least, the first fruit of arhatship. There are four levels of arhatship. After reaching the first level, the being will be reborn only seven more times. After seven rebirths, the arhat will be forever liberated. For an arhat, the stage after death is known as nonlingering Nirvana. There is no lingering karma attached to the being, so it enters into Nirvana.

Sages are still sentient beings. Their practice is much deeper than ordinary practitioners, but they have not yet attained liberation. Some of the patriarchs were sages.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, a being who is above the first bhumi level is a Bodhisattva saint. For a Bodhisattva, there is no such thing as birth and death. A Bodhisattva, because of its great supernatural powers, can manifest in innumerable places and forms in the same instant.

Chan Buddhism accepts and respects Buddhist scripture but it does not focus on it. Chan stresses that a practitioner must come to realise that there is no life or death, no good or bad, no internal or external, no future or past. Chan does away with dualities. It puts emphasis on sudden enlightenment. Chan requires that you adopt the attitude of not comparing and not being obsessed with anything. Only with such an attitude can you face death with equanimity. With such an attitude, there is no fear, and no clinging to life.

**Student:** If you practice for your entire life and do not get enlightened, will it have been a waste of time, or will something carry over into the next life?

**Shih fu:** If you have the Chan attitude I have just described, and if you practice diligently, then whether or not you get enlightened in this life and whether or not you pick up the practice in your next life does not matter.

I don't think you are satisfied with this answer. Objectively speaking, then, what happens? A serious Chan practitioner will not do bad things and create bad karma; therefore we may say he will not be reborn in a lower realm. Even if he does something wrong, he will know it immediately and repent. After repenting, the consequences of the action will not be as bad.



A Chan practitioner who has mastered his fear of death does not care if he goes through the Intermediate Body Stage; it does not matter what realm he is born in or what world he is born in. If the causes and conditions are conducive for practice, then he will practice in his next life.

What carries over from one life to the next? There is no physical body, no true or eternal self. What determines the next life and what carries over to the next life is karma. There are two types of karma: karma with outflows and karma without outflows. Karma with outflows is karma that is created because of attachment to a self. It is governed by desire, anger and ignorance, and encompasses good, bad and neutral karma. Ordinary sentient beings create karma with outflows because they are attached to a self. Therefore, they will continuously receive the retribution of karma, life after life. Karmic seeds reside in the eighth consciousness. After death, karmic seeds will continue to ripen, and the most powerful karmic seed will influence where one is reborn. The being will be drawn to a set of parents like iron to a magnet.

Karma without outflows is karma without attachment. It is the karma that is created when there is no attachment to self. It is the power of wisdom, or prajna. Such karma is created by great practitioners, and the consequences of such karma are also without outflows. The karma will not be attached to a self; therefore it will not be attached to Samsara. Such karma will not enter the eighth consciousness. An enlightened sage is not controlled by karma with outflows. What carries over from one life to the next is his power of wisdom. He is reborn because he responds to the needs of sentient beings.

On the other hand, a person who clings to an illusory self will still be controlled by the power of his karma. In fact, the illusory self is the power of karma. Therefore, one can say

that it is the power of karma that carries over from one life to the next. One can also say that the attachment to an illusory self carries over from one life to the next. The self being illusory so must transmigration be.

**Student:** Suppose you find yourself on your deathbed. What mental attitude should you maintain? If possible, should you enter meditation or recite Kuanyin's (Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's) name or recite sutras? You said that a Chan practitioner should realise that there are no such concepts as life or death, but what about people who haven't attained such realisation? What mental attitude should they have?

**Shih fu:** Many of these questions arise because one encounters different Buddhist traditions, and it leads to many questions relating to death. What I said earlier still holds. A Chan practitioner should not concern himself with the questions of dying, death, or rebirth. It is not necessary to be enlightened in order to be fearless. There are no special preparations one needs to make before death. The important thing is to maintain a regular practice while alive.

If a person does something for himself when he is on his deathbed, such as meditating or repeating Kuanyin's name, that will be of some use, but the power or influence is not that significant. The important influence comes from not only the person's practice while alive, but also the kind of vows the person made during his lifetime, as well as the sincerity with which the vows were made.

People often ask what the attitude of a Chan practitioner should be in various situations because it seems the Chan attitude is different from that of other Buddhist traditions. As always, I must stress that, with one exception, Chan methods are not different from basic Buddhist concepts. The basic Buddhist approach speaks of different levels of experience and a gradual process, whereas the Chan approach is direct, and it always emphasises practice. Other than this, the attitude and beliefs of the Chan practitioner are the same as what is expounded in the Dharma.

If a person is afraid of death or concerned about where he is going after death, and thinks there is something he should do, that is not true Chan spirit. It is more likely the attitude of the Pure Land practitioner or the Esoteric Buddhist; and as I said earlier, other Buddhist traditions speak of different levels and gradual practice. The true Chan attitude stresses that one should cultivate the attitude of having no fear of life or death regardless of whether one has great attainment or not, and this can come only from diligent practice.

It is only in its later development, from the Sung dynasty onward, that Chan Buddhism absorbed some elements from other traditions, especially the Pure Land sect. It was then that people started asking questions about death: "If you practice your whole life and die without getting enlightened, what happens?" Maybe these people should practice Pure Land Buddhism instead so that they may be reborn in the Pure Land. This may be Buddhism, but it is not true Chan spirit.

**Student:** Is it important to recite prayers or sutras for the deceased?

**Shih fu:** Really, there is no need to do anything for relatives after they pass away. If services are performed for a person who has died, it is useful, but it is not that significant. Besides, to depend only on the help of other beings after one's death, regardless of whether they are relatives, Bodhisattvas or Buddhas, is not in accordance with the basic principle of Buddhadharma. What is important is the power of one's own karma and vows.

As for Chinese services, these are not really Chan methods. They are considered expedient methods. For example, the relatives of a deceased person who did not practice while alive might perform services and make offerings in order to transfer merit to his spirit. Is this useful? Of course it has a certain benefit, but it is only a remedial method.

When I was in India I asked a Hindu practitioner, "Do Hindu practitioners believe that people can perform services that will help to send a deceased relative to a better place?"

The person replied, "In general we believe such things, but this is not really in accordance with the principle of karma."

Many people need such ideas because they feel helpless in the face of death. Someone dear to them dies and they cannot do a thing; they may feel great sorrow and regret. To believe that some service can be of benefit to the deceased makes them feel better.

I asked this Hindu practitioner another question: "If your father or mother passed away, would you perform a service for them?"

He replied, "Yes, definitely. I choose to believe that it is useful."

**Student:** It seems the services are more for the living than for the dead.

**Shih fu:** To a certain extent you are right, but one cannot say that these services are completely useless. The power of the mind is indeed capable of helping the deceased. As I said earlier, if the people who recite the prayers are sincere in their intentions and their practice is strong, they may be able to improve the deceased person's rebirth. Also, when people chant or read sutras, deities, spirits and other beings will gather to listen. They benefit from the service; and if they benefit, then the deceased person will benefit indirectly. An analogy would be if someone were locked up in prison and his family did charitable work in his name. The person would not be freed, but he might be treated better.

**Student:** Thank you, Shih fu. You always answer from the standpoint that Chan is absolutely self-reliant. It's clean, it's pure, it's not affixed to the supernatural. On the other hand, we are intelligent creatures, and if we direct our compassionate and well-intentioned minds and energies toward someone or something, it cannot harm but only help, and create good karma.

**Shih fu:** Yes, you're right. A Buddhist, including Chan Buddhists, should perform such services for relatives and friends who have died. I recite sutras for my parents, and I do it seriously, with sincerity.

**Student:** Suppose a Chan practitioner goes through a "near death" experience, such as going "through a tunnel," or moving "toward a light," or having an out of body experience. What should a practitioner do in such a situation? Should he be attracted to images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or dead relatives, or should he ignore such phenomena?

**Shih fu:** People who have nearly died and have then come back to life should not rely on or put total faith in anything they may have experienced during that time. First of all, a person who comes back to life never really died in the first place. Some of his bodily functions may have temporarily ceased, but his brain did not die. If it were the case that his brain died, then the person would not be able to return to life.

As long as the brain is alive the person still has his memory. During this pseudodeath experience he may be in a dreamlike state: The dreams may be strange and powerful, so when the person regains consciousness it seems as if he has returned from somewhere. The experiences of seeing the underworld, for example, may seem real, but they are unreliable. One should not put much stock in them.

As religious experiences, they are useful and powerful. We should not negate such experiences and say they are false. For example, a person may think he has gone to heaven or the Western Paradise. Even when someone is healthy and meditating deeply, he may feel that he has travelled to an extremely beautiful place, and he may be absolutely certain that the experience was real. These are his personal religious experiences. Nevertheless, from the Chan point of view, these experiences are unreliable, and we should not put our faith in them or in our interpretations of them.

**Student:** What do you mean by religious experiences?

**Shih fu:** Religious experiences are profound spiritual experiences. Such experiences are of great importance to the person who experiences them. They help to build faith and confidence. These experiences are revelatory. They usually arise spontaneously and are not necessarily a result of one's practice. Such experiences can settle a person and help him to become more peaceful. Chan practice emphasises seeing one's own nature and illuminating one's own mind. Religious experiences are good illusions, but they are illusions all the same.

**Student:** Earlier you said that we should not put too much faith in experiences because they are unreliable. What is reliable and what is unreliable?

**Shih fu:** Supernatural experiences, such as passing through a tunnel or meeting dead relatives or hearing disembodied voices, may be real. Or they may not be real. Suppose you meet a dead relative during a near death experience, or even in a dream. It might really be your dead relative, but it might be a deity, a ghost, or your own imagination. How can you be sure? One thing is clear: experiences like this are powerful. They fall under the category of religious experience. But if you put too much faith in such things, you might spend all your time waiting for it to happen again; you might grow attached to it; you might interpret the world through this experience. Yes, the phenomenon might be as you experienced it, but it might be something that arose from your own consciousness.

When one dies, the first five consciousnesses based on the senses stop working, so the person loses sensation and perception, but the sixth consciousness (the mental consciousness of representational thought and the symbolism of imagination) still exists and functions, so the mind's eye might experience something. All of it is illusion. Suppose the experience is blissful. It may be because the person no longer has the burden of a body and its pains. From the consciousness might rise beautiful sights, sounds and smells of paradise. On the other hand, suppose the person still clings to the suffering and pain of his body. Then he may experience something terrible or nightmarish hell. The explanation I have just given describes these phenomena as products of the sixth consciousness. I am not saying that this is the explanation for all experiences like this, but it is one explanation. The fact that there are numerous interpretations makes these experiences unreliable.

**Student:** Sometimes Chan teachings seem schizophrenic. Chan is very practical. It says you shouldn't rely on anything, but in the next breath it talks about ghosts and deities, heavens and hells. These are not familiar sights. Bodhisattvas are the hardest of all to believe in. Supposedly they are beings who can incarnate in innumerable forms in innumerable places in the same instant. It takes a stretch of the imagination to accept this. And then after all of this, Chan says everything is illusion.

**Shih fu:** Everything you say is true. And you don't have to die and come back to life to experience the supernatural. Even when one meditates one can experience things that are beyond the ordinary. For example, suppose you are meditating deeply and in your mind you see a beautiful picture; and then you enter the picture and play around in the new world. This is also a function of the sixth consciousness.

Experiences can be real in an objective sense that they occur to consciousness, but your experience of them is personal. You filter them through the sixth consciousness. Personally they are subjective and not entirely reliable. The sixth consciousness itself is unreliable. In Buddhism, we do not deny the existence of ghosts, deities, heavens, hells and Bodhisattvas. However we use our sixth consciousness in order to experience them, and therefore they are illusory. As long as you use the sixth consciousness to perceive and interpret the world, everything you experience will be illusory. This conversation right now is illusory. If you want to experience the world clearly, directly, then you must practice.

# Separation

John Crook

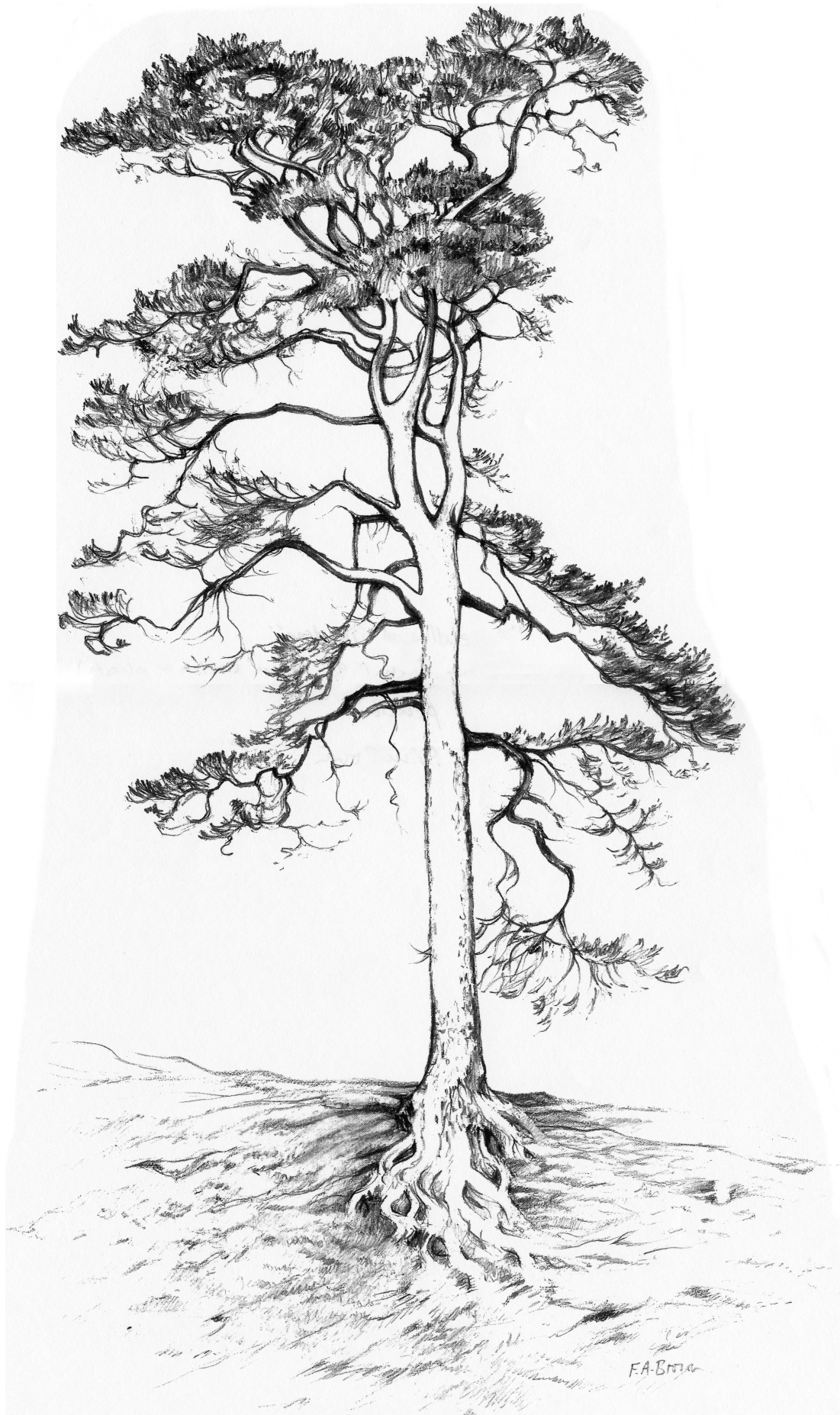
*The silence that has fallen  
here's forever:  
carpetless your busy room,  
embedded still the presences  
of absent furniture,  
empty bookshelves, departed garden tools,  
flowering pots, patches of empty wall  
where pictures hung -  
so strange is time -  
this ancient photograph lost behind a  
list of phone numbers -  
so long ago - the way you look at me  
and I so vigorous - was that my prime?  
The place is gently haunted now-  
alone before the ten-o'clock news  
memories of two cats gaze beyond the horizon  
and distant donkeys bray .*

*I do believe it's much more difficult  
staying behind -  
the ghosts in your place  
are unfamiliar  
they will not trouble you.  
Here they come through doors  
unexpectedly  
or creak along corridors  
or run a bath.  
The place vibrates in its past  
immediate  
the gaps in decoration  
becoming doors  
to sudden pictures  
drown the heart.  
The farm is restless now, reproachful,  
distractedly a place in silence.*

*It's making cheerful phone calls  
as if nothing in particular  
has happened that does it --  
At least you watched the ten o'clock  
news with me where even timbers  
now refuse to creak:  
funny how these memories  
are of happy things remorsefully recalled.  
You will not be coming back.*

*It's final.*





# Euthanasia: Some Questions for Buddhists

**Ken Jones**

Let us suppose, dear reader, that you or I are terminally ill. Let us suppose that we have considerable spiritual maturity and have meditated for many years on the Great Question of life-and-death.

However, in our final months we begin to experience very severe pain. There is a dilemma here for those Buddhists who believe that our state of consciousness at the time of death is a major determinant of the next rebirth. In fact, a survey by Karlis Osis of over 35,000 observations by medical staff concluded that only 10% of patients were even fully conscious in the hour of death. And of these only one in twenty (0.5% of the total) showed any sign of elation – doubtless glad just to be released at last. Most of these patients will have been subject to pain-killing medication. Should this be withheld? Dr Steve Heilig, a director of the San Francisco Medical Society, writes out of wide experience:

*Pain itself can cloud the mind or even obliterate it in ways that no amount of diligent practice and forbearance can withstand. Serious, lasting pain can be dehumanising. Using drugs to alleviate suffering, even if it renders us seemingly unaware of what is happening, may be a blessing greater than the unknown merits of staying awake, aware and in agony to the end.*

Even when the best palliative care is available pain specialists variously concede that they can “control” pain in around only 85% of cases. However, let us suppose either that our terminal condition falls within the other 15%. Note, by the way, that euthanasia is increasingly seen not as an alternative to palliative care but simply as a very last resort when the patient is convinced that all else has failed.

In our case we are next faced with a terrible quandary. If we were to wait until our helplessness were more advanced we would need an accomplice, either to assist our suicide or, if needs be, to be solely responsible for our deliverance. But our accomplice would be liable to prosecution and probable imprisonment in most countries. There is thus for some the cruel pressure of the law to take their life prematurely, rather than later to be faced with the possible need to depend on another for assistance.

But surely the greatest obstacle of all to euthanasia is that the First Precept of Buddhism clearly condemns the taking of one’s own life or, presumably, helping someone else to do so. This brings us to a much larger question which has received remarkably little public discussion among Buddhists. I refer to the ethical divide between “literalists” and “situationists”.

The literalist treats Buddhism as if it were a “religion of the book” where the precepts must be applied literally no matter what the circumstances. Yet surely a great many situations arise in public and private life which are sufficiently complex as to put us in some moral perplexity. Courage is required when whatever decision we do make may turn out to be harmful and it is difficult to know what to do for the best. We can only act out of our compassion for all involved (including ourselves) and do our honest best. Of the five distinguished Buddhist teachers who contributed to a symposium on euthanasia in the UK Buddhist Hospice Trust journal four assumed the situationist position. One of these, Ajahn Sumedho, wrote as follows:

*We seem to want to take absolute, moral and fixed positions on such questions as “How do you feel about euthanasia?” Our minds tend to be conditioned to take a fixed view on [such] issues, and we interpret life*

*morally. But the Buddha-mind is not fixed on a position and is able to take into account all the things that are affecting a given situation. This means that sometimes it seems a bit wishy-washy and we would like Buddhism to come through with a strong moral position; and yet what Buddhism has to offer is not moral positioning but real morality; the opportunity to take responsibility for your own decisions.*

This is not some quandary of contemporary Western Buddhism. In all the Buddhist traditions there is warranty for a situational morality. Moreover, the present world offers many examples. Anarchic states are increasingly common, with much random butchery of the helpless by drug crazed soldiery or ideologically crazed fundamentalists. Such situations require multi-skilled peace making teams of mediators, aid workers and others. These must of necessity include specially trained soldiers able to make a judicious use of force where it is clearly essential to protect the innocent and enable more peaceful remedies to be applied.

Note, however, that the situationist is concerned with ethically extreme, complex and problematic situations. The literal precepts certainly do not cease to be invaluable base lines, from which we should depart only with great reluctance and circumspection. So it is with euthanasia which I define – *please note!* - as the medically assisted suicide requested by a terminally ill person who is mentally competent but experiencing unbearable distress for which all forms of relief have failed.

For my part I respect the *personal* views of my literalist co-religionists hold about euthanasia, but surely they should not uphold the coercive power of the State to deny the dignity and autonomy of fellow human beings to make their own decisions about life-and-death when they find themselves in a condition of great anguish? I know of Buddhist hospice and palliative care workers who have confessed how their exposure over the years to the reality of the messiness and distress of dying pulled them up short. Their black-and-white view of things changed because so many anguished patients begged that their lives be ended. Incidentally, it is where euthanasia is illegal and takes place by subterfuge that abuse is most likely, rather than where there are strong and well-considered safeguards built into the legislation.

Finally, there is the belief that if we “murder” ourselves, or have others do it for us, this violent act will have an adverse karmic effect on rebirth (not, of course, *our* rebirth, which would suppose a self to be reborn). Would the literalists have us believe that, as punishment for having compassionately released ourselves from irremediable suffering or having helped another to do so, we shall be reborn into some Buddhist hell, or condemned to some lower form of life? However, it appears that many Western Buddhists either simply do not believe in rebirth — and the doctrine has proved thorny and problematic throughout the history of Buddhism — or they are agnostic about it.

Whatever position we may take, it is worth recalling that karma, as a volitional mental phenomenon, is only one of the five Abhidhamma modes of causality. Several of these *niyamas* may be involved at death, and certainly the physical-organic one (*uti-niyama*). I refer the reader here to a valuable recent book by Nagapriya, *Exploring Karma and Rebirth*, (Windhorse Publications (Birmingham), 2004):

*In reality, there are not five distinct orders of conditionality. Every experience comprises a vast network of conditions; our previous moral conduct will often have a bearing on our present experience, but in many situations non-moral factors will exert a more decisive influence. The teaching of the five niyamas thus presents a more complex and subtle*

*account of why things happen as they do than the crude view of karma criticised above (p.39).*

“The crude view” here is the traditional folk belief (without canonical warranty) that everything that happens to a person is karmically determined and a consequence of volitional intent. Nagapriya is the latest of a long line of Dharma scholars who have tried to kill off this “simplistic model that was both able to account for suffering and to spur people into living a good life through fear of a nasty rebirth and the promise of a pleasant one” (p.131). He concludes that “it does not seem appropriate to assume that people are suffering as a result of their previous karma. This is [only] one possibility.” The causal stream is commonly so subtle, complex and problematic for the karmic thread (if there is one) to be readily distinguished at all. This must be especially so in the manner of our dying, over which we appear to have less control than idealisations of “the Good Death” would lead us to suppose

Religious attitudes to euthanasia, as to much else, have for too long been bedevilled by a clinging to righteousness and scriptural fundamentalism. Our insecure self craves above all else for moral certainty and all too easily slides into punitive morality.

The Steve Heilig quotation is reproduced from *Turning Wheel*, magazine of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Spring 2002, with grateful acknowledgement to the author and editor.

Karlis Osis *At the Hour of Death*, New York, Avon Books, 1979.

Ken Jones explores some of these issues further in his pamphlet "*Ageing: the Great Adventure - A Buddhist Guide*" (£3.50 cheque to "K.Jones", Troedrhiwsebon, Cwmrheidol, Aberystwyth, Wales, SY23 3NB).



# The Iraq War Did Not Take Place

Colin Evans

*The consequences of the recent war in Iraq and the occupation of that country following the fall of the dictator rumble on. Retributive karma affects victor, vanquished and bystanders alike. How can a Buddhist best reflect on these monumental tragedies to reach soundly held opinions yet without the ranting and raging, which one may often feel to be justified? Here we present two articles – the first a reflection on the war itself by Colin Evans, a professor of French language and literature and a reformer of university education, and the second, an article submitted by Ken Jones, on the response to enmity itself. Eds*

We now know things about the Iraq war, which we did not know back in March-April 2003. We did not know then whether the war would take place. We didn't know if there were weapons of mass destruction. It was a confusing time. How could we reduce the confusion? Radio? TV? Newspapers? Philosophers? Archbishops? Historians? I tried them all with varying success. My best resource was revisiting a French writer who died in 1944, in Nazi-occupied France.

Jean Giraudoux was a diplomat. A lover of Germany and German culture, he fought against the Germans in the First World War. After the war, he became a novelist and playwright. With the rise of Hitler he saw that the last war would not be the last, and, in 1935, he wrote one of the greatest plays ever about the fatality of war and about the doomed struggle to avoid it. When the diplomats and the inspectors were trying to prevent the invasion of Iraq, I thought of that play. I was surprised that no one was writing about it or staging it in the good translation by Christopher Fry<sup>1</sup>.

It's called literally *The Trojan War will not take place*. In 1935 everyone knew that the Trojan war did take place: the Greeks, seeking revenge for the capture of Helen, destroyed the great city of Troy, after a long siege involving a Trojan horse; the Trojan leader, Hector, was killed. But Giraudoux sets his play just before, when the Greek leader Ulysses has landed in Troy and he and Hector are trying to prevent the war. No one on stage knows for sure if there will be a Trojan War.

In 1935, no one knew for sure if the Second World War would take place. It might have been prevented if the British Government had intervened in the first weeks of May 1936 to stop the Germans and the Italians supporting Franco. In 1938 Chamberlain thought he had brought peace.

In early March 2003 no one knew for sure if Bush and Blair would get a mandate from the UN or if they would invade without one. I marched with a million people in London to try to influence the decision. I visited a remote part of Southern Spain: every café, restaurant, town hall had signs up - *No a la Guerra!* Giraudoux shows dramatically what it is like to know what is bound to happen and still to hope that it will not. The Russian toast 'To the success of our doomed enterprise' could be his motto.

And all the aspects of war are there in the play.

The use of international law, for example: Busiris, an expert in international law, happens to be in Troy and he is asked for his professional opinion: he says that the Greeks are guilty of three specific breaches of international law, connected with the insulting way they entered the port and flew their flags. So the Trojans must respond to the insult and fight. Hector replies: 'No poet ever interpreted nature as freely as a

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<sup>1</sup> *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, 1935, translated as *Tiger at the Gates* by Christopher Fry.

lawyer interprets truth' and tells Busiris that he will be detained in Troy for the duration. Whereupon the lawyer discovers that there are 'mitigating arguments' and that the flags can also be interpreted as showing respect. This was the scene I thought of when Blair desperately asked the attorney general to show that invading Irak would be legal although Irak was not threatening the invader and Christopher Greenwood QC obliged.

And the climax of the play is the meeting between Ulysses and Hector. As Ulysses says, 'The privilege of leaders is to watch catastrophes from a balcony'. Hector suggests Greece just wants Troy's grain (oil?). He asks if Helen was just an excuse (like the WMD). He asks Ulysses why he didn't just invade. Ulysses replies 'There's a kind of consent to war which can only be given by the world's mood and atmosphere. It would have been madness to start a war without that consent. We didn't have it...and now we do.' And I thought how Bush needed 9/11 to get that 'consent' in America and how Blair failed to get it here.

Hector says that Greece will be 'responsible and ashamed for the rest of time' and Ulysses replies: 'Even if we believed we were responsible for the war, our generation would only have to deny it, and lie, to appease the conscience of future generations. And we shall lie. We'll make that sacrifice.'

The war, of course, takes place – the Trojan sailors can't bear to hear Hector telling the Greeks that Helen can be given back without war because Paris never really had sex with that woman on the boat. They ruin Hector's strategy by giving graphic descriptions of rampant Trojan virility. And finally it is an act of violence from the peace-seeker Hector that triggers the war.

Two years later, in 1937, a few years before France fell to Germany, Giraudoux wrote another play based on a famous Greek myth: Electra. At the end of that play, a corrupt civilisation has been destroyed and the tyrant is dead. But at a terrible cost. The city is invaded and destroyed. The stage fills with the poor and the dispossessed (a production today would have them carrying off the King's furniture and computers). The final words before the curtain falls are shared between two of these poor people who have acted like a chorus throughout the play:

**Mother Narsès:** Explain. Explain. I'm always slow to understand. I can see that something important is happening. But I can't make sense of it. What do you call it when day breaks, like today, and you see everything is ruined, gutted, and yet somehow the air is breathable, you've lost everything, the city is on fire, and innocent people are killing one another, but daylight reveals the guilty ones dead or dying.

**Electra:** Ask the Beggar. He knows.

**The Beggar.** It has a very fine name, Mother Narsès. It's called the dawn.

Giraudoux died in 1944 and did not live to see how he had foreseen Hitler and his followers dead in the Berlin bunker.

There is comfort here for Blair and those who, like Electra, sincerely believe that in order to remove a dictator any price is worth paying and that, in the long run, the oppressed will benefit from a new dawn.

I'm less easily comforted and I've always thought Electra to be naive. Giraudoux had a deep optimism which at the moment I don't share.

That a writer so long ago told it as it is and told it so well, consoles me in a way but also makes me think that from Troy to Berlin to Kabul to Baghdad, nothing much has changed.



# How To Dissolve Enmity

Ken Jones

Enmity encompasses ill will, rancour, hostility, envy, bitterness, resentment, animosity and much other mind-disturbing, guilt-inducing stuff. We may feel it in ourselves, or may be on the receiving end of it, or both. We may feel it towards a parent, child or spouse, towards a co-worker, or towards a public figure. Enmity can give Buddhists a lot of trouble. In many instances our enmity may make us feel doubt, regret, guilt or even pain, especially when someone close to us is involved. At work it may add a disagreeable complication to the everyday demands of the job. And a sense of outrage about the public figures we love to hate does little for our sense of well-being and peace of mind. It is also likely to get in the way of a more objective understanding of what they are up to and hence of doing something effective about it.

One response is that we may try to deny our feelings, or feel guilty about them. We may even develop a corrosive enmity against our own selves, because we don't feel as a good self *should* feel. This is the path of spiritual lobotomy, of the saint as zombie.

The difficulty with enmity is that in many cases there may be very evident grounds for it, whether it be felt or received. We may be trapped in strong feelings of the injustice done to us, of the unreasonableness of another person. Surely we have some *right* to feel enmity towards them? Why not give them what they deserve, in a bloody good row, a thorough humiliation, a well-merited sacking, or even a bloody good revolution? And sometimes the sheer force of righteous outrage may appear to flatten the other party and resolve the problem.

However, badly hurting a person, or a social class or movement, or a nation, or a natural environment, commonly has a price, paid over the years, and poisoning perpetrator and victim alike. There is more than pious homily in the warning in the *Dhammapada* that "Hate is not conquered by hate; hate is conquered by love. This is the eternal law." The twentieth century has the appalling social example of so-called 1914-1945 "war". The Treaty of Versailles that concluded the First World War so humiliated and punished the Germans as to lead directly to the even more destructive Second World War. Usually, whether on the public or personal level, there is no outright victor and only a deepening polarisation, as in the long running enmities of Northern Ireland. And, on the personal level, the unforgiving rancour of divorcing parents can blight several childhoods late into life.

## Dissolving Enmity Through Emotional Awareness

There is a third response to enmity, beyond either denial or letting it rip. For Buddhists the golden rule is always first to look within, to be scrupulously self-aware. For the present, forget the other. The feelings we experience are *our* feelings, not theirs. It is *our* problem (whoever else's it also is), something that *we* are carrying around with us and which is disturbing *us*. Just to get to this point of turning the question round may itself bring some relief.

We do not respond to others as if we were dispassionate reflecting mirrors. We respond as precarious, needy beings, struggling in the world to affirm some reassuring sense of self-identity. It is this that characteristically drives our feelings, perceptions and behaviours, and, largely unbeknown, distorts our mirror view of others.

In this connection the Buddha likened our discomfiture to being struck by two arrows when we felt we had been struck by only one. The first arrow is the objective ground for our enmity – the incident, the alleged injury or whatever. The second is how we



*experience* the blow – what it *feels like* for us. To be aware of this distinction is a vital step in the development of the practice of emotional awareness.

Sometimes enmity may arise on the merest pretext. Probably most of us carry around with us in one pocket or another at least a bit of enmity ready for use. After all, surely someone or something must somehow be responsible for the mess? The perpetrators of endemic, low level enmity may be largely unaware of their acerbic manner, their abrasive style, their waspishness. Some books do have a quarrelsome smell about them. I recall a letter to the editor of one of the more fundamentalist ecological magazines. The reader complained that “though in complete agreement with the substance of what you say, there is a spirit of aggression emanating from the pages that makes me recoil from it. I can understand this – there is good reason for anger; the anger appears to have curdled, however, and become vengeful and spite ridden.”

The most difficult and important stage in dissolving the experience of enmity lies in cultivating a level of awareness in which we are able to open ourselves clearly, intimately and profoundly into the bare acceptance of that experience. Such emotional honesty can appear hurtful and threatening to our self-esteem, to our very sense of self. We therefore need to be highly aware of our characteristic evasions – fixating on the injury done to us, projecting our indignation on the perpetrator, trying to rationalise our emotional discomfort away (or just denying it altogether), beating ourselves up with guilt, and so on. (Further guidance on the practice of emotional awareness can be found on the website [www.engagedbuddhists.org.uk](http://www.engagedbuddhists.org.uk)).

### **Freed From Our Subjective Contamination Of Reality**

As we learn to become intimate and accepting of our own feelings of enmity they begin to release their grip on us. We begin to view the objects of our enmity in their own light, as it were, rather than in ours. George Orwell warned that “one cannot get away from one’s subjective feelings, but at least one can get to know what they are and make allowances for them,” so as to avoid falling into “a sort of masturbation fantasy in which the world of facts hardly matters”.

At this point it will be helpful to reflect as calmly as possible on what actually may have happened. We may then perceive that, for example, a criticism someone made of us was in fact reasonable and well founded. But that it was made by someone whom we believe dislikes us, and was delivered in a disagreeable manner. So we may then dismiss the criticism as “mere carping” coming from someone whom we could not expect to treat us fairly. We may feel belittled by them. Or even treated unjustly. In short, we then *experience* some enmity towards that person.

Accepting our feelings just as they are, we not only start to accept the other (with *their* enmity) just as they are, but also start to see more clearly the overall situation in which the mutual enmity occurs. The problem then appears more as a situation to be resolved than another person or group to be corrected or punished or defeated. This revelation is commonly accompanied by a release of tension. Once we get the knack of this practice a new lightness of being is possible. Thus, for example, the divorcee abandons with some relief his or her stressful and futile hectoring that the former spouse should change (and perhaps gives up for the present even trying to forgive them) and is freed to getting down to negotiating a working partnership in the interests of the children.

Whether at the public or personal levels, none of the foregoing implies any endorsement or acceptance of wrongdoing or injustice. Instead it is about a shift in perception which empowers us to respond to the situation with a new clarity. Freed of what Orwell called “subjective contamination” we are in a much better position to achieve a satisfactory resolution. Mahatma Gandhi, in his use of creative non-violence,

was very clear about this. He was always adamant that there should be no compromise on fundamental, reasonable and minimum demands for redress. To the extent that the adversary refuses to meet such demands the struggle should resolutely be sustained. But it should no less be a struggle to deepen the adversary's awareness of the suffering and injustice that is being perpetuated, and to do so through mutual respect, genuine communication, and some recognition of common interest.

A willingness to enter into authentic dialogue and a tireless search for an optimum resolution of the problem is the mark of the dissolution of enmity, in at least one party. Where there is a raging confrontation the prospect of constructive dialogue is unwelcome, it is seen as a threat to the seamless righteousness with which one or both sides identify. Through such dialogue a constructive and mutually beneficial reconciliation is possible, as in the historic achievement of Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk in South Africa, underpinned by the subsequent Truth and Reconciliation confessionals.

Through awareness and acceptance enmity can be dissolved and reconciliation achieved. Beaming loving-kindness (*metta*) at the next crooked politician posturing on the Today Programme may take longer. However, reconciliation does provide favourable conditions for the arising of loving-kindness and compassion, though best at first to people we can get to know well. And when our awareness practice makes us familiar and accepting of our own frailties, and we come to love ourselves, our hearts are opened more readily to accepting in fellow-feeling the frailties of others.

I believe the two most important breakthroughs are when we can distinguish the arrow of affliction from the arrow of experiencing that affliction, and when we can take full responsibility ourselves for the way in which we experience enmity, regardless of the alleged culpability of whoever we may hold responsible. This is nicely illustrated by a parable of the Daoist sage Chuang-Tzu. Rowing across a river our passage may be impeded by empty boats that have got adrift. These we push aside without concern. However, if there are people in the boats, although the problem is the same, we get angry and shout at them for wilfully obstructing us.

The method outlined here may be used on its own or in conjunction with such traditional Buddhist practices as the four-fold *metta* meditation (evoking feelings of loving kindness successively for oneself, for a loved one, for someone towards whom one feels indifferent, and for an enemy). This essay is primarily about the inner work of dissolving enmity. In group and social situations it can be combined with one or more of the many conflict resolution and interpersonal skills strategies and methods that are available. One which works well with what is proposed here is Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication ([www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)).

The parable of the two arrows will be found in the *Samyutta-nikaya*, xxxvi.6 (the *Sallatha Sutta*).

The Orwell quotation is from *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus) Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, 1968. v3. pp293-299.

Thomas Merton quotes the river crossing parable in his *Way of Chuang-Tzu*, Unwin Books, 1970, p114.

# Retreat Reports

*Retreat reports are an integral aspect of our journal and one much approved of by Shifu. We print them mostly anonymously and are most grateful to our practitioners for sharing themselves so generously with us. In reading these reports we learn much about the experiences of others on retreat and they often provide pointers for our own understanding Eds.*

## Expect Less, Use The Structure

### From a German practitioner on a Western Zen Retreat

I have been a dedicated Aikido student for a few years, and there is a lot of popular knowledge about Zen in the martial arts, especially about Japanese Zen I suppose. I had read some Zen books, by Desshimaru Roshi and Enomyia Lasalle Roshi for example, but I had never done systematic meditation before. The idea of sitting on my knees for years and years, being very ascetic, trying to think nothing whatsoever and being whacked with a stick whenever one made an unenlightened remark had always seemed remotely fascinating, but really not quite my thing.

I had considered trying out a Christian Zen retreat more recently, and would probably have done that soon, but then I made a new friend who recommended the Western Zen retreat to me. He seemed the right person to make such a recommendation and it seemed the right time in my life, so I came over to Wales from Berlin to attend.

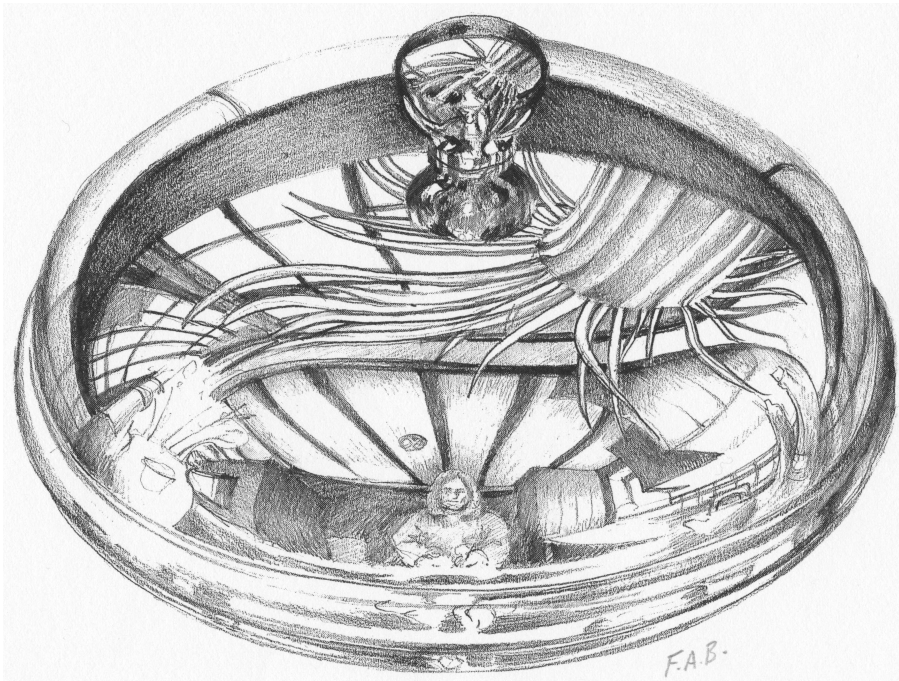
I immediately felt at home when I arrived at Maenllwyd, but I found the first full day quite testing. I had never sat for longer than fifteen minutes, and I seem to remember there were almost ten half hour sits on that day. Unfortunately, I did not know how strict the protocol was. Was I allowed to move? Could I change my posture? Could I stretch? Did I disturb others when I did all that? How should I deal with the pain in my knees?

During the third sit a frightening wave of anxiety suddenly came all over me and I stopped the meditation for a while. However, that seemed in a way quite interesting - it proved after all that meditation could do powerful things. I realised I had been expecting far too much: fascinating insights as soon as I sat for some time, interesting stories to tell my friends, a sudden change in my life and so on. I also felt pressured by a fear that my experience might not be as powerful as my friend's. It had seemed to be important to him that I went and I did not want to disappoint him. However, I decided to forget about all that, expect less, just let it happen and use the structure of the day. "Expect less" and "Use the structure" became like my mantras for some time. The anxiety soon evaporated and did not come back, and later I easily dropped the mantras. Instead, I soon had very unexpected and extremely beautiful insights, I was moved by strong feelings, and on the last day I definitely felt this experience was changing my life. That feeling still continues back in Berlin.

It's just the stories that do not come easy. I feel unable to describe the emotions that came up, the presence of so much beauty in nature all around Maenllwyd, the closeness I felt to many of the other participants and their life stories, and most of all the fascinating glimpse of what "insight" and "clarity" might be about. In a way, I am also unwilling to do so, because I could not quite capture it anyway, and I am afraid that the newly found insights, emotions and perceptions might be lost if I try too hard to put them in words.

I can try to give some scattered ideas. On the first day, Pete the cook said that unexpected things tended to happen to him on retreats, and that became very true for me, too: the next things that happened were always different from what I had thought. And these unexpected things seem to give me a little more clarity about what kind of person I am, where I am going, what I want in life and who I want to be with. Not small questions after all. I learned something about some of my weaknesses and about trying to accept them, and about letting go. Before the retreat, I had thought that my Aikido practice and Zen could only have little to do with one another.

That changed. Before the retreat, I had thought I had made an important decision about where I wanted to live and work. That changed. But all this describes just the box, not the content. I feel very grateful a place like Maenllwyd exists and there is a possibility to return. It seems almost more than one can ask for. A fairytale featuring open fire, crisp cold nights, strong feelings, calm moments, and close community. In only a couple of days. An adventure really. John said that in the beginning, of course, but having experienced it is quite a different thing.



If this should be read by people with no experience in Zen and retreats, I wish to share with them that it is well possible to participate without prior experience, and that it is indeed more than worth it. The aspects of a retreat that seem most frightening from the outside, like getting up at 5 am, not talking, sitting long hours, confronting and disclosing very private feelings and experiences, all those aspects turned out to be among the most joyful and comforting experiences for me, and happened quite easily after overcoming a first initial hurdle. Also, I felt very much cared for and looked after all the time, there was no feeling of dogma and hierarchy, no dividing difference between more or less "initiated" people, no reason, in short, to feel I did not belong there. If you feel a need to try, my advice would be, do it.

Back home, I am turning the experience round in my mind (yes, that's still there), coming to new conclusions, expanding on the ones I came to earlier. So the process that started in Maenllwyd seems to be going on still. I have the feeling it might lead me onto more challenging roads in my life than what I had planned, and cause a lot of turmoil as well, but that is quite alright.

# On Taking The Mirror To Be Me

**Silent Illumination Retreat at Maenllwyd, January 22-29, 2005**

On my way to the Maenllwyd, a snowstorm began in earnest. The road disappeared from time to time in a welter of snowflakes. Driving an ancient car I had only just bought, I became concerned whether I would arrive that night.

Driving up the final track, I recognised 'I'm so happy I could die.' That night I sensed the invitation of the refuge where nothing can be lost or gained.

Sitting on a cushion, I worried about my jacket squeaking as I breathed, and worried some more about the pains in my legs. After the first day, I gave up and sat on a chair. I'm used to retreats being a heroic battle with the pain in my legs, where I am spurred on to greater depths. Somehow, I could sit on the chair without being in any pain, and yet I could begin to centre the attention in my hara.

One morning, John talked about a time when he was asked by a Japanese Roshi during a thunderstorm: "Where is the clap of thunder?" Walking round the yard, I suddenly became aware of a fighter plane that seemed to be below me. There was nothing but roar. I said to John, "The jet - there is no where - just the noise".

Sometimes, bullying words my boss had spoken to me burned through my mind, and I thought, "Aren't I meant to be getting calmer, or just dropping this" - but maybe it was that raw and intense.

I loved cutting vegetables for kitchen work duty - such a relief to be doing something simple and in a team where we worked harmoniously. On the fourth day, I recalled a moment when a monk had instructed me to just watch - he said to me its like watching football on television - don't jump in and start taking sides. I suddenly understood what he had meant: everything I normally took to be "me" was happening all by itself entirely without any effort. It was a shock to realise how much I must normally be taking the reflection in the mirror to be me, and opposing one reflection with another. I could feel that the authority lay with the observing self - something I had often given away in my life, and sought to understand.

Pamela asked someone if they wanted to chop the garlic, and I could feel the pull - "I want to chop the garlic", and recognised - maybe that's how suffering happens - I impose a phantom me on the changing conditions of nature.

Going home I felt at a bit of a loss. I felt slightly disorientated - how would I manage if there was nothing to manage?

## **Practising in Ease and Silent Joy**

### **Silent Illumination Retreat at Maenllwyd, January 22-29, 2005**

This was a retreat of ease and silent joy. It was marked by a continuing change in my attitude to training, towards a sense of 'no effort', of 'no striving' and of 'not trying to attain anything'. There was, much of the time, an acceptance of whatever arose. I was happy to just be in this moment, whatever was happening. There was simplicity and straightforwardness. This change was also present during Master Sheng Yen's hua-tou retreat at DDRRC in December, and it continued to develop through December and January, but the change only became clear to me during this retreat at Maenllwyd. Perhaps because of this relaxation away from striving, during sittings on the fourth evening and also during sittings early the fifth morning and over breakfast, I had insight into those patterns of my mind that lead to tension. I saw clearly patterns of desire that I knew to be the root cause of suffering. In particular, during breakfast on the fifth day I saw patterns of desire going back over the years. I could see that I create these desires myself, that there is absolutely no need for me to create them, and that when I observe and drop these desires then separation reduces or ceases and suffering is no more. I remembered something similar in the Heart Sutra and checked the text in the retreat booklet of ceremonies. There are several translations of the Heart Sutra: some use the word 'desire'; others use the word 'concern' which seems broader and therefore preferable. 'In dropping all concern'...

The retreat was also marked by a series of 'one-mind' or 'unified mind' experiences of varying intensity. There were 6 or 7 of these of varying depth and duration. I was surprised how early in the retreat they arose and by their number. This may be because of the reduction in desire and also because the conditions in my life are easier now than perhaps they have ever been. As a result I have been able to attend three retreats, each of 7-9 days duration, over the past 3 months. In addition, over those months I have been able to meditate at home as much as I have wanted, on average about 1.5 hours each day. And for several months now, a whole day each week has been dedicated to a 'home retreat' comprising meditation (4-5 hours) and study of Buddhism.

The shortest and shallowest 'one-mind' experiences were characterised by the following. All wandering (self-concern) thoughts fell away though words did not necessarily cease totally; some arose in response to the experience. There was a sudden knowing of 'depth' with increased intensity and clarity of vision and sound. There was beauty. There was unity with and of all things. There was a feeling of love and care for all creation. These shallower experiences lasted a few minutes: they were not particularly stable, and they ceased by themselves.

The deeper 'one-mind' experiences occurred on three occasions and were longer and stable. Although I couldn't initiate them, I seemed to have choice when to move out of them. They are much more difficult to describe, no words can adequately describe the wonder and joy. The environment became vividly alive and crystal clear. Everything little thing had 'presence' and a subtle radiance. Everything gleamed with purity and perfection. There was joy flowing amongst all things. I was in love with all things and all things loved me. 'Delight' is perhaps a better word, the delight that comes with happy recognition. It was as if all things recognised me just as I recognised all things. There was total love and acceptance as we recognised each other and we recognised ourselves in each other. I cannot say that all things and I were not separate, but neither can I say that we were the same. Each thing was itself yet somehow there was no distinction between all. Living things sparkled more brightly and had more 'presence' than, for example, dead branches and leaves, nevertheless there was no sense of any difference between life and death. Twice this occurred during afternoon walks, and the third was during a morning service.

To be clear, these experiences were not characterised by 'emptiness of self-nature', neither by 'emptiness of dharmas', nor by oneness with 'Buddha Mind'. These were not no-mind

Kensho realization. I was not clearly aware of being one with and arising from the original source.

(Yet, I realised during meditation after the retreat that I am in danger of making a false distinction here. A one-mind experience has its basis in Mind, even if I fail to recognise the source.)

During interview with Simon (Heale) and John, Simon asked me to describe what these one-mind experiences were like. There was also discussion of Buddha Mind which arose from my reference to John's skilful discourse the previous day on the verse 'To know all the Buddha's of the past, present and future, perceive that dharmadhattu nature is all created by the mind'. Simon asked me to demonstrate Mind to him. I said that everything is Buddha Mind; me, him, John, the bookcase and books, the walls etc. He agreed but asked me to show him Buddha Mind without words or use of the intellect. I replied that it is a mistake to say that words or intellect are separate from Buddha Mind. He said 'That is not incorrect'. John helpfully explained that much of Simon's training had been within a different order of Zen where it is expected that Buddha Mind be demonstrated in different ways. I was briefly unsure how to respond - then spontaneously a great joy, love and gratitude erupted within me and I leapt up and hugged Simon. (Actually I can't say 'I leapt up', it just happened by itself). Then I said 'But this is the man I really want to hug (going to John), I owe him so much for all he has done for me'. The interview finished with me asking if my method of practice was OK, 'I'm just letting go of everything that arises.' John said that was correct practice.

Throughout the retreat I had had virtually none of the type of thoughts that used to disturb me during meditation, such as worries about work or other aspects of my life. However, the next lower level of more subtle thoughts, related to subtle self-concern and self-pride, were often present. I accepted that they are normally there and realised that practice in meditation and daily life of 'let through, let be, let go' was all that was required. During meditation sittings, the method I used at the beginning of each sitting, and also again if wandering thoughts started to get the upper hand, was whole body awareness including whole breath awareness; I then expanded that to awareness of the room then to awareness of the external environment. Often but not always I was able to do this very quickly. Then I was stable enough to be able to drop thoughts, perceptions and feelings as they arose. Sometimes my awareness could do this quite stably from the space where no thought exists, observing the thought bubbles as they arose.

One day during the rest period after lunch, I was half-awake and watching these subtle 'self' thoughts going on endlessly, and I wondered whether 'let through, let be, let go' would eventually erode this selfishness? The words came to mind

*'In my heart I take refuge in the three jewels.  
May I save suffering creatures and place them in bliss.  
May the compassionate spirit of love grow within me  
so that I may complete the enlightening path.'*

John had spoken about this verse in some depth during one of his talks. It did seem a very wise approach towards gradually eroding self-concern. In fact it struck me during the retreat how well all the elements of the practices and services work together, with each part being essential.

During one sitting on the afternoon of the last day my mind seemed even noisier than it had been throughout the retreat; and the 'one-mind' experiences had been absent for 24 hours. A lot of self-pride was apparent. I became concerned that after six full days of meditation there seemed to be no reduction in the volume and force of the 'self' thoughts. My selfishness seemed intractable and I started to get a bit despondent. Would it ever change? Then, without my volition, the word 'faith' came strongly to mind, meaning "have faith and continue for as long as necessary the practice of 'dropping all concern'".

# Goodbye To Assam

Ian Finlay

*This is the second of Ian Finlay's accounts of his time working with Amida in eastern India. It speaks of a little known part of the east with warmth and affection. Eds*

Only three days to go and I have very mixed feelings. Looking forward to being home in many ways, seeing old friends and my children, but sorry to be saying goodbye to new friends and aware that there are still many things that I have not been able to do. So, where to start?

*'...the cradle of the best and the worst  
for its here they've got the range  
and material for change  
and its here they've got the spiritual thirst'*

Well, Leonard Cohen wrote that about America, but much of it could apply to India - I think of the incredible warmth and friendliness of the people I've met, yet the brutality and violence of many places. The beauty of the countryside, the efforts at conservation, yet the underlying corruption, the filth and squalor of the cities. Recently I met a tribal woman from Manipur with a doctorate in agriculture. She feels strongly for the richness of the land and is trying to keep everything organic, as this is one of the last areas of the world where everything is still pretty traditional, but for how much longer? The strength and diversity of the peoples is tremendous but can so often degenerate into ethnic violence, the good intentions of the government often frustrated and lacking strength and conviction. For on the whole India is tolerant, welcoming refugees from Tibet or Bangladesh, and has good policies for the tribal people (adivasis), better than those of Canada or Australia for example. But there are still problems for many: local prejudice, violence and fragmentation.

And the spiritual thirst? Well, it hasn't died out in India but often material needs supersede it. There is a genuine desire for a return to moral values and a regeneration of Buddhism and other faiths.

And the best for me? Well, meeting the people, and, at least equally, meeting some of the wildlife. I've just indulged myself in four days in Kaziranga and shall now indulge myself in writing about it, because it's been one of the experiences of my life. It is the greatest wildlife park outside Africa. I travelled through on elephant, jeep and a little on foot, my journey eventually being stopped by wild elephants with a three-day-old baby. The last great refuge of the Indian rhino, there are now 2,200 of them there, and increasing. I got really close to a number of them, two with babies. Also close to wild buffalo, boar, elephants and loads of deer, including the rare swamp deer. Huge numbers of birds - pelicans, four types of stork and giant fishing eagles every few hundred yards, along with osprey, brahminy kites, herons, egrets and many others. Undoubtedly the ornithological highlight for me though was watching a pair of great Indian hornbills feeding on wild figs from a forest tree. A vulture sized monster with an impossible beak, the bird is now seriously endangered, partly because of that beak. Many tribals use it as part of their head-dress, but I read in the paper that a nature group is now making fibre-glass imitations and the tribals are accepting them! So there is hope for *Buceros bicornis* yet.

Wildlife generally is surviving well in Assam, which has retained much of its tree cover on the hills, although there is much deforestation around Guwahati, which must cause serious erosion. I'm not sure whether the terrorist groups help the conservation or not, they certainly keep many people out of the forests but they also poach elephant and rhino. Certainly I found good wildlife in all areas I could visit; brilliant birds: parakeets, kingfishers, rollers, hoopoe, bee eaters, bluebirds, orioles and barbets. I saw long necked turtles basking on riverbanks, geckoes in the houses catching mosquitoes and making loud



clucking sounds for such small creatures. I only saw one snake, a two metre highly poisonous brown snake.

There is wealth of colour from trees and shrubs, bougainvillea, flame of the forest and silk cotton trees, most trees festooned with epiphytic orchids, which unfortunately will not bloom until the monsoon. There were monkeys in various places, rhesus macaques and langurs as well as giant fruit bats hanging from the trees. Many beautiful butterflies, big swallowtails and I even saw one giant bird-wing, so large that I actually mistook it for a bird.

In fact it is often the smallest creatures that fascinate me the most with their incredibly diverse forms. One night I was removing moths from my tent and I went to pick up a small moth much like the European white ermine. Immediately it arched its back revealing a bright yellow abdomen with two eye marks at the end. At the same time four long appendages shot out from the top of the abdomen, exactly like the hairy legs of a big spider. Obviously it was mimicking some fierce jungle creature to avoid being eaten, and it certainly made me jump back!

Things like that really amaze me. I feel there is a great cosmic creative intelligence, and better still, he, she or it has a real sense of humour. Coming back, however, to the squalor and filth, the lepers and cripples and beggars of Guwahati, I realise there isn't, and that he, she or it hasn't. Both attitudes are superficial and partial. If there is a joke then it is on me.

Parts of Guwahati have to be the worst if I'm going to pick and choose, avoid the Great Way and make value judgements. The dirt, the dust, smell, noise and heaps of humanity in the gutters. Cripples rolling along in the filth while dogs and cows pick amongst them. The thing that moved me the most was a procession of the blind leading the blind. A string of seven shabbily dressed men led along by one blind man with a big stick who had somehow managed to learn how to find his way round. There's a painting of the subject by Pieter Breughel and its totally realistic, he's captured the expressions perfectly. I was almost transfixed watching them shuffle along, wondering what it was like to be them, what their consciousness was. I couldn't imagine, it's as different as a 16th century Dutch painting.

So, an interesting time draws to a close. I've been here over three months, interesting psychologically too. Certainly difficult times, especially as I was quite ill for a while, but on the whole good. Getting lost in Guwahati one of the worst things. I thought I was getting to find my way round quite well, even using the buses pretty efficiently, but recently I've got lost every time, wandered around appalling neighbourhoods in circles for half the day and completely failing to find the right bus or a rickshaw driver who could understand where I wanted to go. Anger and frustration builds up, I hate being lost. Perhaps it's symbolic of my life, my desire for certainty, wanting to know where I'm going. Which is why the blind men affected me so strongly.

Well, I went out this morning and managed to get some medicine for poor Sakya, who now has gout. He's taking the tablets I got him and also has a poultice of jungle leaves provided by one of the monks. I also confirmed my flight home today, from here on 7th, a night in Calcutta and on to London on the 8th. As I say, such mixed feelings, and even Guwahati isn't all bad, there are some beautiful houses and gardens with flowers. So I'm organising my last hours here, worrying about fitting everything in, counting off the days and unsure whether I'm pleased or not that there are only four to go.

Thinking of past and future, making plans but aware that by so doing is often little more than an escape from reality, the present moment, infinitely more precious than my memories or dreams of the future. Coming back to the present, the eternal here and now, wondering why humankind cannot bear very much reality, why I judge and live in daydreams until the wondering becomes another, "This moment is different from any before it, it is now". No more to say, the rest is silence. Trying to think of a catchy way to end this but it'll have to be a whimper rather than a bang, a desire that I may gradually drop a few insecurities and that beings will discover the way to happiness and spread peace around them.

# The Skinner Street Salon

Ken Jones

A winding street near the harbour, its broken gutters splash water on the passers by. In the damp westerlies the door sticks. Push hard. The old shop bell gives a cheerful tinkle. Scents and lotions waft on the warm air.

*“Bore da, cariad! Nadolig llawen!”*

It is Buddug, with her bouffant display of henna’d hair. Like everyone else here she is a woman of strongly voiced opinions.

*Gossip of scissors  
the combs parting  
sheep from goats*

As I settle myself on the end of the bench Modlen appears from behind a mysterious curtained recess like some houri, bearing a tiny tin tray.

*Shortest day balancing  
a sherry  
on a cinnamon cake*

Buddug and Modlen combine repartee, mime and therapy – *and* you get a haircut. A racy mix of Wenglish and kitchen Welsh crackles round the little salon. Under the dryers ancient ladies sip tea. They are the kind you see on Sunday mornings, in their court shoes, clutching their prayer books as they hasten to chapel, all *twt a thaclws*. Yet the bawdy banter here would make a strong man blush. The few men who do venture into this lair exchange their knowing nods and winks.

Modlen beckons me to her chair and swathes me in the National Flag. Some skilful flirting goes with the haircut. “Now how would you like it this time, dahlin’, with that designer stubble of yours?”

*Recalling the beards  
she has known  
her fingers*

I tell them about how my old professor of ethnology would spend his summers in Fenland barbers’ shops. Measuring the customers’ heads, he was. To see if there were any Cymry Cymraeg heads still there after all that time.

Buddug responds with a play on my name – Ken, the Gaelic for a head, and hence Cen in the Welsh form. Not for the first time, they get into phrenology. Modlen feels my shorn cranium and speculates as to which bumps where might give some clue to the size and potency of the natural member.

*Plaster head of painted numbers.  
its face  
gives nothing away*

I entice them away with a titbit about the bend sinister in my Anglesey pedigree.

Modlen whisks away the flag and holds up the mirror for my approval. From Buddug a farewell Christmas kiss – full on the lips. “And another on St David’s day. Twice a year is enough for a married man, *cariad!*”.

*Worn linoleum  
she sweeps away my hair  
across the cracks and continents*

“*Bore da, cariad! Nadolig llawen!*” -- Good morning, darling! Merry Christmas!

*Buddug* – Boadicia (still in use)

Modlen - Magdalene

“Twt a thaclws” -- Neat and tidy; prim and proper

Cymry Cymraeg – pure Welsh

# **Holocaust Memorial Day**

**Commemorative Event at Westminster Hall, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2005**

**Sally Masheder**

I was invited to represent the Network of Buddhist Organisations at this event. Representatives from all the other major faith communities were also present along with concentration camp survivors, some of those who had liberated them, senior members of government and Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. Almost the whole of the event was shown in a programme that evening on BBC2 and many people will have seen a brief excerpt from it on television news.

It goes without saying that the event was very moving but it was also very dignified and restrained. This occasion was not specifically designed to focus upon reconciliation. Other events have taken place in recent years which were designed to do that. Some of the words that were spoken betrayed an underlying anger but the overwhelming feeling was simply one of sadness. Sadness at how much was thrown away in the attempted destruction of a whole people, together with sadness that we seem to be so slow to learn the lessons that it might teach us.

Remembrance candles were lit from a flame which was brought from the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. I was interested to see that the flame was transported, not in some specially designed torch like an Olympic flame, but in a miner's lamp, of the sort that was routinely used for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. This was a reminder of the ordinariness of the characteristics which we associate with genocide.

There are of course many myths which surround major events in our history such as the Holocaust of the Second World War, and other genocides that have taken place since then. Some myths focus on the awfulness of those who perpetrated the atrocities while others focus on the heroism of the victims and of those who liberated them. The creation of such myths is a very human characteristic but it is an unhelpful one. It is important to remember that in certain circumstances we are all of us capable of inflicting great suffering on those around us, particularly on those whom we deem to be in some way different. Equally, we all of us have the seeds of decency, generosity and even heroism, given the right circumstances.

Buddhist practice gives us the opportunity to look deeply into our hearts and to recognise, with absolute honesty, exactly what is there. Having done so, we should be better able to see through the rhetoric that is constantly before us. Having done so, we may hope to cultivate the positive, recognising that the negative will never entirely go away.

# Notices

## **Submissions to New Chan Forum - Editorial Policy**

We welcome your contributions, whether articles, poetry, artwork, retreat reports, letters, or whatever else. However we do not promise that we shall publish your contribution, or in which issue it will appear if we do so. Owing to the workload involved, our policy is that we do not acknowledge materials received. Where possible submissions by email to **editorial@WesternChanFellowship.org** are preferred for articles, poems, etc, since this obviates the need for retyping or scanning. For artwork email submissions are also useful, but in addition non-returnable copies or originals by post may be helpful since then if required we can rescan them ourselves at higher resolution than may be appropriate for email attachments. Thank you.

The articles in this journal have been submitted by various authors and the views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the Western Chan Fellowship.

## **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 Chan 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.

## **Illuminating Silence – Available at Discount Pricing**

The WCF has bought a stock of the book “Illuminating Silence” and is now able to sell it at £8.99 which is less than the cover price and also includes free UK postage and packing. This is a key book for us, including as it does the teachings at two Maenllwyd retreats with Master Sheng Yen on the method of Silent Illumination, and also other texts and retreat reports by John Crook. To order your copy (everyone should have at least one!) send payment to Jake Lyne (WCF treasurer), cheques payable to “Western Chan Fellowship”.

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*See the website for more details of local groups e.g. websites and email addresses*

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