

# NEW CHAN FORUM

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## Beyond The Signpost

Can we go beyond the limitations of self-concern? This is a vital question whether we perch on the cliff top with Bill Picard at Land's End, meditate in Precious Wood, do an Indian pilgrimage, face the onset of cancer, or contemplate the outer reaches of science and the mind. As I often say, the Dharma is like a signpost on a cliff top with nothing written on it pointing out over the ocean. What is it that lies beyond the illusions of self and attachment? That's a real investigation. Tsan!!

Chuan-deng Jing-di

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## Daily Practice

### Master Sheng-yen

From Chan Magazine. 11. 4: 7-14 Fall 1991. With permission.

*In this elegant article Shih-fu responds to important questions about daily practice in the work place and in the home. These questions commonly arise and I usually ask people to cultivate a "Zen attitude". What is the Zen attitude? In this talk Shih-fu provides the answer. JHC Ed.*

**Question:** Shih-fu, at the end of every retreat, you talk about how we can continue to practise in our daily lives. You say that we should sit for a couple of hours a day, but how can we practise in addition to sitting? If we sit two hours and sleep eight, that leaves another fourteen hours. Does it go to waste, or are there other types of practice that we can incorporate into our lives? In your teachings you emphasize compassion. Is there a compassion practice that we can incorporate into our lives, and how does it compare or relate to sitting practice?

**Shih-fu:** Practice can be divided into two main categories: regular periodic practice and daily practice. Regular periodic practice can be further subdivided into individual practice and group practice. Individual practice is for those who have their own method and who are already stable in their practice. These practitioners set aside time every week, month, or year to practice uninterruptedly. Group practice is similar to individual practice except that it is done with a number of people rather than alone. Seven-day Chan retreats, sutra recitations, and repentance ceremonies are examples of group practice. I recommend that serious practitioners participate a few times each year in group practice.

Your question, however, concerns daily practice. Everyday practice can also be divided into two kinds: fixed practice and ordinary activity practice. Fixed practice means that at a certain designated time each day a person formally practises. One can sit, prostrate, recite or read sutras, or perform morning and evening services. This schedule should be structured and it should be adhered to.

Fixed, structured practice is clear, but how does one practise during the rest of the day, when working, commuting, interacting with other people, entertaining, socializing, and so on? It is possible to practise in all these situations. Ordinarily, when one thinks of practice, sitting meditation or studying Buddhadharma comes to mind, but Wan stresses that one should take advantage of all moments, whether practising in a structured manner or following a daily routine. All times, situations, and environments can be opportunities to practise.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra there is a famous chapter in the form of a gatha (verse). The Three Refuges are taken from this chapter. This chapter speaks of all activities humans perform: eating, sleeping, walking, resting, talking, et cetera. The sutra says that in all activities we should have in the forefront of our minds the well-being of sentient beings. This is what is known as Bodhi Mind, and it is the essence of the chapter in the Avatamsaka Sutra.

A person who is following the Bodhisattva Path should not think only of himself. Instead, he should think of how he may help other sentient beings. This is the first of the Four Great Bodhisattva Vows. If a person is able to consistently think of other sentient beings' welfare, then compassion will naturally arise in his thoughts and actions. The greatest problems a practitioner faces are arrogance, greed and anger. These mentalities will manifest in most situations if we do not attempt to place sentient beings ahead of ourselves.

A person who puts others ahead of himself will have little arrogance or pride because he will realize that his attainment would not be possible were it not for the help of sentient beings. Only with the help of others can a person manage to live and grow in knowledge and ability. We may think that others should be grateful to us when we do something for them, but this is the wrong attitude. We should thank sentient beings for giving us the opportunity to help them, for providing us with the opportunity to practice Bodhi Mind and cultivate merit and virtue.

Without sentient beings, a Bodhisattva would be unable to attain Buddhahood. For this reason, we should be grateful to sentient beings whether we feel we have helped them or not. If we have not helped sentient beings, then we should make it a point to do so; and if we feel we have done something for sentient beings, then we should be thankful for such opportunities. Regardless of the situation, we should have gratitude for sentient beings. With such an attitude, a practitioner will not develop a great deal of pride and arrogance.

It is easy for greed, anger, arrogance and hatred to arise in us. Greed arises from wanting - wanting more of what one already has; wanting what other people have. To be miserly is a product of greed: what is my own I am unwilling to give away.

Anger comes from dissatisfaction over not having things the way we want them to be. Envy and hate can arise when we cannot get what we want. Anger can arise when something or someone blocks our way. Hatred can arise when someone is different from us, and it can arise when someone is too much like us.

Arrogance, which grows out of pride, can arise if we think we have some kind of spiritual attainment or other ability.

All of these feelings and emotions exist because we are attached to a self, and because of our self-centeredness, vexation after vexation comes into our lives. If we allow this to happen without check or awareness, then we are not practising. The way to practise is to put sentient beings before ourselves. If we can do this, then our self-centeredness will lessen.

For example, on Thanksgiving eve, I asked Chris to come to the Chan Center and spend the night and some of Thanksgiving in order to do some editing and paperwork. Chris agreed, and that is good. If he was very self-centered, he might have said no. But the situation is more complex than it seems. By Chris working at the Center during a holiday, he may be helping some people and hurting others. Perhaps his family would be upset by his absence. For this reason I apologized to him and his family and said that I hoped Maria, his wife, would not be upset. Chris said that she wasn't, and I commented that it was probably because she figures I'm an old man who needs all the help he can get.

**Maria:** I wasn't upset. It's Chris who needs all the help he can get.

**Shih-fu:** In that case, Chris should be grateful to us, because I provided a good opportunity for Chris to practice and you made it easy for him to do it.

In all of our actions, we should reflect whether our intentions are beneficial to others or not. Likewise, when arrogance, anger, hatred and greed arise in us, we should reflect on our feelings and decide whether they are beneficial to others or not. In this way, we will check ourselves before we act; and if we put sentient beings before ourselves, then those selfish feelings will not arise as much.

It is difficult for most of us to think of the benefit of sentient beings all the time. Sentient beings include people and animals, but in this case I am putting emphasis on humans. If we think only of our own benefit all the time, it will lead to all kinds of

vexation. This is not proper practice. For example, if one half of a couple is working hard at a job all day, he or she may be in a bad mood upon returning to his or her home. On the other hand, if the other person had to stay home all day and take care of the house, he or she may also be in a bad mood. Two people in a bad mood at the same time usually spells trouble.

But, if one of the two people can be mindful enough to perceive that the other person may also have had a bad day, then he or she will be more attentive, patient, tolerant and considerate. There will likely be fewer problems. This is proper practice: thinking less about oneself and more about others. This is the beginning of compassion.

On a retreat there were three women who slept in the same room. One came to me and complained that if there was one thing she hated, it was snoring, and both of her room mates were snoring their heads off.

I said, "Maybe you snore sometimes, too. She said, "I would rather die than snore". If she could accept the idea that she herself is capable of snoring, she would probably have more consideration for those who do snore.

I told her a story. Once I spent a night in the same room with two masters. Both snored, one in a loud roaring tone and the other in a lower but wheezy tone. It annoyed me. I felt like hitting them with my pillow, but then they might have woken up and been unable to fall asleep again. I decided against that idea. Instead, I imagined that the wheezy snorer was a frog peeping in a marsh and that the other was a tiger roaring in the jungle. On the right a frog, on the left a tiger, right a frog, left a tiger, frog, tiger, frog, tiger... and eventually I fell asleep.

I remembered that ancient masters could enter samadhi just by listening to the sound of the wind or flowing water. I thought that if it could be done with wind and water, it could also be done with snoring. Perhaps I wouldn't enter samadhi, but at least I'd fall a sleep.

It is good practice to be, as much as possible, considerate of others. Do not only think of yourself, and when you are thinking of yourself, at least do the right thing.

**Student:** How do you know what the right thing is?

**Shih-fu:** Base your decisions and judgments on the teachings of Buddhadharma. If you are not sure if something is right or wrong or good or bad, then try to determine if it goes against the Buddhist teachings and precepts. If it does, try to refrain from doing it. If it is in accordance with what you perceive to be the Buddha's teachings, then go ahead and do it. Use Buddhist philosophy as your guideline. Second, use society's laws, ethics, morals and customs as your guidelines. If your intentions accord with society's standards, then you're probably not far off track. Most of all use common sense.

Be aware of your changing mental and physical conditions. See how they affect your thoughts, words and actions. Usually, if we are physically unhealthy or hurt, we will be in a bad mood. The whole world looks ugly when someone is in a bad frame of mind. During these times everything and everyone seems to be lacking in our opinion. It is easy for one's anger and hatred to arise in situations like this. At these times, a person should practise gratitude; that is, from moment to moment and with everyone he interacts with, a person should try to give rise to a feeling of gratitude.

Usually, when a person is greedy he is unaware of his own greed. The same is true for anger, arrogance and pride. But sooner or later, practitioners will recognize that they have been greedy, angry or arrogant. When they become aware of their mental state, they should practise repentance. Every time one becomes aware of one's greed, anger

or ignorance, one should practise repentance. Eventually, these non-virtuous mental states will arise less and less.

You repent because you realize that you have a strong attachment to self. Of course, you must use your self-centeredness to repent, but afterwards, the degree of your self-centeredness should lessen. Repentance can be done in different ways. If the situation allows, it is best to repent in front of a Buddha statue. While bowing or prostrating, you should reflect on the things you thought or said or did that were wrong; but there is another way to repent. Whenever you become aware of your own wrongdoing, you should make a conscious effort to recognize your error and make a vow to try not to repeat that behaviour in the future. Likewise, whenever something good happens or someone is kind to you, you should make a conscious effort to call up a feeling of gratitude.



In the temple in Taiwan, I tell my students to use two sentences in their daily lives. One sentence is to be used whenever they meet anyone or get help from anyone; they should say, “Amitabha Buddha, thank you”. They are not directing their thanks to Amitabha Buddha. Their thanks are directed to the person who helped them, but because they are Buddhists, they also recite the name of a Buddha. For others, saying thank you is enough.

The second sentence is, “I’m sorry”. To say thank you is gratitude and to say I’m sorry is repentance. If a person can truly hold these two attitudes in his mind and act on them, then he will have little vexation. If a practitioner can do this with genuine concern for sentient beings, then compassion will arise.

To summarize: a practitioner should be mindful of the welfare of sentient beings. He should remind himself not to be self-centred; he should repent wrong actions; and he should have a sense of gratitude for others. What I have just said is, in fact, daily practice. If a person consistently strives to hold these ideas in his head and incorporates them into his daily activities, then he is doing daily practice. At the same time, it is important that the practitioner continues to meditate so that he will be more aware of his mental state. If he is scattered and doesn’t have the discipline to be self aware, then he will not be aware when feelings of greed, anger, and arrogance arise. With

meditation as an underlying discipline, he will be more aware of what he is thinking, saying and doing. Meditation helps one to be mindful of one's intentions, feelings, moods and thoughts.

**Student:** You say that we should be mindful of our behaviour. Does this mean we should set up an objective observer in our minds that monitors our intentions, thoughts, words and actions?

**Shih-fu:** No, not like that. That would make you tense and tired. With meditation you will gradually cultivate an inner stillness; so no matter what the situation is, you will not get too excited or emotional. If your mind is relatively peaceful, then you will automatically be more aware of your thoughts, and you will know what to say and do. You won't lose control. If you are controlled by your emotions and impulses, then in fact you are out of control. You will say and do things before you think about the consequences. This is how trouble starts. This is how vexations arise, for yourself and for others.

Therefore, try to stay peaceful, and exercise restraint in your words and actions. This comes gradually, from meditating during your structured practice, from being mindful during your daily practice, and from using the Buddhadharma as your guideline for behaviour.

On the other hand, if you are always watching yourself like a hawk or a critic, you'll drive yourself crazy, or else you'll be miserable. If there is an observer constantly watching, you won't be able to function smoothly. If a piano player always watched himself play, he wouldn't be able to play anything.

**Student:** Everyday I ride the subway and I see a procession of beggars, homeless people, sick people, and they often ask for money. Is there a particular attitude we should have when we find ourselves in such situations?

**Shih-fu:** If we merely use money to help these people, then the help will be minimal. Our financial resources are limited. Besides, finances will not help these people in a fundamental way. We have to figure out how we can improve the environment and help these people not to create the kind of karma that has led them to where they are now. To do this we have to think about how we can spread the Buddhadharma. We have to help these people understand the principle of cause and consequence, so that they will come to see why they are in the situation they are in. In this way we can help these people in a fundamental way. Buddhism takes the long view and concerns itself with fundamental issues. We as practitioners cannot dwell only on short-term, temporary solutions. We have to dig beneath what is superficial.

**Student:** It doesn't sound realistic. Most of these people are already too far-gone to listen to ways in which they can change their lives. It's too late. Even if they believed in future lifetimes, I'm sure they are thinking about today and tomorrow, not about years down the road. And they don't want to know about their root problems. They want food, clothing, shelter, drugs, medicine. These people need immediate help. Are you saying we should become street corner evangelists and preach Buddhadharma to passers-by?

**Shih-fu:** No, you should not evangelise. That is not the Buddhist way. It will only bring more problems - for you, for others, for Buddhism in general. Yours is a difficult question to answer because every situation is different. It depends on who you are, what you can do, how much you have to give. If you are poor and have no power, then you cannot do much. Perhaps you can help an individual person here and there: give food to a homeless family or clothing to someone dressed in rags. If you have money, power, or influence, then you can do more. Perhaps you can help to create a better

society and environment. But you must remember, no matter what kind of help you give, there will be those who don't care, who won't listen, and who will not change.

By Buddhist standards, you do what you can. You do your best. The best way is to practice Buddhadharma. If you live it, then you don't have to preach. It will flow from you naturally. Those who have affinity with you will benefit. This is helping of the highest order. You don't have to evangelise. If you live the Buddhadharma, people will come to you.

**Student:** What about the other side of the coin? Suppose you work in a dog-eat-dog business. How do you deal with competition with other businesses? It is your job to outdo the competition. Isn't this causing your competitors to suffer? But if you helped your competitors it would mean losing your own job or business. How should one act in these circumstances?



**Shih-fu:** Competition is not necessarily evil. Again, it depends on your attitude. In what way are you competitive? The correct competitive attitude is to strive forward and, at the same time, wish your competition to strive forward as well. It's like a swimming competition. I do my swimming and you do yours. We don't try to knock each other dead and then go ahead. We encourage true competitive spirit. It is healthy. It encourages one to perform at higher levels.

An environment where everyone mutually stimulates one another is healthy. In any area of competition, there will be someone who gets ahead and someone who falls behind. Inevitably, there will be someone who falls so far behind he will not be able to make it. That area of competition, then, is not for him. He will have to switch to another field. That's neither your fault nor your concern. The person who fails in one area will survive, and he may go on to succeed in another area.

**Student:** Constantly trying to think of the benefit and welfare of sentient beings seems to be a great burden. Wouldn't this attitude itself become a vexation?

**Shih-fu:** It will not be a burden or vexation if the person understands the teachings of Buddhadharma, especially the principle of causes and conditions. As you try to help others, remember that sentient beings have their own causes and conditions, their own

merit and virtue, their own karma. You cannot change that. You cannot take on other people's karma.

For example, two months ago about eighty of us went to India. An older woman in the group was knocked down by a water buffalo in Nepal and she broke her leg. In spite of her handicap, she insisted on continuing with the group. She said, "I want to go, even if it kills me!"

I didn't let her go. I said, "If you want to die, go back to Taiwan and die. If you come with us, the whole group will suffer because of your presence. You are a Buddhist, so you should understand karma. The fact that you got knocked down by this buffalo could mean that you owed the buffalo something from a previous life, perhaps your own life; but because you were on a pilgrimage, you only suffered a broken leg. That is your karma. If you insist on going on with us, then you will be a burden for the whole group, and you will only be creating more bad karma for yourself". Hearing this, the woman went back to Taiwan.

The key word is "try". Of course you should not do anything that would harm others, but you also should try to help. Whether or not you truly help them is another story, and it really isn't your concern.

**Student:** I still think trying to be compassionate all the time can become a mental burden, especially if it must be pounded into the brain moment after moment. Wouldn't it cut into all of our other thoughts, words and actions? Can we always be thinking about other people? Even when we are sitting on the toilet? It seems to me your answer can be oppressive. Is there another way one can think about it?

**Shih-fu:** You are forgetting what I said earlier. Don't do anything that will make you feel tense, tired or miserable. If you whip yourself all the time, you will be of no use to others or to yourself. Be mindful to the extent that you can be. With meditation as a supporting discipline and the Buddhadharma as your guideline, compassion will grow slowly. Don't push things too much. Do the best you can.

**Student:** Karma, to a large degree, depends on the intention behind the words or actions. Is it possible, without attaining enlightenment, to control our intentions and volition in our daily lives to the point where no karma is created?

**Shih-fu:** It is possible, but very difficult. I suppose you would never be able to interact with others. Words spoken and actions performed without volition do not create karma. I am not sure you can speak and act without wanting to speak and act.

**Student:** What if I kill a sentient being without knowing it? Suppose I'm driving down a dark street at night and a cat runs under the car before I can react. Is karma created then?

**Shih-fu:** First, you were riding the car by choice. Second, that situation came about because of causes and conditions and because of your karma and the cat's karma. Therefore, karma is created; but the karma is lighter than if you had purposely killed the cat with a gun.

**Student:** Do random thoughts create karma?

**Shih-fu:** No. Thoughts that come and go of their own accord do not create karma. Only thoughts that arise with volition create karma. Such karma is also lighter than karma created by words and actions.

**Student:** What about the wilful choice to think about my method of practice, or to think about the welfare of sentient beings? Does that create karma?



**Shih-fu:** Yes, that creates good karma.

**Student:** Is it possible to go about your daily activities and perceive the world like a camera or mirror - non-discriminating - without being enlightened?

**Shih-fu:** There is the mind of intuition and there is the mind of non-discrimination. They are different. An unenlightened person can, to varying extents, rely on his intuition. By intuition, I mean knowing, saying and doing things in a direct way, without relying much on the thought process. With a truly non-discriminating mind, there are no vexations. With the mind of intuition, there is still the potential for vexations to arise. The vexations are there, in the subconscious mind. A mind of intuition can be cultivated and strengthened with meditation. It is not enlightenment, but it is a good experience.

**Student:** How do you practise when you can't practise? When there is not enough time to sit because of a hectic schedule or other obstacles? It can be disillusioning. Is there some way to deal with this in daily life?

**Shih-fu:** During your busy day, try to find little bits of time to sit and relax and clear your mind. It doesn't have to be on a cushion, and it doesn't have to be for thirty minutes or an hour. Take three or five minutes here and there to sit: at your desk, in a car or bus or train. You can do this anywhere and anytime. Relax your body and mind. Breathe. Settle your mind. Let your mind and body refresh themselves.

If you are too hectic to set aside even five minutes, then try to relax your mind and body while you are working or walking or talking. Make work your practice. Be mindful of what you do and say. I do this. When I am in Taiwan I have no private time from early morning until late at night. Whenever I remember, I try to stay relaxed in body and mind. Even though there are many things that bother me, I try not to let them bother me. I let them come and go. If I didn't do this, I'd probably be dead by now.

It's something that all of us can do. It takes effort and time, but it is not too difficult. If I can do it, so can you.

## Zen at Land's End

### The Story of Bill Picard - Master of Zen

Interviewed by John Crook.

Text transcribed from interview tapes by Eric Johns.

Edited by the interviewer.

*I first heard of Bill Picard years ago while training at Throssel Hole Priory. One or two monks had left the Priory to join him in Zen practice in Cornwall. Later on, while visiting Bo Lam monastery in Hong Kong for meditation, I met Eric Johns (Hin Lek Si) who 'sat' with me in the Chan Hall and who told me much more about him. Eric had trained with Bill and learnt much from him (see NCF 18:21-22. 19:6-14). I was intrigued. Some time later I visited Cornwall and took the opportunity to meet Bill and his wife Biddy. At once I recognised a very serious teacher who was not well known in his own country. Hidden away at the far end of Cornwall he was not often to be met with elsewhere and he did not travel around teaching. Yet the group he founded, which continues to this day, was clearly of the highest significance. Together with one or two other teachers in the immediate post war years he helped spread and create the foundations for the Dharma, especially Zen, in the UK. He was thus a true pioneer. We do not know much about these teachers to whom we owe so much. Always independent, Bill's perspective remains valuable and I decided to interview him and ask him to tell us his story. It has taken a long time to get the tapes transcribed- a task nobly undertaken by Eric. Many thanks also to Bill himself for taking the time to carefully check this account. At last here it is — read, learn, mark and inwardly digest!  
JHC. Ed*

### The Interview

#### 1. The War Years

**John:** Can you tell me how you first became interested in Buddhism?

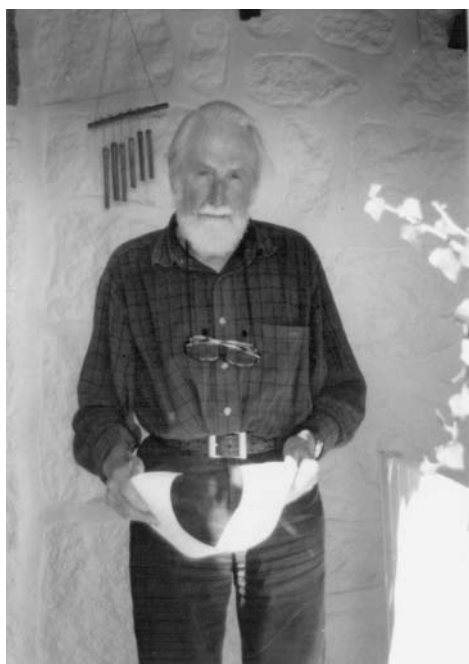
**Bill:** In the early 30's I was an art student. I came across a very small yellow book by Christmas Humphries on Buddhism. It was, I think, the very first one he wrote for the Buddhist Society. Somebody told me about their centre in London and with one or two others we went along there. That was my first contact with Buddhism although my mother had talked about the Buddha as part of my early schooling at home.

I went to Spain in 1937 and was appalled at the political situation and the brutality of the Civil War. It made me ask a lot of questions and I came back and looked again at Buddhism. Then came 1939 and the war. I joined up and served in France then Africa then Burma. I was invalided out with malaria, beriberi, dysentery and a whole packet of jungly things and was sent to hospital down in Calcutta. I was transferred up to Darjeeling to a military hospital in the hills for convalescence. When I was starting to get my strength back, I became aware of notices saying that there were local British people who would like to take any casualty who would like to come and stay with them. I wrote to a Mr and Mrs Burk, retired tea planters who were offering hospitality to soldiers in hospital from the Burma campaign. This grey haired husband and wife arrived in their very dilapidated old car. We immediately liked one another and I got permission to stay with them.

I think I was able to stay nearly a fortnight with them. They had retired just outside Darjeeling in a typical bungalow found among the tea-planting people in the days of the Raj. Ghoom Monastery was just down the road. There was also an Indian officer, a very nice man, staying with them, which was slightly strange to me. Among the Brits

with the colonial attitude, I hadn't seen Indians. I mean they would come and visit but not actually stay. I realised that the Burks were very positive about Indians and had Indian friends.

I was given the run of their library and I was told where all the thrillers, novels and magazines were. I went in there and I suddenly realised there were rows of books including some I had seen at the London Buddhist Society in Warwick Square. One of the books that had intrigued me when I had been at Warwick Square had been Evans-Wentz books on the Bardo thodol. At that time, unless you were some well-known scholar, you could only read them in the centre. I had browsed through these and got very intrigued. What was my surprise when I saw these books on the shelves in Darjeeling?



My eyes nearly popped out of my head when I'd got this volume down. I was standing absolutely lost in it when suddenly a voice said over my shoulders, "Are you interested in Tibet?" There was my host. I was terribly embarrassed because he had not mentioned such books to me. He said there were one or two other books as well and we talked about Tibet. I had always had an interest in Tibet and years before I had obtained two ancient volumes on Tibet from about 1860, which I've still got. These were by somebody called Hack, a Frenchman I believe. I realised how inaccurate they were but it gave some account of Tibetan life long before we began to get it from more modern travellers such as Alexandra David Neil and all that lot. Anyway, my host told me I could help myself and read any of his books I wanted. This was marvellous and about two days later we were talking at table when the Indian Officer mentioned something about yoga and meditation

Now I had heard about meditation, but there was very little done at the London Buddhist Society at that time. It was very much a place where you met other interested people, heard lectures and that sort of thing. My ideas were very vague about where actual practice came in. Mr Burk now said, "Would you like to meet a meditation guide? He is a Lama." Now, not long before I had read *Lost Horizon*, and I really thought Lamas might come floating in on magic carpets and things like that. I was full of a lot of very crazy and romantic ideas. I was told this guide was actually Chinese

but he was none the less a qualified Tibetan Lama. He had also trained with the venerable old Zen Master Hsu-yun in China who was then 100 or so years old. I had heard this name mentioned but it didn't really mean a great deal to me.

Two or three days later I was taken to a small bungalow in the grounds and I realised that this Chinese Lama occupied it. He was actually in the Burks' garden. I found out that they had known this Lama for quite a while and that they both practised meditation with him. He was their teacher, their guru. They had an arrangement whereby they always kept this room available for him. He was some times at Ghoom Monastery and sometimes in Sikkim where I think he was meditation teacher to the Raja of Sikkim.

The British did not directly rule Sikkim at that time. It was one of the protected Himalayan states. You used to have great difficulty to get in. I joined a party of British soldiers who had got permission to go there and we backpacked up to the frontier with Tibet. Fortunately we had a District Commissioner with us so we were allowed to step over the frontier but not to go down into actual Tibet. It was a great event. It was my first time to actually step into Tibet. I've done it three times since but could never get to Lhasa. The last time my wife and I crossed the friendship bridge from Kathmandu with the Chinese watching us from the other side. We had taken a taxi from Kathmandu to go up there. I talked about the army with the Ghurkha guard on the frontier. He was terrified and made us leave our cameras behind and not have anything on us when we put our feet over the line!

## **2. Meeting Lama Rinchen**

So I was taken to this room, went in and there was this figure sitting down at ground level. He had a flat table in front of him and some scrolls and things. He was obviously reading and studying but he looked up and beamed at me. I was very conscious of my Army boots. I felt like a clodhopper coming in. Mr Burk just left me at the door, saying, and "This is the young man with whom you said you would have a talk," and vanished. I hadn't got the foggiest idea what to say but I was told to sit down. There was only a little old seat to sit on and I was trying to tuck my feet out of the way. His English wasn't all that good yet I think he understood a lot more than he actually said. He had a pupil who had been at the original Samye Ling in Tibet and who became the meditation teacher of Trungpa Rinpoche and Akong Rinpoche.

Lama Rinchen would not answer any of my questions but he started me off on meditation, breathing techniques using the Hara and how to get to the point where you cease to have any mental activity. Although it was only a very short time that I was with him he told me enough and he was able to express enough and show me enough that it made a very big impression on me.

There is another side to this story that I really don't like to mention because it sounds a bit whimsical. Subsequently, I used to get a very strong feeling as though he was again present with me, so that questions that were in my mind suddenly got an answer. It was a very personal thing. I usually experienced it later on when practising my Zen meditation on the Cornish cliffs.

Eventually, I had to go back to the Army where, because of my language skills, I had a job in intelligence with the Kings African Rifles. Before I left I asked Lama Rinchen whether he would take me on as a Chela (disciple) if I came back. The Lama laughed, patted my hand and said; "You'll find your East in the West!" I felt brushed off and at the time was quite hurt. I had felt worthy but I hadn't passed the test. He knew that my

interest was wrapped up with a lot of juvenile romanticism and he probably thought that, if I persisted, I was going to find what I needed in the West. When I finally came back to Britain in 1946 I was demobbed but in the interim I got more and more restless internally as I was trying to find answers to all these things.

### **3. The Romanies**

In 1933 I had got in with the Gypsies. I'd been near Dolgellau, cycling and climbing Snowdon and all the mountains, and I had had my bike stolen. While on the road I had seen a shiny bit of metal and out of curiosity I had picked it up. I had a vague idea that it might have come off an axle or something like that. For some unknown reason, instead of pitching it away, I slipped it into my pocket never thinking about it. About a mile or so further on, coming on a bend, I saw an old fashioned Gypsy caravan of the type that you saw a lot of on the road in the 30s. There was a little campfire and I could see this pregnant girl bending over and a young bloke doing something at the van. As I drew level, I realised he was struggling to push a piece of wood under it to lift one side of the van because it was on three wheels with the other wheel lying at the side. On the spur of the moment I walked across to him. I'd read quite a bit of George Burrows and I rather fancied myself as a bit of a linguist. If George Burrows could learn Romany so could I, and I'd memorised a few words, which I probably mispronounced. I knew something of gypsies because the previous summer I'd gone hop picking with them down in Kent. I met a family of Gypsies there, the Scamps, who were also doing the same thing. I mean I'd never looked like a Gypsy. I had flaming red hair, but we had become fairly matey, and I'd learnt a bit about them so, airing my Gypsy, I walked across and said, "Want a hand mush?" and the bloke looks up.

It was obvious what he wanted so I helped him. We pushed the piece of wood up, which lifted the van, and then he got the wheel up and slid it in. He said something to the girl who got up and went to the tool chest at the back of the van. I could hear her rummaging around and the only word I understood was "not here". The rest was a jargon I didn't understand. Looking at the situation, I suddenly thought I knew what was missing and I put my hand in my pocket and held out the object I had found on the road. "This is what you want mush" I said, and the bloke nearly fell over. The girl came up and just stared at me. 'Course he slid it in and it fitted the job perfectly. That was all right, so they both looked at each other, and he said "Would you like a cup of Chai?" And I said, "Yes I would". So I squatted down with them.

They were terribly diffident as if I was going to bite them, and I was desperately trying to think of some Romany phrases. I knew you never ask where a Romany is going, or where you are coming from. It was not etiquette or wise in those days on the road. If you volunteered information that was fine but you didn't otherwise so we just talked in general terms. Then I got up and I left them and a little while later they passed me and we waved.

I camped that night half way on the road up to Bala, and the following day, I was walking when suddenly there was a voice calling out from a gate I hadn't really noticed, down on one side. There were several male figures leaning on the draw-over and a voice called out. I looked round and there was the young man I had met and at his side a venerable figure with a white moustache and two younger men. I walked across and was introduced very formally to the elderly man who held a hand out. He gave a very funny limp handshake, and thanked me for helping his son. I said I was very pleased to have done it. I don't know what they thought.

Because I had been picking previously, I asked is there any work around here and the old man said you go up to the farm and say that Ithel says you are to join their working team. So that was fixed. I pitched my tent and kept away from them, as I didn't want to feel I was intruding. For several days we worked like that and then we moved on. Nothing was said but the young brother of the chap I'd helped, sort of got a bit matey. He was roughly my own age, 16 or 17. We got chatty and had gone out together once or twice in the evening putting snares out for the rabbits. He came across and said "Grandfather says to join them".

Now I used to do every thing and cook my own food but we developed a sort of relationship. They would hop off and say they were going to be at such a place, and I would please myself if I did or didn't join them. We went through Llangollen and then down into England and in the end then it finally came to the point when I was invited to come and eat with them - which was really a great thing.

I realised how strict they were. They had some lovely Worcester china and stuff in the van. I always remember the old man was squatting by the fire and he put his plate down. Just at that moment the dog came up and licked the plate. The old man just picked the plate up and smashed it like that. It must never be used again, he said because it had been polluted. I learnt a lot of things of that nature and we became quite close.

Well, one night we'd been sitting around the fire and talking about the day's events. Mainly the subject of conversation was to do with the clan or tribe, trade possibilities of business somewhere and that sort of talk, but they'd got on to talking about Dukha as they call it. That's the fortune-telling for which they have two words. Dukha is really the more common form that the women do; it is based on sociological observation. For example, you walk up to a house, eye the clothesline and work out roughly the age groups of the occupants and things like that from the clothes you see. They polish up their information by talking to the owner and the next time they come round they visit the house. They know by now that the family has got a son in jail or a son that works or a son that is in the army. Their understanding surprises people. It's very clever how it's done but there is nothing more than at that level.

There are however some who really have second sight. The old Dai, that was Granny, Ithel's wife, was such a person. They were all a little afraid when she told the dukha but one night the younger women were goading her. They used to call me Billy you see. They said, "Tell the young Rai, tell Billy, the posh dukha." The "posh dukha" meant the real thing, and I didn't want it.

I felt uncomfortable and said, "I don't want to know, I don't want to know." The old woman was sitting across the fire and I was conscious of her very black eyes staring at me. I thought she would ask for my hand, which would have been palm reading, the normal thing. But she didn't. She just sat there. She was sort of rocking herself a little bit and began in quite a different way. She said "I see the boro pani, the great water, and it comes in." She was imitating the movement as of an incoming tide with her hands. "There are high hills, oh no they're not. There are high rocks and there is a head coming in through the water and a figure comes up out of the water and comes up the beach". She stops and she looks up at me with quite a different expression and said she wouldn't tell me any more. It left me feeling awful. One or two of the others said, "Well tell him a bit more, Dai, what happened?" She wouldn't say another word, and she never said another word. She left a very vivid picture in my mind though.

#### **4. Cornwall**

Now getting back to Cornwall. After I had been demobbed, I was finally able to hitch-hike away from London and arrived at Marazion The day after, I spent quite a bit of time around Penzance harbour. I walked around Newlyn and on to Mousehole and up to the cliffs. It was getting to the end of the day by the time I got to Lamorna. There is a narrow cove there, and the rocks are up on one side. I went down into this little cove.

I was very intrigued as I had heard the name of this place, and I knew its association with artists and craft people because I'd read books by the different artists who'd worked there. It was part of my reading at art school for instance so I knew about the place and I'd seen a lot of paintings done by the Newlyn art school.



I go down in to the cove and I'm standing there and at first there doesn't seem to be anybody there. There is a little stone quay on one side and, as I'm looking out to sea, I see what I think is the head of a seal in the water coming in. As soon as I saw it I got that *deja-vu* feeling. This had happened before - and then I remembered the incident with the gypsy. I remain riveted watching this thing. It seemed to be a complete resurrection of the image that I'd felt the Gypsy woman had somehow implanted in my mind. It was just as Granny Lee had pictured it. The figure comes up out with the water dripping off, then onto the sand. I'd built up all sorts of things in my mind, for example that this would be the start of a great romance.

The figure came up onto the sand and I realised that below where I was standing there was a rug spread out and there was a little child on it. I realised then that this is not going to turn out like my dream, but I was very intrigued all the same, as you can imagine.

I carried on along the cliffs for a short way. It was near the rock of Carn Barges. I realised that it was getting quite late and I could hear somebody working in a field. They were what you call "tealing". You use a long handled shovel. A man was digging out potatoes, early potatoes because this would have been March. I asked him whether it was all right to camp and he pointed out a place among what we call *quelets*. These are little stone fields on a bend of a cliff and there was a nice little one about the size of this room with stone granite walls (*quoits*) that gave protection. I pitched my tent there and it was obviously perfectly all right. The man said leave it there, come up to the

farmhouse if you want any thing. He was a farmer, Bill Trevarroes who I got to know very well afterwards, and my tent was to remain there for two years!

So things seemed to fall into place, nothing more about the lady on the beach. Anyway I was full of ideas about being a monk, celibate and all that sort of thing. I was going to meditate like anything right there on the cliff top near the sea. I carried on walking the following day and did my journey to Land's End and around the coast. Then I came back to my tent and started this little meditation regime. I was being very dutiful about what I'd been taught, but of course I did a lot of odd things. I starved myself and various things like that and got into a depressed state, not a good one to be in alone on a cliff top. I could have done with a bit of advice and correction. . . Several months later I was going to take my life. At one time I swam out in the water of the bay, no light, no moon. Suddenly I desperately wanted to live and of course then I was trying to see where the shore was and I couldn't. Fortunately there was enough of a swell for a faint line of white to show on the coast so I swam back and dragged myself out.

A bit of a melodramatic thing to do wasn't it and quite honestly idiotic, but it shows what can happen. Often I used to go on to a particular rock to meditate. It is called Carn Barges and the local people always refer to it as the Druid's seat. It is a flat stone with a vertical back facing the sea; just like a huge chair, it was an ideal place for sitting. Yet I eventually decided not to go down there because there was a sheer drop over the edge. I felt that there was a part of me that had almost been taken over in a funny way that was dangerous. So I used to stay more in my tent.

Well - in the second year meditation had been getting better in the sense I was able to drop literally everything. As you probably know, you go through some very strange things, hallucinations, all kinds of things, but I kept going. I had been impressed by what the old lama had said about everything being a projection from my own mind. In other words it wasn't reality that was out there, I was projecting the reality. I had to calm this down and let it drop, and of course by that time I'd read Suzuki. I'm not sure about the reading. I feel that if you can get verbal teaching at the right moment from somebody that you trust in or whom you respect, that's better.

## **5 A Cliff-top Awakening**

Out of all this came something I haven't talked about a great deal over the years. I suppose it was the most seminal experience for me.

Along the coast there was a garden that had been built by Colonel Painter, the old Squire of Boskenna. His was one of the old families that had been there since the year dot, and in the early part of the century, he and his wife had been to Japan. She fell in love with the idea of Japanese gardens and he'd bought a lot of stone things like lanterns and so on. He built her a Japanese garden there in the cliffs, completely surrounded by a wall, which could be locked. It was not attached to the estate gardens at all but rather a separate private garden. It had a little lake and a Japanese bridge over it and a Buddha Rupa (image) that he'd put in there.

Now some people, some woodmen, had been doing some chopping, removing some dangerous trees, and they had pulled down a bit of the Cornish stonewall so they could get a vehicle in to pull out wood. It was pure coincidence that an entrance was available there. I'd never been into this garden, but I'd heard about it so I knew that there was something like that there.

Well, there was this bright moonlit night. I think it was May or June. I'd been meditating and I felt quite a strong compulsion to go walking in the moonlight on the



cliff along a path I knew very well. Instead of skirting the garden I crossed a field and found there was a gap in the stone wall. On the spur of the moment, I walked down to this and entered. At once of course my surroundings were transformed. I was in a Japanese garden and part of me wasn't quite sure whether it was a real garden or not. I had been meditating and been hyperventilating to a certain extent, hardly breathing, so I felt that I was floating, hardly conscious of feet on the ground at all. I went down there and there was this tinkling bell that I could hear, just a faint tinkle. I came around the edge and there was the bridge, and there was the Buddha Rupa. As I saw this, everything dissolved.....

**John:** You found the Buddha in the garden?

**Bill:** Yes, Yes I found the Buddha in the garden. That was just, in a sense, it.

**John:** How long did that state last?

**Bill:** Well I passed out. It seemed it was like a flash and then it was like being drawn into the brilliance. Then I'm not conscious of any thing at all except that, this is it, and this is it, just it. Everything is just one, and I think that that was my main feeling. When I came to, I'm lying on the ground by the foot of this little bridge thing with the Buddha there. I was feeling very cold and I'm looking up. I realise that there is a golden light on the bamboo that was growing at the side. To my surprise of course it is dawn. So I must have been lying there for about three hours or so because it was the very first light of dawn shining on this golden figure. I had had a sort of amnesia. At first, I didn't know who I was or what I was or anything. Yet I was more conscious than I can remember - the feel - even now - of my fingers moving - and I put them on the rock with the Buddha rupa above it. I could feel this sensation and then I got up feeling very stiff, and my idea was to get away somehow.

I knew that I had some way to go, so I slowly retraced my steps and gradually, of course I came to know I am me but with this great sense of lightness and weight and everything gone, no problems absolutely, all very vividly there. That was It. Everything was as though I was seeing it for the first time. I think that is the best I can say. There were absolutely no questions, no inner debate, and no doubt. I was empty so there was a sense of just lightly moving over the ground of this incredible creation as though it had just happened that instant.

Well - I knew enough to know the way out. I retraced my steps, got out of the garden, and, as the state faded, I had a sense that I am 'Me' now and I'll get back to my camp. That was fine and for the rest of the way, about 2 miles along the cliff, I thought I'd just enjoy this brilliant morning as though I'd never seen a morning like it before.

I got back to my camp. I didn't want to talk to anybody, I didn't want human contact but at the same time, if it happened it happened and that was it. Gradually I just got back to my self of who and what I was. I found that a lot of questions and problems suddenly seemed so obviously answered. Everything literally is one and there is no separation.

I think that subsequently I've looked at it as if from the point of view of Physics. In an atomic sense, you know, we are all just whirling particles. That seems to be the answer. The thing that gives us all our troubles and problems is what our brain does. We split everything up and tie them into little packets. So meditation now became something that I did just any time. It was no longer the formal business of sitting as if to get somewhere. That was necessary at times because as the pressures increase, you know, one gets overwhelmed with things and you need the sitting meditation. But if you can carry that "state" knowingly within you then that is IT. What you have to do, and the problems that come up, you just deal with in the here and now.

The need to remain in segregation all alone on my little plot became less. I had already begun to do some work, I used to go up and teal potatoes and do things for the farmer every so often. In return I was not only allowed to keep my tent there but I could help myself to vegetables.

## **6. The Pottery at Mousehole and the Meditation Group**

About the second year in Cornwall, my mother had moved down to Penzance with my widowed sister. They wanted help with the house they had bought. As a matter of fact I had bought the house. I put my gratuity into it to give them a base and also I could have the attic if I wanted it.

I had got to know Biddy, my future wife, and her first husband. I had already known the group of people with whom she worked. They were known as the 'Woodchoppers' and if you had ever read books by Ithel Colquhoun (*Living Stones*) or Denys Val Baker (*Seas in the Kitchen*) you may know their story.



'Woodcutters' or 'Woodchoppers' was the name given by locals to a group of young ex-pacifists who were sent to work on the land during the war. This was now a group of young, student-artist painters. Biddy was teaching painting at Badminton, long before there were hippies, and she'd met one of these woodchoppers there and came down to Cornwall to find him. She had been in Wales with another woodchopper friend and they hitched a lift on a Breton crabber from Haverford West round into Newlyn. For a long time the locals were convinced that she was a Breton. She landed here to contact this woodchopper, a big blond bloke with a long beard and all that sort of thing, so that's how that happened.

Actually I had known the Woodchoppers earlier. Up in Wales on one of my climbing trips after the war, I had a friend whose parents had a cottage on the Gower. I had stayed with him and we had gone climbing and I got to meet these woodchoppers then. I didn't know that in the interim they had all moved down to Cornwall and made their base at Lamorna.

I had cycled over to St Ives to see the famous potter Bernard Leach and we had hit it off. He became like a pater familias to me. We had a common interest in the east and Buddhism. He had started a pottery there in the twenties and was very influential in the pottery world. My mother got to know him also and I think she told him that he had

better talk some sense into this son of hers living a sort of life, that was not done in those days. You couldn't just opt out and live in a tent and just feed yourself, you know.

**John:** It must have been very cold on the cliffs in winter

**Bill:** Well - not as bad as subsequently. That first winter, the 1947 winter, was the first time that they had had any ice in Cornwall as long as they could remember. It had been a long spell of dry, good sort of weather and subsequently it began to get cold. But don't forget I'd been living in tents or living out in the open for nearly 10 years in the Army. I was in East Africa first and then, when we were in Burma, we were in monsoon rain all the time.

Weeks went by when our clothes used to rot on our webbing and get covered in mildew and you were never dry. Feet used to go white and pappy because they were always damp, wet soaked in mud, so in a way one was very tough. Even so at the same time I was getting periodical attacks of malarial relapsing fevers and I was still getting over dysentery and beriberi as well. I'd had to get medication. When I'd left the army I'd had a dossier thing that I'd take to the doctor and I'd have to have pills to cope with the malarial relapses.

Indeed, there was a lot of pressure on me not to be living that sort of life because I was supposed to be trying to get my health back and all that sort of thing. As it turned out it really was the best thing! When I got to know Bernard he had just started a pottery department in Penzance Art School the year before. He said, "Look you can apply, you've been in the army. They will help to fund you to come to the classes." Well I could do enough casual work to be able to attend 3 classes at the art school. I was rather a hit and miss sort of pupil. I used to come in some days and not others; they were very tolerant with me. But I enjoyed it. I liked the pottery and soon met the local artists and craft-workers.

I had trained originally to be a painter in London in the 30s but it was going to be years before I could make any money. I mean the first picture I ever sold was for £5. My son sold his first picture for something like £80! I would never have a sale for god knows how long and then I'd spend the £5 on treating my fellow students, my pals anyway, in some pub in the Kings Road! So it did not do me a great deal of any long term good! But it was perfectly true that with this background I could get a job with the potters. I refreshed my pottery with Bernard Leach and, when I'd finished the course, I got a job with what is known as the Lamorna pottery.

Chris Ludlow who had demobbed from the RAF a few years before had started it up. He is dead now. He'd manage to set himself up in pottery and employed local student artists. We weren't paid very much by modern standards, I think I got about £5 a week, but basically you could live on that.

My ambition was to get started up with a pottery as well but romance interfered with that. Bidy had split up. I had a number of lady friends at the time but the first time Bid and I met it was as though we had always known each other. We could talk. I mean she was still married to Ray then but whenever we met we could just talk quite naturally. It went on like that for a number of years. She had a marriage breakdown and another relationship with some body and so on -- but eventually we came together and decided we'd set up a pottery down in Mousehole. You must know that it turned out that she was indeed the lady who had come up the beach at Lamorna! Strange !

She painted but also has a natural ability in pottery. These sculpts are hers, figures and things like that tree of life and all those sorts of things. So we set up the pottery down in Mousehole, in the fish cellar behind our cottage there. Hand to mouth it really was,

hand to mouth. I mean if we could just scrape together roughly £150 at the end of the year, it could see us through to when next year's visitors were coming and we could start selling pots again

We had a number of friends who were in a similar position trying to sell stuff so we had a system of sale or return at our place. We also started off a number of young people who wanted to do work like this. One of them, Red Simpson, became quite a successful silversmith afterwards. He was a schoolteacher at the time and he played around with copper. He made some little copper dishes which we felt very sure we couldn't sell but he had a lot of cut off bits and Bidy suggested he made some earrings out of them This he did, and they went like hot cakes. That started him off literally and he gave up teaching and moved on from copper into semi precious metal. He set himself up in St Ives and it became his life's work in the end. He became quite well known, and brought up his family on it.

We started up a shop as well as the pottery. This was down in Mousehole in the front of our house in our living room, which had stable doors. At the time, in those years after the war, everything was very drab. It was the same with our garb. We made sandals. We could buy leather so we made things like that. As soon as I'd left the army I'd stated growing my hair long and if we could get a colourful shirt I'd wear a colourful shirt. Since everybody else was in suits with waistcoats and things like that, we looked quite esoteric long before it became fashionable.

I must tell you how the shop came about. We were sitting in our front room one day before we had started the shop and suddenly a gentleman walked in the door and passed us, peering about. We looked at each other: "D'ye know who this is?" After looking around he said "Excuse me, have you seen my wife?" "No, no, what's your wife like?" And each of us thought that the other one knew it must be some one that they knew. Then he went out and we suddenly burst out laughing. He must have thought we were a shop. The place was so brightly painted and all that and we had pots and things in the window. And we suddenly said "Well that's it! Lets start selling ourselves." We built the shelves and I painted a sign that Bidy hated because it was very shi-shi. But that led to an interesting result. The sign was a pot with a mouse looking out of the top of it and we called it "The Mouse Hole" at first. Then somebody said, look you have got to call it the Mousehole Pottery. So Bid got her own way and my mouse and pot was thrown out.

The locals always made a distinction between them and us. I have a Cornish connection but they are very clannish like the Welsh. You either have to be one of them, or you're always going to be the foreigner. Now the artists were a sort of borderline case. I can remember one old Cornishman saying, "There is us-un, you bloody artists, and all the bloody foreigners up there". Now the foreigners were everybody that came in, whether English or not, but the bloody artists were part of the locals. We had not got much money so we lived much the same way as they did.

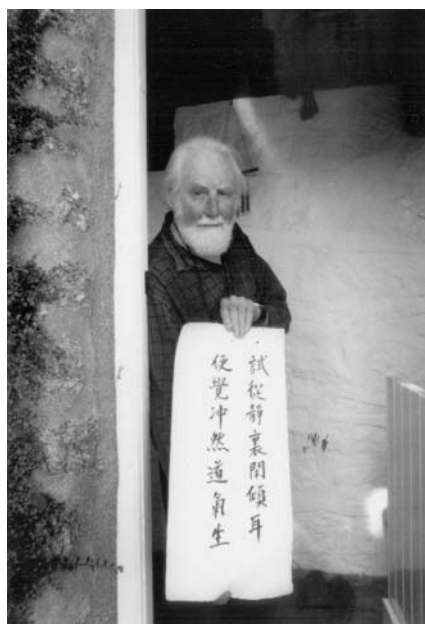
We often used women as models. Clothed models, mind, you did not get a naked model. This had happened for many years. All the well-known painters in the old school painted local people. When we used to hold exhibitions in the gallery in Penzance or Newlyn, a lot of locals came because they had relations that were models. They were delighted to bring them in and say "Oh, that is so and so!" Nowadays the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> generation still go there when they know one of the old pictures from about 1900 is there and they can see an ancestor. They take their friends. The local community always felt quite involved with the artists because of this.

Anything that people like us did was acceptable. Bid went into a shop one day and one of the ladies turned round and said, “Is it true me-dear that you live up in the trees?” And Bid said, “Oh yes of course”. The rumour went around that when it was necessary we lived up in the trees. These legends remain.

## **7. The Teachers**

**John:** How did the Zen business catch up with you?

**Bill:** Well, I just used to do my meditation. There were one or two people here that had been out East. Have you ever heard of Elephant Bill? Well he lived at Lamorna up the top there. When these people heard I was doing meditation, I was asked could they join? Would I tell them what I did? So that is really how it happened. They then decided they should have a society. The Tibet Society and the Buddhist Society in London knew some of us so we were often asked to host visiting Tibetan monks or Buddhists from India, Ceylon or Burma. Chogyam Trungpa as a young monk was one of them. The actual teaching grew from my personal practice. Over the years our numbers varied – from around ten to thirty. People came and went. In fifty years there were many changes.



We'd be a Buddhist society and we wrote to Toby Humpheys in London. He got quite interested because at that time I think there was only one society outside London, in Liverpool. Really people only wanted to come and discuss. It was a bit of a talking shop, and, quite honestly, I used to get a little bit bored. One or two of them used to air their bits of oriental language and one thing and another and I didn't feel I needed that sort of thing. I didn't feel I needed to go on with speculation any longer. I was quite content doing my thing, but there were odd ones in the group who felt they wanted to go further than talking. They felt there was something further to be explored, but for a long time I was very diffident about saying anything. I wouldn't talk about the garden business because I was afraid that I might be laughed at, or I would be told it was all a lot of hallucination or something like that. In my own way I was quite content with my "State".

As I have said, I had to get on with quite a number of things in order to make money so I used to work for potters. Then my mother wanted her house doing up so I went and worked on that but finally things began to coalesce. Obviously I wasn't going to be a Monk and I had a number of girlfriends.

Eventually, as I have told you, Bid and I came closer in a funny sort of way. She had three children. It didn't make any difference. I'd seen them grow up. I was fond of them and they were fond of me. I've been very lucky; we've never had any clashes. Peter was working here and we're very fond of each other, and it's been a good father-son relationship. From that point of view I'm incredibly lucky.

Some years later a Japanese man came out of the blue; my mother-in-law was looking after the shop at the time. He was a lay monk attached to Shojiji Temple in Japan. Have you ever heard of Habbo Sensei? In Japan, he had had a recurring dream. It told him he had to go to the far west, "west" was the important thing about it. He had to take a copy of the Heart Sutra with him and he had to give it to somebody. After he had this dream several times he spoke to his Roshi. Anyway, he eventually got some business connection that financed the trip and he had come across to England by Trans Siberian Railway travelling westward. He'd gone to the Japanese Legation in London and they got a map and said, "You have got a choice, the most western point of England is Land's End." Now there was also a Spanish one or a French land's end also, but he said "I'll start with the nearest." Then they told him that near the English Land's End there was a place called Mousehole. He was convinced that this must be right for him because in his dream he had seen our sign. It was actually no longer our sign but it was the sign that we had had, the mouse that figured in the pot!

Sometimes it seems almost incredible how things tie in like this. Anyway, my Mother-in-law couldn't make head or tail about what Mr Habbo was talking about. So she said "I think it's my son in law you want to talk to." I was told there was this Japanese gentleman who was going to come back later. When he did his drawing to show me his idea of the mouse and pot it was absolutely spot on. It was the old sign, which we no longer had because Biddy had thrown it out. I mean it was several years later you see. He had a phrase he kept saying "So happy! So happy!" and he kept putting his hands together and doing little bows to me. It meant a great deal to him.

Anyway we were obviously going to do a little ceremony and we sat on the floor and had tea. He bought out the scroll that he'd done and it was the Heart Sutra. Now he obviously felt I'd got to read this to him. He said do you speak Japanese? I remembered a few phrases from the war years, but I had quite a personal struggle with this. I'd got to hate the Japanese because in Burma we'd come across the most appalling things they'd done - like using the prisoners for bayonet practice and things like that. I just said Hrydrya Sutra and he looked at me and beamed. So I went and got the Edward Conze version so I could read the thing in English. He presented me with the scroll. I've still got it.

We started a correspondence; a very odd correspondence too. One day I got a letter in good English. It turned out to be from Jiyu Kennet. Apparently Habbo had told her how he'd been over here. She was sounding me out, to find out who I was, what was the set up here and was there a possibility of her being invited to come over and so on. This went on for several years, and at first I had thought it was an erudite Japanese writing to me. She asked questions; we talked about techniques and so on.

What I subsequently heard, although I didn't learn it from her, was that some Japanese were getting embarrassed with her and various young Americans who were upsetting traditional things and going there with their own ideas. They were not going to fit in

and some of the Americans really behaved appallingly. I don't like saying this of Jiyu Kennet but she had a streak that she was going to be somebody of importance. This was what drove her in a way. I can't say it interfered with what she was teaching. That was good, but she very quickly broke off her links with anyone who was going to be an authority over her. She wasn't prepared to have a Dharma brother keep an eye on her at all. I got involved with groups raising money; we brought her over and we held the first retreat in Somerset in the 60s. I was always on the periphery of all this.

Another thing, a friend of mine who was stationed in Hong Kong in the army had met Lu Kuan Yu (Charles Luk) who wanted somebody to read some typescripts he had prepared. I think my friend gave him a wrong impression of my importance and so I got a letter from him. Would I contact a publisher? So I did what I could and gradually Charles Luk's books came out. That is really why he dedicated one of his books to me. All this revealed for me the Chinese aspect in contrast to Japanese Zen with its somewhat military approach. The Chinese go very much on the ceremonial side, the aspect that Eric Johns likes so much. Personally, while I think this is sometimes helpful, we always kept it to the simplest when I was involved in teaching Zazen. We always had a Rupa and lit incense to show when a meditation period had started and ended. We also had question and answers.

I was given permission to teach originally through Jiyu Kennet at Sojiji before they broke with her. They later renewed permission directly for me to teach independently and I kept up contact with them after that for a while. As time went on our group met regularly for meditation in a sail loft and in our houses. That was how the Mousehole meditation group was started. It began functioning around 1949. I think it was the London Buddhist Society that called us "The Mousehole Buddhist Group" and so it became known.

Most members lived at home as they came from Cornwall. Some still worked while others were retired. The older members made up the regular core of the group. Younger people only started joining in the 60's when Zen became popular and a few of these started living as monks or nuns. It was this that started us building our first Zendo - meditation hall.

Over the years our schedule of practice changed. Many original members died or gave up attending weekly meetings yet still attended our retreats. Once the Zendo was built there were weekly meetings. Over the years we used a range of texts, the writing of Daisetz Suzuki, Christmas Humphreys, and Charles Luk were the first. Luk's translations were most useful. Chogyam Trungpa was valuable in his first days in England. Over the years we invited various teachers. In meditation we used shikantaza and koans at different times depending on the teacher and who was present. Our methods were never hard but adapted to our ages.

The group has never closed down. Until I moved from Penaluna, I still sat with them but I am cut off now as my transport is by bus or by getting an old member to collect me. There are still weekly sittings but no one gives teachings any more. Indeed the present members who do sit can hardly represent the group as it originally was. Actually, I now know little of what they do as my age (92) prevents it. What started for me in 1948 has ended.

At the House of an "Ancient Buddha"

**James Crowden**

*During the recent WCF pilgrimages to Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh, NE India, several of us visited an old farmhouse where the 6th Dalai lama had been born and some of us slept and meditated in the temple there. James records his impressions of his visit. Eds.*

*At the house of the Sixth Dalai Lama  
Prayer flags flutter  
The old farm sanctified*

*His birth one in a long line  
His short life full of enjoyment  
Enlightenment of another kind.*

*Easy curves on the eye  
Keeping abreast of the times  
Beneath the Potala.*

*Seeking peaches  
And landlord's daughters  
He planted a tree*

*That he revisited  
Only the other year  
When passing through.*

*Trouble with the Chinese yet again  
Maybe he will return  
To the women of Tawang.*

*White cranes on the shores of  
Lake Gunga Nor carry the message  
Far and wide to his chosen people.*

*Waiting for his songs  
To float through the air once again  
The farmhouse is still alive with voices*

*His relatives offer visitors  
A white peach of course  
And the women laugh without blushing.*





**Shrine Room in the 6th Dalai Lama's Birthplace near Tawang**



**Looking from the Shrine Room to Windows overlooking the Valley**

## Solitary Retreats at Precious Wood

Hin Lic (Eric Johns)

*Eric was one of the Dharma students of Bill Picard so it is appropriate to place his article here. He has started a small group in West Wales and carries out solitary retreats at his small temple there. Quite independently we find we have entered the same Dharma path. JHC Ed.*

This is an account of not just one retreat, but of many held at “Precious Wood” in Wales over a 16-year period. During this time I have been going there mainly alone for solitary retreats, occasionally doing the 10-day brown rice cleansing fast. Others sometimes also go there to meditate for a while or to practice Tai Chi.

There often comes a time with serious practitioners, when they need to leave their teachers and temples and all the books and other social interaction and go off alone for a while.

Usually I would clean up my diet a bit before retreating, eating just very simple natural food for a while. Having made arrangements with my family, I left all behind, no mobile phone until a couple of years ago. Then arriving at the forest, no electricity, water or toilet and a garden shed to stay in.

Far from the road, hardly anyone knew that I was there. Often I would work quite hard physically for the first couple of days, fencing, logging and building the track etc. Then would come sitting, with no fixed timetable. During my training as a monk living in Chinese temples, I had been lucky and had learnt to sit for long extended periods easily and in comfort, also Tai Chi and Chi Kung (energy training exercise), in combination with a careful diet helped enormously. The main problem was this stuff (Dukkha) grating around in my head (Samsara), it never seemed to stop for long!!

Sometimes it would slow down enough to get an experience of what it is like in fundamental awareness. This is “mind before thought” found right in the middle of what we are, underlying all the head stuff. It’s always right there in any and every place we might happen to be! We just need to be ready to let go of it all, but usually never seem quite able to.

In the woods alone, sitting, walking or working often melt into one experience of the present just as it is, flowing but not moving at all. Playing Tai Chi, sitting meditation or walking with the wheelbarrow seem much the same. Sometimes pushing the wheelbarrow is like walking hand in hand with the Buddha, it feels just as precious. Everything becomes very beautiful and glowing in its own aura, boundaries melt down in this heightened awareness, things that once were problems are no more than ripples on the surface of the mind, the depth remains unmoved. In this world of Zen, carrying logs in the rain or digging a new shit pit seem as profound as the morning chanting with all its beautiful Mantras. Here the wind and rain give the only sermons that answer the life Koan, and it’s as clear as the sky.

However things were not always so easy. In the early years I uncovered a raging anger that had driven me to drink heavily in my teens and early 20’s; I acknowledged the inability to achieve the many things that I had missed out on because of my dyslexia, problems from my childhood from my father’s mental illness; all these things and more that I thought had been dealt with, but were not, were all now coming up distracting me from my quest for mental peace and quiet. Yet these problems later became my greatest driving force and incentive to practise. I could never go back to the chaotic type of life that I used to have. It seemed that I had to find a way to get through.

As a Chinese Master had told me that I had already reached the “faith stage” in Buddhism, I knew that I had total trust in the Dharma, I didn’t doubt it. That was a tremendous source of refuge. Also there was a very clear state of mind that I had experienced at Bill Picard’s Zen retreat in Cornwall in the early 80’s and then again at the “Precious Wood Zen Monastery” in Hong Kong. These experiences meant that I had also taken refuge in the Buddha nature of our own mind. There were no doubts, Bill had said so. His advice was that I should put it down and move on with the moment, just drop and drop again. So I went quietly on in my shed year after year. More in winter as my work was busier in the summer.

Slowly over the years, as the track grew longer, away from the road, and my shed with it, down in the middle of the forest, my mind was still grinding round and round but it was easier to step off for a while and - oh - what a relief to be having a “Nirvana-ring” process rather than a “Dukkha-ring” one. It was the same me but a new way of being was apparent. Here there are no fixed things as we usually perceive them, but rather an unfolding and becoming of all that is.

Then, unexpectedly, Bill sent me down to John Crook’s retreat barn in Wales. Here I found myself challenged as to the set of Buddhist attachments that I had taken on and built around a new “me”. Here was a world of practice stripped bare of all the many types of comforts that I had regarded as normal, especially as I love going to the Chinese Monasteries for the beautiful ceremonies and chanting. Here there was no nice chanting, just grunting noises, and there were strong flavours in the food! There were Dharma talks in the vernacular with seeming lack of respect and religiosity, no monks and not much respect for them either. ‘Monks’ had become my role model, a sort of father replacement figure I suppose. I had also been a choirboy and retained another set of stuff from the church school that I had been to as a child. That was quite a surprise.

How is an ordinary experience not sacred?

What makes an ordinary experience sacred?

I still have many layers of habits to work out for the task has hardly begun. For instance, the Zen states that I have experienced all come and go, none have been more than temporary. It seems that whatever the experience is, it is tainted by a conception of purity of mind. This seems to be like a dirty lens that still sees the reflection of a third moon from lake to pool to puddle as my mind patterns transform and dictate the type of experience. Sometimes using the Koan is like using a tyre lever to shift the tyre and sometimes being able to see inside, but not getting it off yet. The trouble is, the more you try, the tyre tightens and the more you struggle the more you are stuck. Clearly every thing must be let go of here, as you can take nothing along.

John encouraged me to start a local group here in Wales, which has indeed begun. I had many doubts about my ability to do this, but, with his encouragement and skilful teaching tricks, I have given up some of my solitude and have had a go at it. Despite considerable personal problems initially, we have been able to overcome these for the sake of the Dharma and I now have tremendous respect for John whom I first met at the Precious Wood Temple in Hong Kong in about 1980. In fact we discovered that originally we had had the same teacher Master Yen Why (Yen Shi-liang) who initially taught me about diet control and what it had been like to be on retreat with Master Hsu Yun. John and I have also found that we share the same lineage of Master Hsu Yun due to the teachers that we have, and the ceremonies that we have been through.

## Poems by Hughie Carroll

from his Indian pilgrimage

### Dog At Tsopema

*we walked around the holy lake  
suddenly  
a dying dog*

*it's wounds horrific  
the pain and pathos  
of it's last breathing*

*alone in the afternoon  
I returned and gazed  
then something inside let go*

*what if I really stopped  
asking the world  
to make me happy?*

### Wild Kids

*these wild kids  
stare at me anyway  
so why not give 'em a show?*

*a few simple tricks  
and they go crazy  
not knowing  
how much joy  
they give me*

**Kathmandu**

*rainy night in Kathmandu  
ghostly cycle rickshaw  
zooms and swishes*

*rattling past*

*the whole street  
suddenly goes dark  
all but this shop*

*shining*

**Chomolungma**

*up through clouds  
sunshine flying  
we all gasp*

*Mother Goddess of the Snows  
herself  
in person*

*Makalu  
Lhotse  
Gauri Shankar*

*ok, eyes wet  
but this time  
it's joy*

## Entering the Global Mind

### Roger Taylor

*Roger, like most of us, is deeply concerned about the present state of the world. A scientist by profession, he has always sought to reach out beyond the frontiers of orthodoxy to see what future work may reveal. In this article he discusses several important, although controversial, findings that suggest further reaches of human potential. Research of course continues. Eds*

We are living now in the age of Kali Yuga. According to Indo-Tibetan mythology, this is a time when iron birds fly in the air, and the life of the spirit falls to its nadir. The evidence for this can be seen all around us: alienation, crime, drugs, degradation of the environment and, poignantly, in a recent figure giving suicide as the third highest cause of death in children between the ages of five and seventeen in the US. Just recently I was particularly disturbed on learning that, according to two polls, some 40% of Americans believe in the literal truth of the Bible. This means that many of them regard attention to the accelerating deterioration of the environment as a waste of time because, according to apocalyptic prophecies in the Book of Revelation, the world is soon to end anyway. Likewise, they welcome wars with Islamic countries as a run-up to the final Battle of Armageddon, which will bring defeat of the anti-Christ, and return of the Messiah for the last judgement. At this time faithful Christians will be saved and go to heaven in rapture and the rest will be damned. Incredible as this belief seems, it has been promulgated in two best-selling books; moreover, over fifty percent of the US Congress members are backed by the religious right, and so can also be taken to share in it as well.

In this article I want first to briefly restate what has been much written about: how the scientific way of thinking arose, and has led us into this morass. I will then consider how, strangely enough, science itself seems to be pointing a way out. In support of this, I will outline three recent scientific studies, which could go a long way towards radically changing our world-view.

It is not hard to see how the age of Kali Yuga has arisen necessarily along with the predominant materialist world-view. Matthew Arnold wrote of the long withdrawing roar of the sea of faith. But the withdrawal has been under way much longer than perhaps he thought. For thousands of years animistic beliefs have been giving way to the developing monotheistic religions. All the spirits, which used to inhabit the natural world, have been, and are still being progressively withdrawn from it, and “kicked upstairs”, to be subsumed in one single Father God. In that he is now perceived as being separate from nature, this God has become more distant and less real than the spirits he replaced, and living nature has been debased to become merely a heap of dead matter out of which the raw materials for the human economy are to be mined.

To reinforce this view, over the last few centuries, the “church” of science has come to insist that, to be fully accepted, all truth should pass the test of measurement.

Note however that, no matter what scales or instruments are employed, measurement always comes to our minds via the visual sense. Indeed human beings do rely on vision to the neglect of the other senses. Now, if we construct our world from visual data alone, we will necessarily perceive it to consist of solid material objects, all apparently separate from each other. It is thus that we get atomism, and the increasingly costly search for ultimate particles.

But quantum physics has forced us to consider an alternative view: of the world as waves or fields. It was initiated by the puzzling finding, among others, that what were thought to be subatomic particles also had wave-like properties, and what were thought

to be waves (light) also had particle-like properties. It just depended on how you set up the experiment to detect them. This is just like using two types of sense organs: one, like the eyes, to see particles, and one, like the ears, to hear waves. So, just as the visible aspect of the world is completely different from the audible aspect of the same world; so the particle-detecting experiment is quite different from the wave-detecting experiment.

To obtain a feeling for the wave view it is a worthwhile exercise to imagine what kind of world you would construct if your only sense was hearing. Suppose we were beings who had no eyes, or any other senses except that of hearing. We would be aware, from the beginning, of a world of sound waves. It would consist only of tones (or frequencies) and loudness (or amplitude). There would be no solid objects, or materials of any kind – even though these would of course still exist for beings with eyes. Nevertheless, our sound world would still be quite rich, with all kinds of noises, pure tones, and chords, up to the most complex music. And of course voices, conveying informative signals of great complexity. Lets assume, too, that we only have one ear, placed in such a way that we could not tell which direction the sound came from. We would then grow up completely lacking in the concept of space – a concept so basic for our materialist world-view.

So, just as we are taught in the Heart Sutra, our world is a mental construct, depending on our particular evolution, genes, culture and language. Thus it is that, building a world on vision as we now do, only the material world of objects is taken as “really real”. And, because of this, I tend to take my material body to be the only real Me.

After some centuries of scientific revolution, this kind of belief has gone very deep. Growing up with this view, people now believe themselves to be separate from all other beings, and ultimately alone in the world. The existential anxiety this entails was well expressed by Rilke: “And if I should cry out, who, among the angelic hosts, would hear me?” In such a predicament, it makes sense to get as much of life’s material goodies, by whatever means possible, before one is annihilated. The very motives driving morality have been undergoing changes, which can only be seen as destructive. Natural morality arises out of the identification of the self with others, as can of course be seen in properly functional families. But although it can still be seen in some tribal peoples, natural morality in relation to the environment, arising out of identification with the natural world, has sunk, throughout most of our species, to a very low level. And morality in general, rather than arising naturally, is coming to be seen as imposed by the authority: of parents, society, and ultimately the father God.

The impulse still exists, however, for re-connection with the spirit. There remain plenty of good-hearted people, who are aware of the spiritual decline, and want fervently to do something about it. Together with the moral degradation exhaustively presented to us by the media, like the white spot in the black side of the yin-yang symbol, there is thus an opposite trend, mostly served by the media with disgraceful neglect. Never before have so many been aware and concerned about the sufferings of distant peoples: note the phenomenal rise of the NGOs, and so many smaller philanthropic projects, and good-hearted people working in both the local and global arena towards a better world.

At the same time, over most of the world, churches, temples and mosques remain full. There is no lack of prayer. Within the materialist paradigm, however, the belief is that only activity in the “real” world can bear fruit. The belief that prayer is any good is weak; most people would be cautious about affirming that their prayers might bring results. Many also are meditating but, as with prayer, the way in which it is seen as worthwhile is interpreted through the clouded lenses of the materialist paradigm. Here,

while not asking for anything in the outside world, we often carry the thought in our minds that meditation might “make us better people”, so that we may spread a good influence among others that we meet in the material world, and through them the influence may spread out in physical space like ripples in a pond. But there is no more real hope of any direct influence on the world outside than there is with prayer.

For all this to change, it seems, we need a radical change in our world-view. And this, I submit, may already be under way. For near on one hundred years now, quantum physics has been dissolving our solid world into one of ghostly insubstantial fields. Seemingly nihilistic from one point of view, the hope lies in the thought that, unlike solid objects, fields mingle and interpenetrate. They are intrinsically holistic. This much is readily understood from our common experience of fields such as magnetism and light, but a much harder concept is forcing its way onto the scientific scene: the concept of non-locality. The familiar fields, such as magnetism, are local, in the sense of being firmly rooted to a particular locality in space; and their influence needs to travel through space at the speed of light. But there is clear evidence now for a subtle interconnectedness, which behaves as if space did not exist. It has now been proved incontrovertibly that two particles can remain in instant communication whatever the distance between them.

Can the same be true for two human beings? While the thousands of anecdotes of telepathy would say yes, the objective evidence demanded by the church of science has been hard to obtain. Recently however, two very convincing lines of evidence have been presented. The first concerns brain waves. The technology now available for the study of the electroencephalogram, or EEG, enables one to quantify the degree to which two wave-trains are “in synch”; i.e. how much the wave-peaks coincide with each other. Working on this, at least three groups of scientists have shown first (and as expected) there is usually a degree of synchrony between the two halves of a single person’s brain. But what is new, and exciting, is the finding of synchrony between separate individuals. This occurs principally where there is a close relationship, as with lovers, or mother and child. But some beautiful results from a researcher in Italy have shown high degrees of synchrony between people meditating together. Because these meditators were in the same room, it might be said that they were responding to the electromagnetic fields of each others’ brains. But a German group has rejected this hypothesis by finding that synchrony still occurred between two individuals in distant rooms and screened inside Faraday cages.

Considerable synchrony may also occur between brain waves and other physiological rhythms, such as heart-beat and breathing. This becomes much more marked during meditation - as if this activity serves to harmonise bodily functions. In deep meditation also, the synchrony between left and right brains rises to very high levels. Although very much a preliminary study, unpublished in any scientific journal, it is worth mentioning the work of an electronic engineer, who looked for synchrony between peoples’ brain waves and the “Schumann resonance”: the natural electromagnetic resonance of the earth. He found this to occur, at times, particularly with “sensitives”, such as psychics, healers and shamans.

The second line of evidence concerns a much more general phenomenon whereby the minds of millions of people all over the world can be seen to be linked together. This work began some 30 years ago, at Princeton University, with the finding that people could, with their minds, influence (albeit to a very small degree) the behaviour of a simple electronic device called a random event generator (REG). Unavoidably, all electronic components generate noise. This noise is generally thought to be completely random, but obviously a mental influence means a departure from randomness. Later



experiments led the researchers to believe that conscious intention was not necessary, since the REG was responding to large groups of people who did not even know the device was in the room with them. Working with situations such as theatres or religious meetings, observers were sent in to record the times when there was simultaneous focus of emotion, such as when the audience laughed together, or held their breath at some dramatic scene. When later these records were compared with the record of noise from the REG, significant correlations were often found.

Thinking already that this effect might be non-local, they set up the Global Consciousness Project, whose objective was to look for correlations between REG behaviour and major world events, which would be likely to focus the emotions of millions of people. The procedure now makes a “formal prediction” that whenever a major world event takes place it will significantly affect the REGs. (There are now over 50 of these operating in various parts of the world). Then, whether the result is, or is not significant, it is still included in the calculation of overall significance.

These results are available for anyone to see on the inspiring website<sup>1</sup>. A wide variety of events have been charted: e.g. the moment of new year (within local time zones of course), the Pope’s visit to Jerusalem, a billion-person meditation, and especially some disasters such as the events of 9/11. The combined statistical significance of all the results accumulated over several years is now extremely high. Have these subtle connections among human beings been increasing in recent years – perhaps with the help of the rapidly increasing network of communications by radio, telephone and the internet? It is too early to say. But the scientists running the Global Consciousness Project suggest that they have, and that they are leading us towards the “Omega Point,” as foreseen by Teilhard de Chardin, when the human race becomes in effect a single organism. In this case, it might be suggested, a high proportion of people’s brain waves would be in synch with the Schumann resonance much of the time, and lead them to identify with Gaia and the natural world.

These lines of work are only among the latest and most striking exemplars of a strand of thinking leading from ancient teachings to recent theoretical work by philosophical scientists such as David Bohm. All lead to the conclusion that not only human beings, but everything in the universe, is connected at some deep level, and participates in one indivisible process of interdependent origination – just as the Buddha taught.

If this is so, then we already have the basis for belief that prayer might, after all, be effective. Indeed a number of scientific studies have been carried out to test the efficacy of prayer in aiding the recovery of patients in hospital. Most of these have achieved a modest degree of statistical significance. Much more impressive, however, are the results obtained by scientists at the Maharishi International University’s Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy. Based on his theory of the unified field, the Maharishi advanced the hypothesis that meditation itself, and especially the transcendental meditation he was teaching, has its effect in the real world, and that this effect might be greatly magnified when large numbers meditate together. This hypothesis has been tested now in over 40 studies on a variety of social indicators, with violent crime showing the biggest effect. Many of these have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

A very large and well-planned experiment took place in Washington in 1993. Every stage of the experiment was overseen by a 27-member review board including sociologists, criminologists, and representatives from the Police and Local Government. It was decided, as the dependent variable, to monitor figures for violent crime. Over a period of two months, TM practitioners gathered at several locations in the city, and practiced the TM-Sidhi programme together twice daily at pre-arranged

times. The graphic result presented on their website<sup>2</sup>, shows that, as the number of meditators rose to reach eventually about 4,000, the violent crime figure dropped progressively by 23%. The statistical significance of this correlation was astronomic. No significant decreases in crime were found for similar periods during the previous five years. On consideration of a great number of other possible causes for this result, such as unusual weather conditions, etc., none was found to be remotely answerable.

Another study centred on the war in Lebanon in 1988. Over a two-year period, seven TM groups met at various times totalling 93 days - not only in Lebanon and Israel, but further afield in Holland, Yugoslavia and the US. Their influence, assessed by a composite peace/war index, during these 93 days reached enormous significance by comparison with the intervening periods, totalling 748 days, when no such groups were meeting. The authors comment that these results make this peace-creating effect of group meditations the most rigorously established phenomenon in the history of social science. Both studies have been published in great detail in mainstream journals.

These results must be taken seriously. To see the graphs gives us exactly the kind of visual, quantitative evidence that our scientifically-encultured minds now demand. Some would object that people have been praying for peace from the beginning, and look how much war we still have. But petitionary prayer still has an element of ego, in that it is asking for something "I" want. The trick may be to stand aside and allow the greater universe to take whatever form it will; to allow the Tao to flow freely. Thus the TM meditators in the experiments were not consciously praying for anything, but rather could be said to be merely aligning themselves with the universe. At the same time, they could hardly escape knowing that an experiment was under way, and what was being measured; and those in the Washington experiment would have known that they were in Washington. This kind of link, held in the background of the mind, is what is usually employed for distant healing, and can focus an essentially non-local effect onto a specific target.

Since we know with such certainty now that we are all connected at this subtle level, we must allow for the possibility that we are having an influence all the time; not only during set times for spiritual practice. It may be that we are never "off duty," but are on the stage all the time. This influence would come not from any kind of activity, not by any doing, but by the quality of our being.

Philip Pullman has given us a potent myth for our times in the trilogy: "His Dark Materials". Both a dramatic and entertaining fairy story, and a deeply meaningful allegory, this work engages with the present turning point in the collective psyche by having woven into it, in an unobtrusive way, a number of concepts derived from modern physics. As the story develops, one is gradually made aware of the mysterious "dust". One is led to understand that dust is of over-riding significance for the very survival of the human race, but that it is leaking away. The protagonists, two children on the verge of adolescence, find themselves engaged on a quest to stop the haemorrhage of dust, and so save the world. What is dust? Although never baldly stated, it can be understood as one of the fundamental particles. Just as physics tells us of particles of light (photons) and of charge (electrons), so dust would consist of particles of love. With the encouragement both of scientific theory, and the astounding results just quoted, perhaps we may gain inspiration to set out on our own mythic quest to restore love to the world, and bring the age of Kali Yuga to an end.

1. <http://noosphere.princeton.edu/>      2. <http://permanentpeace.org/>

## Yellow Petals

Ken Jones

*Sans paroles – we wish Ken well at this time. Eds.*

*Simply trust:  
Do not the petals flutter down  
just like this ?*

Issa

PSA readings: 1. 6... 2. 4... 5. 4... 5. 8... 7. 1...

The mathematical ascent to death. Now slower, now faster, but always sure.

*Fear  
a rising curve  
through small blue squares*

The ascending star of my would-be executioner – Basil, Basileus, imperial tumour of the prostate. A Good Death? “A spectacularly awful way to die”, said one urologist – even when eased by the constipated nightmares of palliative morphine. Or perhaps a graceful exit by EasyJet to Zurich for a teatime appointment with Dr Death? Yet still a nightmare not yet metastasised into reality.

The scabby walls of the cancer waiting room once displayed an exploded diagram of “The Genito-Urinary System”, a tube map with the different parts brightly coloured, numbered and named – all ours. “It used to make me feel funny,” says the bloke next to me, anxiously fingering his South Wales Echo. Then one day a big, black biro’d tumour appeared, with a smiley face, clutching the pink prostate. Now there’s only art therapy on the walls. No Last Judgements by phlegmatic Flemings. Only Patience Strong stuff to match the brisk optimism of the doctors.

“And how are we today, Mr... er...?”

Many of the patients here are ex-miners. Small, quiet, stoical men. No one makes a fuss. Resistance is futile. The late afternoon sun has sneaked round the corner of the hospice across the road. It floods in on us, a crowd of waiting men.

*The incense - ash  
the candle - melted grease  
yellow petals everywhere*

Failed surgery or radiotherapy? Back on the conveyor belt as a “salvage” patient. Slow chemical castration then remains the only orthodox “treatment”. Hardy souls opt out for a shorter life but a merrier one – if still up to it. The testosterone that feeds the cancer powers the passion.

*Together  
the wild laughter  
of abandonment*

## **A Stroll on the Banks of the Bramaputra**

**James Crowden**

*Another poem from our Arunachal adventure. Eds.*

*Mid morning, hot and sweaty  
Below the Raj Bhavan, the Governor's residence*

*A mile or so of beach and rubbish,  
Scattered to the four winds*

*Plastic bags, old banana skins  
Boys playing cricket in the sand*

*Swimming in the brown river,  
Swirling waters that have come*

*From the other side of the mountain range  
From the unseen country which sheds its people*

*Like tears, and the water runs on swift and swirling  
As men and women stroll along its banks*

*Eyeing up the farthest shore, the sandbanks,  
The island with a temple, slender fishing boats*

*Drift hazily along and dip their nets  
From the bow and retrieve the silver citizens*

*Of the great river that end up on the pavement  
In the fish market flapping and gasping for air*

*In shallow tins, till bought and gutted  
Eels and cat fish, perch and other fish*

*Their eyes perched on the end of their nose.  
Like spectacles. A man has his hair cut in the shade*

*And then a shave, his cheeks lathered up  
The cut-throat lying on the pavement.*

*A girl walks along in a world of her own  
Towing behind her a length of thin black cassette tape*

*On the end of which is a stone  
Like a small dog which is taken for a walk*

*Dragged through rubbish, brought to heel.  
Priests lie asleep outside*

*Their makeshift shrines, saddhus begging  
Exhausted after Durga Puja their devoted followers,*

*No longer dropping coins in the tins.  
Large mature trees cast their welcome shade without*

*Casting aspersions. A radio blares out in English  
An old pop song "There is nothing I cannot do"*

*Lawyers take the stroll in the narrow park  
Fresh air from the law courts*

*As a pair of Pallas's fish eagles circle very slowly.  
There is a breeze, Rickshaws pass*

*And the strong, long, wide, muddy swirling waters  
Of the great brown river merge with the sky*

*On the other side, the hazy shore  
Swallowed up by jungle, tea plantations and paddy fields.*

## **Falling Out of Yourself**

**John Crook**

*A talk given during retreat at the Maenllwyd. Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> 1998 transcribed from the original tape by Rob Alexander. Edited and abbreviated by the author.*

It's probably true to say that the root of our troubles is the manner in which we think of ourselves.

After all, if it is true that we spend ninety percent of our thinking time wondering about ourselves, it's not really surprising we create a problem for ourselves. It follows that it's not at all surprising to find that the first major theme to which a Buddhist must address herself is the problem -Who am I? What am I? Where am I?

In the usual way of things we make an assumption. Because we have names Tom, Dick, and Harry, Betty, Esmeralda, Jane, we believe that a name refers to something, to a thing, an object; a self. We spend our time living as people who possess a self; who have a self. This is so very clear in ordinary language; I talk about "myself". I ask you "How do you feel", "Who do you think she is?" Or, even better, "Who does she think she is?" Possibly sometimes "Who do I think I am?"

There's a very good reason for this. It's what you might call 'common sense'. The only problem is that common sense is not always quite reliable. It is common sense to look around the room and see our selves sitting here, Fiona, Simon, Hilary, Malcolm. We're all here are we not? Aren't we? But are we?

Well, of course, yes we are, yes. But what is it that is here?

I think I'm here, and I think you're here. At least, I hope you are, otherwise there wouldn't be much point in my talking to you, would there?

So, here we are. And yet, because we also know that we come into the world, and die, we only have a very short time, seventy years or so, to be here. Three score years and ten? Almost nothing on a cosmic or planetary scale. There was life on earth long before we ever came here. Think of the dinosaurs galumphing around, snorting and bellowing - but not doing much thinking, I suspect. Our extraordinary intelligence and language allows us to worry. "What are we here for?" "What ARE we here for?" "Did somebody put us here?"

Who was that?

These are not new questions. The Buddha addressed himself to them long ago, but they keep on turning up. There is something quite natural, indeed inevitable, about these questions. They have a long history. We cannot suppose a bit of study of Buddhist philosophy is going to solve these questions quickly.

It's natural to us to think that "John is here". How could I communicate with you if I didn't think I was here? There's a profound paradox in all this. Common-sensically, when John goes and buys an egg in the shop, it would be ridiculous if John didn't know he was John. Who would then be asking for the eggs?

So there's this common-sensical awareness of being John, Malcolm, Hugh. Such common-sensical awareness cannot be thrown away, clever-dick wise, by a bit of philosophy. We live inside this common sense most of the time. Yet, when we begin to look into this, and say "Well, it really troubles me: you know, seventy years isn't much, the quality of my life isn't all that good" we come up against the assumption we are making, - assuming a mind, assuming a self. Have I got it right? Is it as simple as it seems? Now -that's where the Buddha started from.

I want to remind you this morning that one of the very first ideas of the Buddha was the Anatta doctrine. Anatta is a Pali word meaning "no self", and the simple way of putting it is to argue "We got it wrong. We do not have selves".

Superficial understanding of anatta generates all sorts of mistakes, particularly amongst those who say "Ah, Buddhism is therefore Nihilism, it's all about nothing, there's nothing there, it's Nihilism." Actually although the Buddha said "No self", he didn't say there's nothing there. It becomes very interesting to investigate exactly what is there. What did the Buddha mean by "There is no self?". How did he discover it anyway, when it's common-sense to think that there is one? After all, --here's John, --there's Hilary.

We know rather well what the Buddha did. The Buddha was on a quest, like the rest of us. This young man had had a somewhat problematical childhood. His Mum died when he was very young. His Dad wanted him to become a king but he did not want to be a king. All very painful. Not very nice to be destined to be a king, which after all is rather a posh position, and actually not want to be one at all. Young Siddhartha became very concerned with suffering, his own and that of others. He fixed his mind on the question, Why suffering? He was completely focussed on finding out how to solve that problem.

As we know, he went off on a quest. He frequented all the teachers of his time, wandered about, teacher after teacher after teacher. And some of the main teachers of his time were the Brahmin forest wanderers who talked about Brahman.

What was Brahman? Brahman is similar to the idea of God. It is God and it's everywhere, the entire universe. Everything was Brahman; Brahman produced everything, everything returned to Brahman. So, they said, if you meditate well, if you do great Yoga, you'll find that your self, your 'Atman', this breathing being, will disappear into Brahman. And that is bliss.

Siddhartha said "Oh that's great, let's try it out". So he sat and he contemplated and he sat and he contemplated and he did his Yoga and he was doubtless a very great Yogi indeed. We know he nearly killed himself doing his ascetic practices. Yet, after a while, he said to himself "Well, I seem to have done everything, but no Brahman, no bliss. Or rather, this doesn't seem to lead to anything transcendent or permanent. So maybe I'd better look more closely into what I'm doing with my mind. When I sit down in meditation, what is going on?"

So instead of going into a deep trance he began to sit easy and just watch what was going on in the mind. Every time he had gone into the deep trance states he had seen that "Pop!" he came out again. So where was Brahman, where was the permanent bliss? He watched what his mind was doing very, very closely, and he saw that one thing lead to another. If you do a certain kind of yoga, it produces a feeling of blissful wellness. Then if you wait a bit, it fades, you're back to where you started from. If you do another kind of yoga, it produces silence. If you do another kind of activity, it produces joy. If you think too much about yourself, you get miserable. In this way he mapped his whole world of experiences.

"When I look at my mind," said the Buddha, "what I find is an endless pattern of change. Some of it is blissful, some of it is miserable. Continuous, changing patterns, flowing and flowing and flowing."

He also noted that nearly all of this flowing movement took the form of thought. Thought and feeling. The mind he was looking at was a thinking, feeling, concept-making, experiencing mind; the normal mind which we have, but now being closely examined within meditation.

He realised that instead of there being a something, a thing, a self, what was actually there was a stream of consciousness, a continuous flow. Furthermore, when he began to think about himself, it was as if that flowing stream in all its freedom suddenly congealed into a lump called Siddhartha'. Identifying himself as a thing-like self he became a kind of lump on his cushion, he had lost the free movement. There he was, worrying about being Siddhartha.

This endless flow of experiencing began to intrigue him, and he made it the chief focus of his meditation. This was a new method of meditation, Vipassana. It is a method of inspecting the movement of the mind, so that you really recognise what's happening there. And when you do that you do not find a 'thing' called Tom, Dick, Harry, John, Malcolm, whoever, Theo, Jenny - you don't find it. All those words are just names.

What you actually find is this flowing continuity of experiencing which has many, many implications. It suggests that when you grab hold of experience and give it a name and make it solid, then all the problems begin to appear. Yet, when you get down to it in direct awareness this 'thing' dissolves into a continuous flow, just like a river. The name is just a concept, a mental construction, a sort of short hand way of speaking of a process of great depth and mystery. Thinking it to be a simple entity, me, is clearly a great mistake.

This principle is known in Sanskrit as the principle of interdependent origination or co-dependent arising, the process of continuous mental flux. These are big words, but the idea is quite simple. I first learnt about this experientially while walking in the mountains in India with a very fine thinker, Shri Tashi Rabgyas from Ladakh. As a boy, Tashi had walked from Ladakh to Lhasa to hear the teachings of the Dalai Lama. This would have been about 1950, and it took him three months to get there.

We talked a lot about Krishnamurti's idea of 'bare awareness'. Tashi said "You know this bare awareness, it's just the same as co-dependent arising". I said, "What, Tashi? What do you mean?" So he said, "Well, when you are just aware, bare aware, without bothering about your name or who you are or what you want, just being present, and allowing things to come through, that is observing the flowing presence of your existence."

And so we practiced this, just walking in the mountains. It was quite wonderful, to be walking in the hills without bothering about being me, just one foot after the other, one cloud after another, one stream after another, one camping place after another, flowing along.

When one thinks about life, that is actually how it is. One day follows another, an hour follows another, breakfast comes before lunch, dinner comes in the evening, we come on retreats, we leave retreats. It's a continuous flow of happenings and events. When you look more microscopically at what the mind is doing, it's similarly flowing from thought to thought and worry to worry; an endless, continuous flowing-ness.

What the Buddha had realised was that when you obstruct that flow by making yourself into a concrete thing, all suffering will appear. If, by contrast, you let go of yourself, if you let go of attachment to these thoughts and feelings, and just fall into the flow, then you find joy and peace. You have to fall out of yourself to find freedom from yourself.

Buddha said "Don't believe me, in fact you may disbelieve me, but I put it to you, this is what I've found. If you try and find it out for yourself, you can see whether I'm right or not."

The Buddha was not a dogmatist, He made suggestions based on his own experience.



When we think about ourselves, what do we think about? Well, it seems to me that there are two main things. First of all, we think about our bodies. We get terribly disturbed if we run a splinter into a finger. It's very painful, for one thing, maybe it's going to go septic and if it goes septic maybe I'm going to be ill and it's even possible I might die from it.



I'm reaching an age now when quite a lot of my friends now have gone and died, finished, caput. Once every few months, I read about some old friend who's dropped dead from cancer, or whatever it might be. "What about me, am I next?" Well, maybe I am next. But then I count up my ancient relatives, all of them were over eighty and some of them were over ninety by the time they died, "Oh, good, I've got a long time yet!" Forgetting, of course, the bus with my name on it, which is going to run me over tomorrow. Shaky business, life, very uncertain.

We, who live in peacetime, don't often have to think about immediate mortality. But I'm old enough to remember the war as a child. So I can remember things like the bombing and so on, but for a child that was a bit of fun.

A good friend of mine, Robert Hinde, the recent Master of St John's College, Cambridge, is a little older than me and served in the war. He navigated Sunderland flying boats flying out from Oban, in Scotland, looking for submarines. In those days, radio contact was extremely poor, no useful radar. They just took off and flew out a

few hundred feet above the sea over the Atlantic. Coming home they had to stay below cloud cover otherwise they would have no idea where they were. Very dangerous. Of course there were many deaths.

These lumbering flying boats would come back after a six hundred mile tour out into the Atlantic trying to stop U-boats surrounding convoys. When the cloud was down you fly round and round, use up all your fuel, then you try to land. And commonly hit a mountain. That's the end. To such servicemen, mortality was an immediate possibility every time they went on a mission. They simply had to put that thought aside. We have it easy today - most of the time.

Yet mortality is right there in front of us all the time. The real worry arises from the attachment to being this person who wants to survive. The Buddha was interested in what happens if you drop that attachment.

The Buddha says, "Okay, see if you can drop the attachment to the body, the attachment to being a certain sort of person with particular kind of name and a reputation". What happens? Just try it. What happens if you drop it, just let it fall out of your mind? Where do you find yourself? That turns out to be the key question. If you do the experiment, and just let go of all that stuff, where are you?

This is something that can be found out only individually, personally. We can call it "the flow of experience", we can give it a big Sanskrit name; all right, that's fine, that's all literary stuff. But in actual experience, where do you find yourself, if you drop preoccupation with the things to do with the body and identity? Where are you then?

Look at it this way .....

What happens when the breathing goes out and you look into the space into which the breathing has gone? You find a sort of silence. It's not a big silence, it's just a sort of clarity with no concepts in it.

Hmmm.

You breathe in again... and maybe after a few minutes you start thinking again, -- because, as we said, thinking is natural. Even so you've learned something. Until that moment you never thought that such a thing as real silence existed

Just take a deep breath and then.... watching it go... what happens? It's like diving off a high board. Where's the water? If you have come to an end with the ending of breath where have you gone?

Look and see.

The great Master Xu Yun used to talk a lot about questions such as "Who Am I?" He would say, one way of working with this is to repeat the question; "Who am I? Who am I?"

'Who' is just a sound, if I look at it without identifying with it, the 'who' is just a sound coming up, but where has that 'who' come from? Well it must have come from me, where else? Okay, that's common sense. But look again, where, actually, in experience, does the 'who' come from? Try and see. You have to repeat the 'who' every little while, so "Who Am I?". "Who?". If the 'who' comes from 'me' what is that 'me'?

You know that in a couple of minutes you're going to say 'who' again. Where the hell does it come from? So - look into what's there just before it comes up. "Who am I?".

"Who". It's coming, it's not here yet, it's coming though, but where's it coming from?  
"Who". It came from somewhere, and where's it gone? Where is the mind when it's looking at the space out of which a word comes?

Before it comes, where is it coming from? And when it's gone, where has it gone to?

"What is the experience before the 'who' arises?" If you can see it, note the implication. If you can see the space out of which this simple word 'who' has come, you've also put your finger on the space that is always lying behind language. Here is that aspect of the self, the no-mind, out of which mind comes.

The Buddha recommends we find that space. It's not the whole story, but it is the beginning of the realization that mind is, as it were, floating in a silence. This silence is not the silence of the grave but the bare awareness of the continuous flowing of yourself and necessarily of the universe.

Is that Brahman? The Buddha would not assert such a thing because that would create an entity, an object of thought, a solidity and a source of attachment where there is no object of thought.

All he would say is "There is the unborn." Yes, indeed, there is the unborn. A beautiful word for that which is later born; the mind is born from the unborn. The unborn is the basis, and a familiarity with the unborn is a doorway to what's called enlightenment.

## 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.*

### What's This?

Since attending the WZR at Pinebush (2004) I have been listening to tapes of John's talks frequently while driving.

Earlier today, driving along and listening, John's question: "Are you that question?" in one of his talk segments about "Tell me who you are." triggered something which caused me to exclaim: "That's it!". It is difficult to explain the shift in my definition of "I" and certain physiological changes which resulted. Here's a try at it.

As my mind's vision/conception of what "I" is shifted to the entity asking the question, it was like a merging of the conventional "I" with an undefinable \*\*\*\*\* asking the question. I cannot come up with any words to describe \*\*\*\*\*. "Nothing" comes to mind, but not quite. For quite some time, there was only \*\*\*\*\* doing the driving and it was the only thing in my consciousness. Simultaneously, my body seemed to be merged with the \*\*\*\*\* , which proceeded to play with gestures, vocalizations, and gleeful observations of the surrounding, moving countryside as \*\*\*\*\*/body was driving along. Perspective was distorted as well, as distances appeared flattened, as if viewed on a movie screen.

The experience filled me with joy, a feeling of freedom and release from all anxiety. It has lasted from inception, about 3:00 PM, right through the practice session led by Guo Yuan Fa Shi at the Centre this evening. Another odd thing about my perception of time, is that when I first wrote the previous paragraph, I had written that it took place yesterday. However, by going back over the sequence of events I can pin down historically, I calculated that it must have been about 8 hours ago.

What can you tell me about this?

## Surrounded by Silence and Care

### Solitary Retreat at Maenllwyd, Sept. 6 – 13th 2005

On arrival, I felt overjoyed to be at the Maenllwyd and tears flowed on seeing the garden's bright flowers. The sign, "Free" on the outside toilet summed up my hopes and expectations for the week. Before unpacking the car I rang the mule bells, then went up to the Buddha room and lay down on the cook's bed in the alcove where I had planned to sleep as it is nice and dark there (and after all I was cook for the week!), and wept with joy! -- This was HOME! I felt very privileged to be there and was amazed at the beauty of the place, even though I know it so well. It was a warm, sunny evening. The silence was overwhelming and very extraordinary. I was far more aware of it than I usually am on group retreats. It enveloped the house in a protective cloak. Perhaps this was partly to do with the time of year: - a quieter stream and no lambs, though there were Red Kites about. On my first morning I couldn't stop smiling and sometimes broke out into spontaneous laughter! It was only when I began to sit in meditation before lunch that I began to relax the smile on my face. This was what I'd

come for and here I was, relaxing in front of the wall and allowing whatever needed to arise to come up and be dropped. It felt so 'right' and somehow 'perfect'. I no longer needed to express joy.

I followed a rough schedule loosely modelled on a Chan Retreat but made no advance plans or timetable. Each activity took place because I felt it was what I needed to do next. All formal meditation was done in the Buddha room. I timed my meditation sittings depending on how I was feeling at the time and almost always stuck to it, in that I didn't finish early, but I sometimes extended it. I used the timer from the Chan Hall because I like its silence and little green blinking light. The length of each meditation sitting was anything between 30 – 90 minutes, but usually they lasted 30 or 40 minutes. It turned out that I sat five or six times each day, totalling on average three and a half hours of sitting, which was less than I'd anticipated before I came, but I think it turned out to be about right for me. I felt that it was necessary to impose a time on my sittings as I am very easily distracted by changes in the weather, by farmers collecting sheep or whatever.

One of the first things I did on the morning of the first day was to copy out the words of Roshi John Garrie which I found in the library, and I kept these beside my sitting place for the first day as they were very helpful and encouraging (they had been on the Chan Hall notice board during the May retreat):-

*"Retreat is a much misunderstood and misused word. It is not an occasion for convalescence, or for transcendental or psychic adventure, nor for penance or, indeed a platform for performance. It is quite simply a time to let go of defence, offence, or pretence. A time of gentle watchfulness from the sanctuary of 'Where-you-are-coming-from'. The stillness at the Eye of the Storm; and of renewal of Ease and Trust in the humility of the moment. A time to bow to the Here and Now."*

Without planning it I ate meals at fairly regular times and had breakfast between 8 and 9; lunch sometime before 2 and supper around 7.30 (so that I could clear up before it got dark), - or as early as I liked if I was hungry.

I slept when tired for as long as I needed to; anything from 5 hours to eight and a half hours in the night, I only needed one day-time nap in the whole week.

I started each day with the usual Chan retreat exercises, in the yard when fine, and went for walks of roughly an hour on three days and on another day for two hours. On two rainy afternoons I did the Rajneesh Nataraj Meditation in the Chan Hall. I had two different musical versions with me and used them both, but I preferred the earlier 1970's tape to the more recent CD. I also did the Kundalini Meditation once. I expected to do a lot of walking up and down the yard but did that only once. I sometimes did Kin-hin between sittings.

I'd brought with me six Dharma talks on CD, which were all recent Throssel Hole ones which I hadn't listened to previously, and played four of them at different times when my energy for meditation was waning a bit or getting dull, which tended to be when the weather was dark and gloomy. These lifted my spirits considerably and were moving, - humorous, - and thoughtful. It was good to hear the voices of the monks, both male and female. I was in tears throughout one particularly honest account of lessons learnt on a solitary retreat, which very much spoke to my condition, entitled 'Coming to Terms with Imperfection'. I was very grateful for that.

Almost every day before breakfast I sang the Chan Morning Service using the tape from the Gaia House 2000 retreat with Master Sheng-yen. I found this to be beneficial in helping to dissolve self-centredness. I was aware as I did this that the very first time these words were sung in this country, it was in this very room. I recited parts of the Chan Evening Service only on my final evening; otherwise, most evenings I chanted Tibetan chants or recited different versions of the Heart Sutra or sang Throssel Hole's Vespers.

I made prostrations and bows from time to time for short periods especially when I needed to express joy or gratitude, or to repent some recent action I'd made on the retreat. (There were several such mistakes!) I lit candles and incense most days, and had to have candles for light after 7.45, which made a nice atmosphere. I didn't feel the need for lamps; neither did I light any fires as the air was warm enough, and I found it quite possible to have a couple of cold showers on the warmer days and to dry my hair in the sun. The sitting periods following these were always excellent!

I made about four trips to the library room to browse or look for particular books but did hardly any reading and didn't even unpack the books I'd brought from home. I got fascinated by certain books I hadn't seen before, but felt that I hadn't come here to read and so didn't read for long. I'm not a bookworm by nature!

I didn't use the hut at all, but did investigate its facilities, especially the gas stove and the supplies in there in case I decide to use it another time. It was always several degrees warmer than the house, but I thought food wouldn't keep so well in there, especially with the stove lit. Nothing went 'off' in the house except some broccoli after 4 days. Yoghurt and cheese were fine, and I kept the fresh milk cool in the stream under some flat stones for shade. I borrowed a small non-stick pan from the hut (which David had donated after his solitary retreat there in the spring) and used it to fry small quantities or make scrambled eggs.

I loved the flowery garden, and ate lunch out there on the warm cobbles in the sun on the only really sunny day. I did an hour's Direct Contemplation too that afternoon in which I was distracted not only by a caterpillar crawling over the very nasturtium I'd decided to contemplate, but by a field mouse who graced me with her presence for about half an hour. She climbed up to the tip of a poppy stalk which bent under her weight to the ground where she stretched, yogi-like, with little pink hands and feet over to the next stalk; - face, snout and whiskers in continual movement, searching for seed pods of a weed I had earlier thought I ought to have pulled up! She would work her way along each one with her teeth, shredding it open to eat the seeds before moving on to another. Direct Contemplation had to come to an end as I observed her, but I felt honoured to be in that place and time, sharing the sunshine and the flowers with so beautiful and delicate a creature.

I did between one and two hour's work each morning which included cleaning up after myself; the usual things. I also brought some oil from home to try to solve the squeaky upstairs toilet door and I think I solved that in the end but not before I'd also sanded the inside corner of it as it seemed to be a 'wood-on-wood' sound rather than the hinge. I fixed up a falling down bedroom curtain and scrubbed mould, dead flies and spider webs from the insides of various window frames, evicting quite a few spiders (who I'm sure will soon find their way back in again!). Also dusted spider webs from the white painted beams and walls where they show up, and cleaned mouse droppings from the parlour sink, where they had been eating the soap! I'd brought with me sketchbooks and pencils but never felt the urge to draw at all. I used my camera on the last two sunny days and used up over two films. I spent over an hour each evening writing a diary as my memory is not what it used to be!

What did I learn from the retreat?

The Maenllwyd is difficult to get to down its long, gated, rutted track through flocks of sheep. This symbolizes the meditative journey, which isn't easy. Living there it is necessary to be extra mindful especially where fire and personal accidents are concerned and all this aids the process of meditation. One takes great care of the body, and with the environment. One learns to do everything with slow, watchful deliberation, without hurry. Having to live like this sharpens the senses and this helps with awareness in meditation, too.

There are no demands on one to act in any particular way, yet the precepts are naturally kept as a normal part of life. What else is there to do!

There is freedom from the bounds of time whilst at the same time being aware of time's existence. My perception of time became more flexible and varied. Much of my life I am bound by 'rules' I impose upon myself, to do with time; probably because this is the way the world works! Yet here I ate when hungry and slept when tired, and was freed from time's imagined restrictions. This is to feel real freedom. And on leaving the Maenllwyd I felt I took this freedom with me, for a while... There was freedom of action too, and with no other egos to rub up against I felt I became truly myself and could laugh and sing and smile and weep, and lose self-consciousness completely.

An aim on this retreat was to see if I could silence the "voice in the head" (as Rev. Master Daishin Morgan calls it). There are two voices really, one being involuntary (tinnitus). The other loves to explain things to imaginary people or plan the future; anything but be in the present. I became clearly aware of this voice; noticed when it wasn't there on occasions; noticed when it returned, and did my best to see beyond it. The deep silence of nature surrounding Maenllwyd helped me to be more aware of the alternative to this constant noise and I felt very grateful for that.

I found it was good to try to achieve a balance between 'being' and 'doing'. "Ordinary Mind, Wanting Nothing" was a good state to be in, yet there were times when I woke up in the morning and felt it necessary to write down a list of activities I wanted to get done that day or I could see I would get to the end of the retreat not having achieved even the simplest of aims such as having a shower. I didn't want to spend the entire week drifting aimlessly. Too much sitting meditation is not necessarily a good thing. Yet there were times when it was best to do without choosing whatever the next thing was, - just whatever seemed good to do at that moment.

I was solitary and surrounded by silence, yet also by the hard work and care of many people, -- from the Western Chan Fellowship Sangha (and the wider Buddhist tradition going back centuries) to the mechanic who serviced my car enabling me to drive there, to the producers of the food I ate. Throughout my week I felt the presence of others, and though solitary was never lonely.

## **Cardiff is a Nice Place**

**Eddy Street**

*Evidently inspired by the Ten Koans of Layman John (NCF32) Eddy recalled this finely crafted koan. Enjoy. Tsan!! Eds*

At a time of great personal turmoil, Layman Street, who had not yet stepped onto the Path, had it suggested to him that he visit Lam Rim Buddhist Centre and speak with Geshe Damchos Yontan. Layman Street had only read about meeting with Buddhist teachers and he had the notion that when you consulted a master it was appropriate to ask a question, the answer to which would have great significance. In the time that led up to his visit Layman Street pondered all the questions that he might ask but it did not fully form itself until he was travelling to Raglan.

During their conversation Layman Street told Geshe-la all about his situation to which Geshe-la responded with compassion and heart felt advice, then the moment came when Layman Street felt he could ask his great question of the lama from Tibet.

“Geshe-la, what does Everest feel like?”

The Geshe looked very kindly at Layman Street and said “Where you from?”

Layman Street replied “Cardiff”.

“Ah Cardiff is a nice place.”



## **A WCF Centre for Buddhist Education**

### **Proposal for Discussion:**

**John Crook**

On further reflection concerning the possible futures of the WCF (See NCF 31) I have recently come up with the following ideas.

1. The WCF does very well in promoting the Dharma through the medium of intensive retreats. Many retreatants come again and again to one or other of our events. This is all to the good. However many retreats simply serve a remedial function for those stressed by the contemporary conditions of life, personal problems, or a feeling that previous events have been beneficial. There is no harm in this; indeed it is good news that our work is of value to many. However relatively few retreatants have adequate knowledge of even the basic Buddha dharma and most are confused regarding the finer points of Buddhist thought or its potential contribution to modern times beyond that of a personally therapeutic role.

2. In the last two years I have been reading intensively for a book on “World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism” which may be published by Motilal Banarsidass on completion. I have realised that Buddhism, far from being a religion in anything like the usual sense, is in fact very close to Western humanism but with a unique spiritual component.

I feel that the next WCF project needs to develop a distinctive educational focus developing such insights through the presentations of relevant teachers. The general direction of such teaching would be towards a Buddhist Humanism. In suggesting this term to some five potentially interested parties including Peter Reason, James Low and Jake Lynne, I found the idea appealed strongly to them.

3. In what would such a project comprise? Basically weekend workshops for about twelve persons focussed on the relationship between Buddhism and relevant modern ideas in philosophy, science and economics including the environment – that is to say the themes emerging in Western humanism from the 18th century European ‘Enlightenment’. I would be happy to teach the line of thought presented in my forthcoming book while teachers such as Peter Reason, James Low, Stephen Batchelor, Ken Jones and perhaps David Loy could be invited to supply comparable courses of whatever length. There is also the potential for a more careful consideration of our role in interfaith work – particularly Christianity, based on a more defined viewpoint.

The workshops would include meditation periods and socialisation. Longer courses could also be envisaged.

I would like to hear views on such a proposal, which may be formulated gradually as a WCF Teachers policy should there seem to be adequate support.

John Crook.

Chuan-deng Jing-di. Teacher to WCF

## **Notices**

### **Solitary Retreats**

*westernchanfellowship.org/solitary-retreats.html* describes several opportunities at Maenllwyd (using either the new hut or the main buildings) and at Winterhead Retreat House. Further information on Winterhead Retreat House and its facilities for solitary retreats are available here: *westernchanfellowship.org/winterhead.html*

### **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”.

### **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.

## Contacts

### for New Chan Forum and the Western Chan Fellowship

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**Subscriptions:** WCF Fellows receive NCF as a benefit of Fellowship. Others may subscribe at a price of £12.00 per three issues (we aim for two - three issues per year) by writing with payment enclosed (cheques payable to Western Chan Fellowship), stating the issue from which you want your subscription to start, to Stuart McLeod, 195 Gillingham Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 4EP.

**Back Issues**, (*except issue 15*), are available at £4 per issue from WCF Treasurer as above, otherwise please refer to the website [WesternChanFellowship.org](http://WesternChanFellowship.org) where most back issues are freely available online.

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### AFFILIATED GROUPS

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**Manchester** Simon Child 0161 761 1945

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**York** James McCarthy 01904 330977 or Jannie Mead 01904 628536

**Cardiff** Eddy Street 029 2069 1146

**Cambridge** David Brown 07766 686 345

**Lizard** Sophie Muir 01326 221651

**Medway Towns** Stuart McLeod 01634 571659

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## Retreats

### NOTICE: Retreat booking address has changed.

Please send all applications to:  
Stuart McLeod, 195 Gillingham Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 4EP

## Forthcoming Retreats

### A Dogen Retreat with Ken Jones at the Maenllwyd, 2-8 July 2006

Since this retreat will be outside the usual Maenllwyd repertoire – though very much in the Maenllwyd spirit – a few words of explanation may be helpful.

We shall focus on Dogen Zen, with a koan type of orientation (example below). The retreat will incorporate compassion and mindfulness practices, and we shall, of course, make the best of the midsummer weather. Talks and interviews, and Dogen's poetry, will offer an appreciation of the relevance to our lives of one of the greatest Zen masters.

Each participant will work successively on a selection of six phrases from the *Shobogenzo* in the course of the retreat. The purpose is *to elucidate the phrase and its relevance to your own life*. Here is an example.

WHEN YOU ARE IN A BOAT AS YOU LOOK AT THE SHORE YOU WILL HAVE THE ILLUSION THAT THE SHORE IS MOVING. If you look carefully at the boat, however, you will realise that it is the boat that is moving. Similarly, if you try to understand the nature of phenomena only through your own confused perception, you will mistakenly think that your own mind or self is permanent. But if you look within to the true self, the absence of a separate self will be clearly revealed.

The retreat is a development of one which proved very popular at Chester last year. It will be guest mastered by Hilary Richards. Please enrol early!

## Maenllwyd

Apr 8th - April 22nd	Two Week Retreat	
	Sat April 8th - Sat April 15th Silent Illumination	Simon Child.
	Sat April 15th - Sat April 22nd Koan Retreat	John Crook.
May 20th - 24th	Meditating with the Birds	John Crook
June 9th - 14th	Western Zen Retreat	Simon Child
July 2nd - July 8th	Dogen Retreat	Ken Jones
Aug 24th - Aug 29th	Introduction to Meditation	Hilary Richards
Sep 16th - Sep 23rd	Fellows Practice Week	
Oct 14th - Oct 19th	Western Zen Retreat	Simon Child
Nov 11th - 18th	Koan Retreat	John Crook
Dec 7th - 13th	Mahamudra Retreat	John Crook

## Hourne Farm, East Sussex

For more information and to book call Stuart McLeod on 01634 571659 or email [microberts@tinyworld.co.uk](mailto:microberts@tinyworld.co.uk)

May 5 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup>	Weekend Chan Retreat, with Simon Child
July 21 <sup>st</sup> – 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Weekend Chan Retreat, with Alec Lawless
November 24 <sup>th</sup> – 26 <sup>th</sup>	Haiku as a Spiritual Practice, with Ken Jones