



## NEW CHAN FORUM

BUDDHIST JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP

SUMMER 2010 NO.42 £4.00

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### ZEN QUESTS

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*John opens this issue with his annual address as Teacher to the Western Chan Fellowship. It has been revised from the spoken version at Stroud early this spring (2010). This year's address is particularly worthy of careful attention by all fellows because it sets out a carefully constructed review and interpretation of our retreat methods, their unique character and their derivation from Shifu's Chan, all the way from the first sit to an enlightenment experience. It explores our terminology in attempting to make clear some Chinese terms and ideas. This detailed account of method should be helpful for all Westerners attempting to find out where they are on the path. Note, this is a discussion of method – a key interest of Shifu. The Dharma that is the basis of all methods remains untouched in the age-old Chan tradition Shifu has handed on to us, eye-ball to eye-ball, through our Dharma heirs.*

*The articles and poems that follow all result from individual practices of method with their delight, paradox, problems and difficulties. These are expressed in a caring, reflective article from Fiona Nuttall, poems, haibun and retreat reports from all of which much about the Dharma within our charity in our time is expressed.*

*Finally, we remember with affection Dr Sally Mashedor who died recently from cancer after contributing so much to the NBO and the Bristol Chan Group. And also Dr David Clark who enlivened several of our retreats some years ago. We thank our contributors for such a rich mix of insight, feeling and commitment.*

## MEANING, PURPOSE AND INSIGHT IN WESTERN CHAN: PRACTICE AFTER SHIFU

*Annual Teacher's Address, Stroud 2010*

*Chuan-deng Jing-di, John Crook*

*The Annual General Meeting of the Western Chan Fellowship (2010) coincided with the anniversary of the death of the Venerable Chan Master Sheng yen, our Shifu, guide and Dharma advisor for many years. Shifu transmitted his first Western Dharma heir, John Crook, in 1993 and Simon Child in 2000.*

*The WCF has thus had the unusual good fortune to receive instruction from two Dharma heirs of a great teacher. This annual Teacher's Address is thus in part an expression of our great gratitude to Shifu for his advice, retreat presence and Dharma instruction over the years and also an investigation of the way forward for Chan in the West now that the Master is no longer with us. This leads us into a timely examination of the ways in which expressions of traditional Chinese Chan may be presented to beginners in the West taking into account particular discussions and correspondence between Shifu and John over many years. We dedicate this lecture to the memory of our Shifu in profound gratitude and reverence. Editors.*

### SHIFU AND HIS DHARMA HEIRS: RELATIONS BETWEEN THE WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP & DHARMA DRUM MOUNTAIN

The death of the Venerable Chan Master Sheng yen (our Shifu) last year has been a traumatic event for all of us, especially those of us who had received personal teachings from him. A direct relationship with a great Master is rare and wonderful and the disciple comes to depend on feeling the Teacher will always be there 'on call' when problems arise. Needless to say, this illusion is inevitably trashed.

The departure of a great Master forces those Dharma Heirs he has left behind him to consider their own approach to teaching the Dharma. Throughout the history of Chan, as one generation passes to another, there have always been unavoidable shifts in emphasis dependent on the personal views, personalities and capacities of the inheritors. Indeed, it is remarkable how the fundamental teachings of the Buddha have survived given the powerful personalities of successive Zen masters. The reason for this lies in the fact that Zen does not depend on idiosyncratic teachings, personal approaches, or indeed any philosophical position subject to personal opinion but is rooted in a fundamental experiential understanding of life and world that is essentially universal throughout humanity (i.e. 'A special transmission outside the scriptures'). This spiritual basis can be found in all religions but the Zen perspective is particularly direct and free of over-interpreted fantasies. Insight into this universal experience has never ceased to be the key understanding and focus of great Zen masters.

The relation between Dharma Drum Mountain, Taiwan and New York, and the WCF is rooted in the involvement of Shifu in both of their creations. In the WCF, the question of how to integrate cultural contrasts between Chinese and European thought within Dharma teaching was present from the beginning. When Shifu affirmed my *inka* experiences, he asked me to lead retreats in Silent Illumination

at the Maenllwyd as it were as his ‘representative’. At that time, I asked him, “I am not Chinese. I am not a monastic. How can I best do this?” Shifu had replied, “I am Chinese. You are English. You find out”. He was always willing for me to present the Chan Dharma in an authentic, personal way – not as a mere imitation of what he had done or said. We had much discussion along these lines throughout our relationship.

The first focus for discussion was the structure of the ‘Western Zen Retreat’ a basic retreat that I had compiled from Western sources before I began training with Shifu.<sup>1</sup> Shifu took a great interest in this from the very first time we had met. He believed it was a valuable Western approach, which only required the addition of Lay Precepts and an emphasis on the importance of compassion to make it ‘truly’ Zen. When Shifu eventually encouraged me to take this improved retreat form to Dharma Drum Retreat Centre, Pine Bush, New York, he showed his trust in what I was about. Subsequently, with rather greater interaction, he queried and finally supported the development of our new method of presenting Koans on retreat.

These discussions drew attention to certain contrasts between social aspects of the Western and Chinese minds that became clearer as we went along. It is on a basis of these contrasts that a certain shift in emphasis between the DDM approach and the WCF approach is inevitably developing. Even so, for reasons stated, our essential insight into the Dharma remains one. Only the methods are varying as we seek to convey the Dharma most appropriately to peoples of differing culture; our lineage loyalty is not affected.

My discussions with Shifu turned out to coincide with the development of a more broadly based academic interest in contrasts between Western and Chinese psychology and they had therefore the timeliness of a wider relevance we had not fully recognised. Recent research from the empirical literature shows that there are significant differences between Eastern and Western measures of several aspects of ‘self’; self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-enhancement. Furthermore, research shows that these differences are less when measured between Chinese acculturated in the West and their hosts suggesting a social causation for the contrasts.<sup>2</sup> In addition, measures relating to concepts of ‘happiness’ differ between Western minds focussed on personal independence and the interdependent social focus of the Chinese.<sup>3</sup> Several psychological studies point to an historical shift towards Western mental structures among Chinese in recent years, reasonably attributable to the growth of consumer capitalism and Western business attitudes in China. The emergence of a complex personality type that is partially Western with respect to certain contexts such as business and Chinese with respect to general social life has been noted for example in Hong Kong. Conversely, we find the increasing importation of psychotherapeutic methods derived from Chinese Buddhism and Taoism in Western mental health care and an increasing focus in the West on the need for cultural change towards a more collective and less individualistic stance, such as that found in Chinese psychology, in political attitudes towards the developing Climate crisis.<sup>4</sup> There is thus currently a demonstrable tendency towards convergence between Chinese and Western approaches to psychological issues. The discussion on retreat practice that follows has a relevance to these concerns.

## SELF-EXPRESSION IN CHINA AND THE WEST

Chinese and Western people differ subtly in many sociological and psychological features underlying their attitudes to life.<sup>5</sup> The major one in question here concerns the understanding of the self. Research has shown comprehensively that, compared with Chinese, Korean and Japanese peoples, Westerners – that is Europeans and Americans, especially the latter – are quite remarkable in their often-excessive focus on self-importance. At almost every level and in almost every interaction the Western person is concerned consciously or unconsciously with how his or her self-image will be affected by any behaviour – either one's own action or how to respond to other's actions. This concern begins in the family, develops through education and is manifest in the highly dualist and competitive relations between fellow businessmen, academics, politicians or any professional person. By contrast, the Easterners show an equally clear yet contrasting focus based in a self-process that emphasises mutuality, sharing, and development of common aims, cooperative and team-based activities rather than ego competitiveness. This contrast has a wide range of consequences socially and politically.

Within Chan, it affects the attitude towards the purpose and function of group and individual activities. Young westerners often seem to be competing as to who will become enlightened first and develop quite fierce competitiveness as to whose is the best master or method. Commonly a Zen beginner arrives with an intense desire to 'achieve' enlightenment, which is perceived very much as a successful consequence of diligent training with undoubted benefits as a credential – at least in one's own mind. This attitude was greatly enhanced by the rather one-sided introduction of Zen to the West by the *Rinzai* focussed teacher, Daisetz Suzuki, with its emphasis on getting enlightened.

Shifu expressed this contrast to me once as follows. He said that when he suggested a method to a Chinese retreatant the person would say "Yes Shifu", go off, and do it uncomplainingly perhaps for years. A Westerner in the same situation was likely to ask "Why?" and privately consider whether Sufism might not suit him better.

The interdependent Eastern social relations rooted in generating mutuality have, none the less, a defect. Lacking in individualistic concerns the process can lead to groups of cohering persons worshipping over-authoritative teachers who are rarely subjected to criticism, and to sectarian stances that are not adequately debated, evaluated or criticised; for example the militarism of the Japan's *Rinzai* orders in the 1930's and 40's, yet its absence in the *Soto* sect.<sup>6</sup>

As I began teaching Zen, it became clear that one of the chief karmic blocks a Western beginner had to encounter in practice was his or her own ego-concern. This wells up in endless hassling thought circling around personal problems pivoting on fears from self-criticism in personal, usually relationship problems. By contrast, as we began working with Chinese people, it also became clear that many traditionally educated Chinese practitioners could not relate easily to the question 'Who am I?' For them, a really powerful question would concern relations within the family or the firm. For example 'What is freedom?' or similar. These contrasts suggested that for each culture slight differences in the presentation of *Hua-tou* and *Koan* retreats would be helpful. This is what lies at the root of many of our innovations.

## DHARMA CLARITY IN THE WEST

Careful reading of English translations of Chinese instructions concerning method and focus in both individual meditation and on retreats suggests that the subtleties of Chinese language are often not being well conveyed to Western readers and that Western mental subtleties are rarely a focus of Chinese interest. For example the Chinese word *Hsin* has a variety of subtly related meanings. Some translators give the word ‘mind’ as its meaning, others ‘heart’, yet others try to present yet further subtleties. At root, *Hsin* refers to both of what we speak of in English as mind and also heart. To use one of these terms rather than the other shifts a Westerner into either thinking in terms of the intellect and hence philosophical explanations, or into emotional reference that ends up in some poetic or psychological view. The Chinese reader will be interpreting the word in a much more inclusive manner. Similarly, the word ‘happiness’ produces similar problems.<sup>7</sup>

This and related puzzles lead to particular problems when texts try to discuss experiences that are essentially beyond objective understanding, because they lie beyond access by discriminatory thought. (i.e. ‘A special transmission outside the scriptures, no dependence on words or letters’) Instead of gaining some psychological insight, a beginner may only find wordy obscurity. The problem here resembles a question such as ‘What is the taste of water?’ A reply might be ‘No-taste’, which is of little encouragement to some investigator of water.

Such problems become quite acute when experiences arising in meditation are in question. Since experiences of an ineffable kind lie at the root of Zen, the manner in which they are described, explained or discussed become crucial to teaching. Most such translation seems ineffective. Indeed many translations purporting to explain the significance of Buddhist wisdom use words such as ‘awakening’, ‘enlightenment’, ‘emptiness’, ‘Buddha-nature’ or other subtle metaphors, which do not allow a beginner a practical rather than a plausible intellectual insight on why he should follow training.

## THE OBSCURITY OF MU

A good example of a case where such difficulties arise for Westerners, especially beginners, is to be found in considering the *koan* ‘*Mu*’. We will recall that when the Master Zhaozhou was asked “Does a dog have Buddha nature?” he replied “*WU!*” – a Chinese word simply meaning “*NO!*”. (Japanese *Mu*). This is an odd response when Buddhists believe in the universal presence of Buddha nature. Yet, this is one of the most popular *koans* in China and Japan, stories given to monks in training to reveal the basis of enlightenment. What did Master Zhaozhou mean?

Some Chinese authorities argue that *Mu* is the best of all *koans* precisely because it is meaningless. Yet, then what is it that is NOT? If *Mu* implies an ‘emptiness’ that is NOT anything, what is the meaning of such ‘emptiness’? The beginner is told that the solution is only to be found by breaking out of doubting enquiry in an enlightenment experience (Jap: *kensho*, Chin: *kai wu*). But if *Mu* is meaningless may that not mean *kensho* is also meaningless? *Kensho* is inexplicable in words – so what use is it? In what sense is the term ‘meaning’ being used here? What does *MU* actually refer to?



The ego-centred Western beginner always needs a 'use' or a function. He or she requires an understanding of what the usage of meditation is. Shifu's viewpoint is that the advantage of the meaningless *Mu* is that it prevents a practitioner wasting time with worrying about self. It gets straight to the point of forcing one to break out of reasoning discriminatively about an answer. The Western beginner may find this 'meaningless' response merely confusing and off-putting. Shifu's proposed list of alternatives would then be far more attractive.<sup>8</sup>

Western beginners commonly belong to a post-Freudian, post-Darwinian and post-Einsteinian intellectual culture that always rejects questions that are not meaningful in some practical sense. Many do indeed find *Mu* problematic, are not encouraged to proceed or get stuck in some fantasy about it which, without good teaching, may last for years. Given the self-focussed concern of the average Western mind, a meaningless question is given little patience. A *koan* that is so resolutely empty seems even to destroy its own paradox and it is an intriguing paradox that keeps the Western mind involved.

The traditional Chinese approach to *Mu* is based in the view that rather than wasting time with dogs and their attributes, the practitioner needs to experience that very real felt 'emptiness' that comes when thought and attachment are dropped. But a Westerner, even when falling into some such preliminary experience, may fail to appreciate it; rather asking what is the point of something so beyond any thought-through 'usable', 'practical' or personal meaning. The Westerner, prior to undertaking any Buddhist yogic mind enquiry, usually needs to have a view as to why this understanding is actually of deep significance. This calls for a basic 'faith' in the method and needs some preliminary work. There is then a strong case for arguing that the Western mind needs to sort itself and its conundrums out to a considerable degree before it can generate the doubt appropriate to *koan* enquiry. The 'Who am I?' question is therefore a good one for a beginner in this culture.

#### NEW RETREATS USING KOANS

In traditional Chan, *koans* have been used in retreats in many different ways; as a series to be answered one by one, as a single paradox for long term study, as an expression of a life time's difficulty or as a basis for sermons. Recently *koans* in their full form, as opposed to the short excerpts (*hua-tou*) often used on retreats, had been somewhat neglected in Chan. I felt *koans* expressed wonderful paradoxes and that these puzzling stories often suggested guidelines both in resolving personal problems and in elucidating Dharma.

In our freshly designed *Koan* Retreat, I present retreatants with sets of *koans* that they examine on the first day. They are asked to choose one of them on which to work. This idea came from Shifu's discussion with me of the 'Life Koan' as the prime karmic confusion in a person's life. Every person, Shifu would argue, has a key set of issues that as a *Life Koan* creates problems for him/her throughout life. To me, it seemed that a practitioner's choice of a *koan* would therefore be based in a feeling for its personal relevance and that the choice could be none other than an indication of some connection with a *Life Koan*. It would not be essential for the person to have any understanding of this; a feeling of intrigue at

the wording would be enough. The most intriguing *koan* should be therefore the one selected for investigation. Furthermore it seemed that for a Westerner to dive immediately into traditional *koan* observation might not be as helpful as a thorough, typically Western, initial search for some rational, ego based explanation. Given the nature of paradox no such ‘answer’ would be found and the practitioner would then resort to more meditative examination in the Eastern style.

The manner in which this approach has worked out on retreat<sup>9</sup> has provided good evidence for the accuracy of this viewpoint and has led to people making much progress in both self-understanding and in personal insight within the Dharma. The WZR, the *Koan* and *Hua-tou* retreats that we present have therefore come to focus on self-confrontation in ways that traditional Zen retreats consider much less clearly but of which Bodhidharma would probably have approved! (*See below*) These innovations have led us to further understandings in seeking to express the processes of change during retreat.

#### CLARITY AND INSIGHT

Master Hsu yun has said that the practice of *zazen*, either as Silent illumination or in a *koan* or *hua-tou* investigation, is to illuminate the mind so that we can see our ‘true nature’. This ‘true nature’ or ‘Buddha nature’ is Emptiness experienced – not a void without objects, nor lacking anything, but rather the basis of sentient being – ‘emptied’ of words. Experiencing and eventually understanding this and applying such understanding in life is the purpose of the Dharma.

In practising Silent illumination, Shifu always stressed the calming of the mind to reach a one-pointed awareness of the totality of a body’s experiencing (Total Body Awareness). Once achieved, this awareness may be widened to admit sensory impressions. Once this is stabilised, changes in experience may appear spontaneously. These may include a loss of a sense of time, a widened awareness of space and later possibly bliss, gratitude, and a disinterested love of being itself. These shifts in feeling lead into a quiet tranquillity. The Japanese call these experiences *makyo*, illusions, since untrained persons may mistakenly think they are enlightened. I call this condition ‘Self at Ease’. The feeling of being a normal self remains present during these shifts in awareness. It is clearly ‘me’ that is having them.

The *hua-tou* method may be either intense or relatively relaxed.<sup>10</sup> The concentration takes the form of an obsessive enquiry, known as the ‘great doubt’, into such brief paradoxes as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” or ‘What is next?’ At some point, during either Silent Illumination or *hua-tou* work, some stimulus, usually quite small and either of an inner or outer nature, may trigger a sudden change. This change comes *from its own side* without any self-involvement, wishing or desire and the continuing presence of ‘me’ is disrupted. It is as if at the centre of awareness there is a mirror where the ‘I’ had been and in which all impressions are reflected without any comment from the mirror itself. Shifu calls this experience ‘self forgotten’. While the intensity of the experience may be suppressing the normal awareness of self, it remains possible that the egoic component of self changes in form to a bright witnessing with a mirror-like quality lacking self-reference. This experience of ‘insight’ (*prajna*) beyond ego is essentially



ineffable – one can try to express it but it is essentially beyond the reach of language. Although this is an experience of ‘emptiness’ – an emptiness of access to word, thought, idea – yet the immediate environment is extra-vividly present in a unique way, extraordinarily brilliant, clear and vivid. One is uninterruptedly ‘present in the presence of the present’.

What then has this ‘insight’ seen? It has seen the triviality of the wordy, discriminating mind of anxiety, its utter lack of solid basis and its impermanence and, by contrast, it has perceived a state that seems basic and fundamental, a mental truth. This is however not yet what is called *kai-wu* in Chinese or *kensho* in Japan, the ‘enlightenment experience’, although it is indeed the underlying essence of that experience. Although the egoic self has been ‘forgotten’ during the experience, self is still present as a witness and the experience is still reported as ‘I felt’.

Although the translated words of these accounts appear clear enough within their theoretical presentation, there may remain uncertainty as to what ‘doubt’, ‘illumination’, ‘true nature’ and ‘Buddha nature’ actually mean in the personal life and practice of beginners. What should one do? While the Chinese terms may work well for them, we need to explore their meaning for us in the West. Let us investigate further.

Having a look at the way the Buddha and other thinkers of his time understood the structure of the mind assists us here. The mental attributes or *skandhas* provide us with a basic model of how the mind functions in everyday activity. The mental processes involved are sensation, perception (knowing what the sensation is), cognitions and will, (comprehension of the perceived experience in relation to one’s life-narrative and acting on it), and conscious awareness, which underlies the others. One’s personal history is formed through the action of sensation, perception and cognition: they create the conditioned life story that we know and entitle through our names – John, Betty. When we think, we probe the storehouse of memories based in these three attributes and seek resolutions to problems. We construct ideas, viewpoints, illusions, intellectual insights and actions that lead either to anxiety or potentially to a homeostatic sense of ease. All of them are necessarily based in the presence of awareness.

The hassling mind of everyday is the continual judging or evaluation of these mental events as they go along moment to moment. The key result is the sense of being an anxious ‘me’. ‘I’ am inferred to be an objective presence, a ‘thing’ with all these mental events as its attributes. Yet, as the Buddha told us, all of this is subjective and all impermanent. We cannot rely on any of it. We have developed attachments to what we like and aversion to what we don’t like. The interplay of these in a world of impermanence constitutes human suffering. As far as we know, no other sentient beings, except possibly the Great Apes, even remotely suffer in the way our ego-hood forces upon us. To a huge extent, the ego is our problem.

The Buddha set out to solve it and the Dharma has been the result. In the texts of the ancient Abhidharma the fundamental analysis is expressed both philosophically and as a basis for practice. The central theme in Zen is the setting aside of ego-related suffering and acquiring the Mahayana practice of

compassion that follows from that. The practice operates in two ways; stabilising, calming and letting go of anxiety, and, secondly, gaining insight into the fundamental nature of mind – its ‘true-nature’ (see *Tables 1 and 2*).

Most Buddhist meditation methods apply the two processes of calming the mind and gaining insight into its nature – although in slightly varying ways. Calming the mind is basic because the problems of karma need quietening. Once the mind is calmed, one may persist with silent investigation or jolt up that calmed mind with calculated questions – such as a *koan* or *hua-tous*. The process is gradual until suddenly insight occurs and the problem is resolved, as Hsu yun explained above. The sudden resolution comes from the entry of the second method acting from its own side, experientially.

Some individuals, whose karma is less obstructive than others, may experience that insight quite quickly, moving from Self-at-Ease to Clarity or suddenly falling into Clarity from a one-pointed mind. Fundamentally, this *prajna* insight is the personal realisation that all thought, feelings, ideas, are merely mental processes empty of any objective being or significance except on their own dreamlike level. This ‘realisation’ is presumably the completion of what Shifu called ‘contemplating emptiness’, which involves cognitive experiencing beyond merely intellectual insight.<sup>11</sup> The personal realisation is experienced as a sudden plunge into an emptying of all ideas – and ultimately even the idea of self, entirely. Only that which is seen in the remaining bare awareness remains shining in an undistorted clarity. What has happened is that all the operations of mind cease – except for the maintenance of a mirroring awareness present as an extraordinary and unique clarity free of ego orientation. This ‘self-forgetting’ is distinct from a yet further experience of realisation where self is ‘absent’ entirely and only recognised as it begins to reappear – this is then ‘seeing the nature’, an ‘enlightenment experience’. In all this ‘no-self’ awareness there is a strong sense of ‘freedom’. Returning to daily life, such a mind knows it is free to ‘dream’ anew. The prison gates are open. The meditation process can be described in these practical terms and the valued result emerges through the bliss of the final perception and its consequences in life.

#### DEVELOPING WESTERN CHAN

Most practices of Zen meditation in the West begin with Calming the Mind (*samatha*). Indeed given the complex, agitated sense of self among Westerners and their basic insecurity, it would be hardly possible for those who are beginning training to attempt any direct insight into such a troubled mentality until agitation has subsided. Yet, perhaps to our surprise, the founder of Chan in China, Bodhidharma, in one of the earliest descriptions of practice, did not suggest beginning in this way.

Bodhidharma said there were two aspects to Zen, the Principle and the Practice.<sup>12</sup> The Principle is the enlightenment experience itself, and he probably implied also the preliminary experience of clarity in a timeless present. However, he argued that only people of sharp intelligence could achieve this insight without prior training in practice. Actually, I think that there is a translation problem here. I suspect Bodhidharma was not talking about the intelligence of the clever mind but rather the fact that most

people suffer from ignorance arising from problematic karma and that it is the karmic bias of the self that prevents insight. Certainly, those with severe karmic problems would need an initial practice. So what does he mean by practice?

It is not *samatha*. Rather, it is the use of self-criticism and self-knowledge in the context of examining karmic reactions. In the first of Bodhidharma's methods, the practitioner is asked to respond to the aggression of another through considering his/her own involvement in causing the other to be aggressive. In other words, he wants the investigative practitioner to respond to the antagonism of another with reflection on his/her own role in it. This is, of course, a form of self-confrontation. In effect, it is a 'Who am I?' question contextualised in a specific personal situation.

His second practice broadens the approach by requiring meditation on one's personal role in the everyday causes and effects of daily life – that is within context of the Law of Co-dependent Origination. This requires practitioners to investigate their karmic past and immediate relations with others. The third practice is to allow life to function within the Law without manifesting attraction or aversion to whatever happens. The fourth is the practice of a life in the Dharma through following the Bodhisattva path. Each practice requires self examination and confrontation with karma in a series of widening levels.

This is a fascinating finding because it implies that self-confrontation is the basic practice recommended in the earliest Chan. This is exactly what we are emphasising in our forms of retreat so why has *samatha* become emphasised so strongly? The answer is that *samatha* is one of the key Theravada techniques rooted in the ancient *Abhidharma* – entirely traditional and valid therefore but not what our founder in China chose to emphasise, a fact that many Western teachers seem largely to have ignored. This difference is perhaps a sign of the pragmatic rather than mystical inclinations of the Chinese when compared to India. As a sole practice, *samatha* leads to varying depths of inner silence and ultimately the sensation-less trance basic to much Indian mental yoga. The Chan practitioner is asked not to go this far because beyond a certain point 'insight' is not possible.

This does not mean that *samatha* is not of great value to Chan practitioners. Indeed, to quieten the mind is extremely important for Westerners and is commonly the first technique to use in attempting Silent Illumination. Never the less, in entering Chan a more self confrontational approach is clearly to be recommended as soon as possible. Presenting the WZR and our *koan* retreats in this way has therefore traditional support.

Whether the practitioner calms and simplifies his mental activity through *samatha* or by examining closely what his motivations may be, the outcome is an experience of increasing equanimity, peace and tranquillity. As we have seen (above), at a certain stage, the mind state begins to change. There is a timeless quality as, for example, when a thirty-minute sit seems to have lasted only two minutes. There may be a feeling of spaciousness as when one appears to have an awareness extending beyond the room, walls and building to the farthest horizon. Sometimes feelings of bliss may be physically experienced as

if rising up the back or spine. Sometimes a total blankness appears, a deep dark stillness with no sensation at all. These experiences arise due to the dropping away of mental measurement in space and time thus giving rise to a timeless and spatially unlimited feeling coinciding with a letting go of depressive ideas limiting bliss.

The above process is termed 'gradual' since it develops progressively and takes both time and focus. *Prajna*, 'insight', by contrast always arises suddenly, it is subitive, 'sudden'. While there is commonly some trigger, a word, a thought, a falling tile, a passing aircraft, the change of state is immediate shifting the mind into a completely different mode. This mode is beyond exact description because the thinking mind of thought and language does not operate here. No thought, therefore no measurement, therefore no time. Although the mind state provides an immutable background condition in the manner of a mirror mirroring, the movement of the trees in the wind continues therein as a continuing present moment. There is thus a sort of complete stillness and peace and total relief from all time-based worrying.

Many such occurrences of this 'Clarity' are exceedingly brief, seconds or minutes. In reporting them in interview, practitioners will characteristically say, 'I felt'. The self is still there although it has been temporally set aside, forgotten or changed into mere witnessing. I call these experiences 'Clarity' because they are clear of karmic responding and totally anchored in the mirrored present moment. Mental time stops as awareness simply flows along in the impermanence of the world with no thought of past or future. Worldly time goes on. The ego is not active but the self is present as an observer.

A more sustained period of Clarity is called the One Mind Experience (Shifu).<sup>13</sup> The mind is still, peaceful, quietly blissful, the environment appears pure and at peace. It is as if one is looking at an alternative reality.

While these experiences are of great value and encouraging, they are not 'Enlightenment Experiences' ('No-mind' – Shifu) deserving the Chinese name *kai-wu* or the Japanese names *kensho* or *satori*. *Kensho* is present when the same clarity erupts without any sense of the self-function being present at all. The egoless state is experienced as a startling and mysterious absence. As this fades, usually quite quickly, self-reference softly emerges again and the blissful innocence is lost in evaluations.

Experiences of 'enlightenment' (*kai-wu*, *kensho*) are rare although their asserted frequency seems to depend on a Teacher's understanding of what comprises such an experience. Shifu always stressed to me the need for caution since to claim 'enlightenment' of an insufficient experience may harm a practitioner through subsequent faulty self-assessment. In discussing several possible cases, which we had both considered following the relevant interviews, he usually let any doubt lead him to confirm an experience as no more than 'clarity' or 'one-mind'. The deep experience of self-absence rather than a mere self-forgetting is the key distinction here, and often difficult to determine. Furthermore, *kensho* experiences themselves vary in depth and may sometimes lead to direct experiences of the universe as 'Buddha mind' rather than merely 'seeing the nature' in 'no-mind'. Such an experience is likely to appear following deep

reflection on co-dependence in a ‘contemplation of emptiness’ (p 8) and several brief experiences of ‘no-mind’ enlightenments. This indeed seems to be the meaning of the Japanese term *satori*.

In assessing the nature of any such an experience, the Reverend Master Daishin Morgan of Throssel Hole Abbey once told me that he was less interested in his monks’ descriptions of experiences than in their consequences shown in changes in character. He felt sure an experience was a genuine *kensho* only when character changes appeared. If none appeared he let it go. Western teachers have to be aware that Western practitioners have developed an excessive concern with having these experiences as a result of the *Rinzai* teachings of Daisetz Suzuki early in the last century. Mistaken assumptions about personal ‘enlightenments’ can be a major cause of Zen mistakes.

Professor James Austin, the author of *Zen and the Brain* has attempted to construct a neurophysiological explanation of such Zen experiences based on an experience he had himself had on a London station on the way to a retreat with the Venerable nun Myokoni (Irmgard Schloegel). He writes:

“The new scene is fixed gently, not fixed on hold. The purely optical aspects of the scene are in no way different from the way they were a split second before...They are being viewed directly with all the cold, clinical detachment of a mirror as it witnesses a landscape bathed in moonlight... but there is no viewer. The scene is utterly empty, stripped of every last extension of an I-me-mine. Vanished in one second is the familiar sense that this person is viewing an ordinary city scene...not pausing to register the further paradox that no human subject is doing it...a vision of profound, implicit, perfect reality”<sup>14</sup>

It appears to have lasted in a clear intensity for less than a minute and led Austin to further insights entirely traditional in form – indeed resembling the exclamations of Master Huineng on attaining enlightenment during an interview with his teacher focussed on the Diamond Sutra. On hearing the quotation “Let the mind arise without attachment to anything!” – he exclaimed:

“Who would have thought that the essence of mind is intrinsically pure? Who would have thought that the essence of mind is intrinsically free from becoming or annihilation? Who would have thought that the essence of mind is intrinsically sufficient on its own and free from change? Who would have thought that all things are the manifestation of the essence of mind?” He concluded, “For someone who does not know the essence of mind there is no use in studying Buddhism. But knowing the essence of mind, he is Buddha – a teacher of Gods and men...”<sup>15</sup>

The Venerable Myokoni accepted Austin’s account as *kensho* saying “I am very happy for you.” Thus, the ‘essence of mind’ has been the same for at least a thousand years.

A Master once said that the visionary Clarity basic to all these experiences can take ‘one all the way’. Indeed the basic feeling of sudden Clarity is also the fundamental quality of the *kensho* experience too. This means that an experience of Clarity is a kind of preliminary glimpse of enlightenment potential but not yet ‘enlightenment’ itself (*kensho*) for that depends on ‘self-absence’ not merely ‘self-forgetting’. Shifu has also remarked to me that someone who has experienced *kensho* is likely to taste partial ‘shadows’ of it again in re-appearances of moments of simple clarity.

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 TABLE 1 SEQUENCE OF TRANSITIONS IN SILENT ILLUMINATION

 A. *Normal Egoic Consciousness (1–5)*

1. Everyday mind, hassling mind, wandering mind etc.
  2. *Zazen* sitting in posture. Mind calming. Body awareness.
  3. Total Body Awareness.
  4. *Makyo* experiences. Time and space changes silence, void, bliss, disinterested love.
  5. Self at Ease. One-pointedness. Vast present awareness. ‘Being present in the presence of the present’.
- 

 B. *Diminished Ego Consciousness (6–7) Prajna – ‘crossing to the other shore’*

6. Clarity. Mirror mind. Self-forgotten. One-mind state
7. *Kai-wu, Kensho*. Clarity with ego-self absent. No-mind state.

## Notes:

- Each meditation attempt may succeed for a while, then gets lost and return to wandering thoughts etc. It is then restarted. Progress is like a spiral. “Use the method, lose the method, retrieve the method” (Shifu). The *makyo* experiences may or may not occur in the sequence.
  - *Prajna* can in principle ‘strike’ anywhere but usually follows a one pointed mind episode however caused. The transition to diminished ego consciousness is not therefore ‘caused’ by the sequence 1–6 but may be facilitated by it.
  - *Kai-wu* by this route is sometimes difficult to distinguish from Clarity. It arises often from Clarity and may return to it. It is quieter than in *Hua-tou* investigation.
- 

At root, Clarity is a sustained sense of the presence of the present moment. It is not simply a sharp awareness of immediate momentary sensations but, rather, a sustained state of bare awareness in which the present happening reflects. As we have seen, it has a mirroring quality. The practitioner enters a transformed state, an unmoving, un-reacting, mirror of a bare awareness in which the world moves. It is well termed the ‘essence of mind’. This ‘world’ in the mirror has the simplicity of just being itself; one might say it is ‘allowed’ to be itself. No projection of personal bias, prejudice or theoretical understanding is imposed upon it. It has the simplicity of mere presence: bird song, rustling water, the wind in the trees, an owl call. In the complete clarity of *kensho* the additional absence of self is apparent as a strange feeling, no-one is there. Only the un-interpreted world remains. One may well say that after discovering one’s ‘true nature’ one perceives the universal ‘Buddha nature’.

Buddha nature then is the ‘world’ seen by the subject in one flowing relationship in the state called ‘true-nature’. The sensory mind participates directly in the world process but without dualistic identification as something apart. Intellectually, one knows that vision is a perception of objects reflected in light from the sun the energy of which is focussed by the eye and interpreted by the retina and optic brain. One



knows that the chemicals giving rise to smell touch the sensory nerves, which pass impulses to the brain for interpretation. The world that seems so glibly exterior and separate from 'me' in a dualistic relationship is actually deeply integrated with my being in a unitary pervasion. The experience of clarity and subsequently the 'enlightenment' of *kensho* is the experiential awareness of such oneness. What consciousness 'is' remains as mysterious as the cosmos itself.<sup>16</sup>

This then is the 'enlightenment' that provides the evidence for the monist perspective of Buddhist thought. Further more, one may argue that such a sensory world-awareness is potentially the same for all human beings once discriminatory thinking is set aside. And further, allowing for contrasts in brainpower, the seemingly always-bare awareness of higher animals may be similar. Looking at the sheep pondering one's presence in a field in Wales, one may be seeing a being in a similar state of clarity without an ego. This is one root for the Buddhist compassion of all sentient beings.

Westerners may like an evolutionary interpretation here. Clarity may well resemble the form of sentience experienced by big-brained animals such as birds and mammals; the ones that we intuitively identify with, or have as pets with 'whom' we talk. The uniquely human sense of an egoic self with its capacity to create a cognitively constructed and wordy reified identity (and thus karmic conditioning, attachments, liking, aversion, personal love and hate) plausibly developed out of such a more basic awareness of simple sentience and has varied in its social expression with contrasts and developments in culture.<sup>17 18</sup>

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## TABLE 2 SEQUENCE OF TRANSITIONS IN HUA-TOU WORK

### A. *Normal Egoic Consciousness (1–5)*

1. *Hua-tou* introspection. Ego based reflection
2. One pointed focussing.
3. Intensifying 'doubt'
4. One-pointed mind of Great Doubt.
5. Various relapses passing through tranquillity and one mind states

*Or:*

### B. *Diminished Egoic Consciousness. Prajna (6)*

6. Clarity etc – or *Kai-wu*.

Notes:

- The *Kai-wu* by this route is commonly abrupt, emotionally dramatic and leads to deep stillness. The sequence commonly breaks into a relapse. *Prajna* again can arise at any stage and is facilitated rather than caused by the early ones.
-

Evolutionary psychologists<sup>19</sup> are arguing that this cleverness came about through social evolution. Many primates have evolved as group living populations in relation to patterns of distribution of resources in their habitats and as protection from predation. Within this context, competition between individuals is believed to have provoked the emergence of skills for deception, insight into deception by others, alliance formation and the brainy intelligence associated within being aware of one's personal self as an object in a social world. The individualistic, ultimately self destructive, aggressive nature of human politics stems from this. Yet, in contrast, parental care, family and alliance formation drove the emergence of tendencies towards empathy and certain forms of altruism.<sup>20</sup> The conflict between these forms of social being produces the highly bipolar nature of human life. Generally, many world religions favour the mutualism of altruistic compassion yet become structured as highly self-oriented institutions often willing to murder those of other faiths.

In *Koan 62* in the *Book of Serenity*<sup>21</sup> we have the story of a monk who asked a master “Do people these days need enlightenment?” The master replied, “Oh, its not that there is no enlightenment but what can be done about falling into the secondary?” The story clearly recognises a primary holistic orientation of compassionate enlightenment contrasted to the secondary condition of a discriminatory, argumentative, hassling mind. In meditation therefore, we may be evoking something of enormous psychological antiquity, plausibly even a pre-human mode of knowing and being. The clarity of ‘insight’ (*prajna*) appears to pre-date the ‘ignorance’ (*avidya*) of discriminatory intelligence!

#### EXTENDED IMPLICATIONS, THE BODHISATTVA PATH

We have been using English terms that hopefully may clarify the nature and function of Chan meditation (bare awareness, clarity, present in the presence of the present, one-mind state), and tried to show how they can help translate Chinese discussions of meditative practice. Yet, we have to be careful. Like all words and ideas, their very use can be a barrier to insightful practice.

Essentially, the nature of Chan insight cannot be described. All one can do is to hint at it through various forms of metaphor. Any attachment to names or ideas sustains the discriminatory mind and this is just as true for the words we have been using as to older terminologies. The experiences arising through Buddhist meditation remain as mysterious as consciousness itself. Furthermore, practitioners may come across other experiences not discussed here that seem utterly inexplicable from a scientific or Western psychological perspective – for example during certain tantric practices or the unexpected appearances of moments of clarity seemingly evoked by place and circumstance, or the presence of certain charismatic teachers. It is necessary to acknowledge mystery and the strangeness of the human mind we share. To hold opinions generates ego-based dualism and prevents insight in practice – and this is always a difficult lesson for Westerners to learn. This choice of terms is intended to enhance precision in English expression. In practice, retreatants need to find those that help them most.



Insight (*prajna*) carries one across 'to the other shore' (secondary to primary) where sensory experience and the energies expressing the Universe appear clearly in union. There is no sense of separation or duality. One sees then how one's basic awareness is normally invaded or covered over by thoughts and feelings that express the personal concerns of practical life. The unified understanding of world-mind pervasion may be what is termed the 'ancient mirror' in Dogen's writing,<sup>22</sup> a term for 'Buddha nature' where 'Buddha' is a synonym for a cosmic awareness in humans. Dogen emphasises that to think of a practice that proceeds by stages to enlightenment is misleading. Such an idea arises from the way the mind shifts back and forth repeatedly from unitary to divided, multiple states. Enlightening insight is always potentially available; one is 'enlightened already'. All that is needed is a clear awakening to the way basic awareness becomes 'clouded' through invasion by mental discrimination.

Yet, that discriminatory awareness is not in itself 'ignorance'. It is the natural and evolved way by which the brainy physical body negotiates the competitive life of the 'world'. 'Ignorance' is the absence of perceiving that this negotiation is only a mode of experiencing within a much deeper original unity of mind and nature. The 'Bodhisattva Path' then becomes the practice through which insight is understood and selfhood steered away from harming others and indeed the planet through greed and aggression. This is then the profound path of enlightened compassion and wisdom. As Shifu would put it, here meaning and purpose unite in a life that is the ultimate practicality of Chan.

*Master! How can I understand enlightenment?*

*Have you had your breakfast?*

*Yes, Master.*

*Then perhaps you had better wash your bowl.*

## CONCLUSIONS

In this talk, I have attempted to provide an account of Chan practice that may be helpful to Westerners puzzled by translations of Chinese Zen literature. It is important to close with certain comments. Firstly, we have been discussing methods of practice rather than the Dharma teachings of the Buddha and the Patriarchs. There is no alteration intended here to the basic line of Shifu's Dharma Drum lineage based in both the *Linji* and the *Caodong* schools. Secondly, we have been seeking to respond to a need for clarification especially for Western beginners, and thirdly we have noted that this is a quite natural process of re-expression present throughout the history of Chan and at the present time. Indeed, two of the main Chinese Dharma Heirs of Shifu in Taiwan are providing retreats that differ considerably from one another and from those taught in recent years by Shifu himself; one emphasising calming the mind as a prerequisite for *Hua-tou* exploration and the other the confrontational approaches initiated in antiquity by such great teachers as Linji in China or Hakuin in Japan.<sup>23</sup> Adding our innovations to the mix, we may suggest that Chan teaching is highly creative at the present time and that centres such as the Dharma Drum Retreat Centre in Pinebush, New York, benefit greatly from this diversity of presentations.

These changes of course will continue. What is essential is that they never fail to express the root teachings of the Buddha. The maintenance of traditional Dharma is vital lest deviations develop that could so easily import the greed and selfish arrogance of so much of the Western dominated consumer capitalism of our present era. Both Simon Child and I are highly sensitive to the dangers of incautious, popularistic modifications to traditional practice. We remain devoted to the teachings our Shifu gave us and will continue on this path.

*Wednesday, January 20, 2010. Revised, Thursday, April 1, 2010*

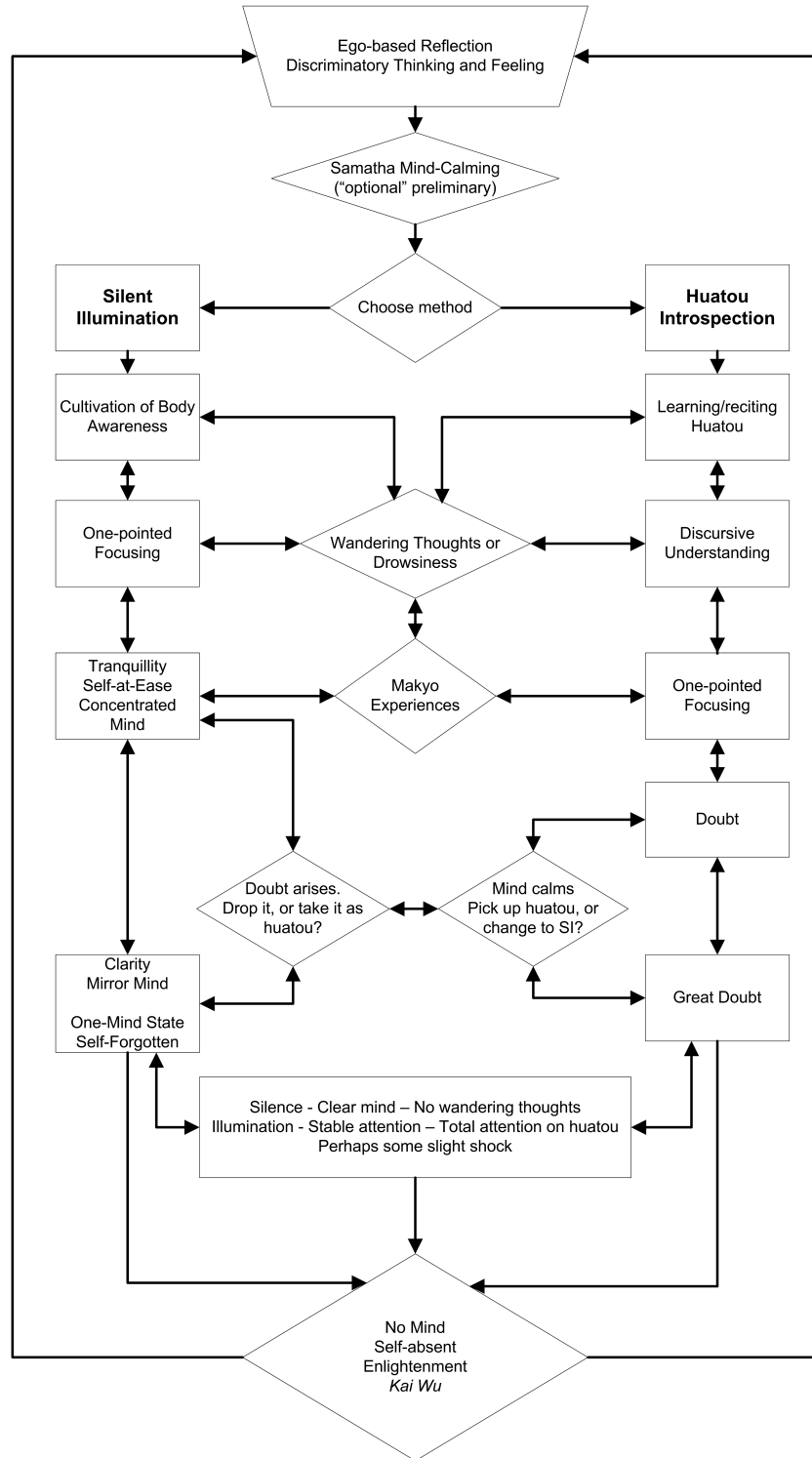


DIAGRAM *This diagram summarises the sequences of likely transitions during retreats using Silent Illumination or Hua-tou methods. Note that both Clarity and Enlightenment experiences require the ‘subitist’ appearance of prajna insight. Moreover, this may arise at any time including non-retreat times and is usually preceded by one-pointed-attention to the present moment and often some slight stimulus from the environment. The ‘gradual approach’ at the beginning of these practices thus requires non-intentional insight for their completion.*

Acknowledgement: I am most grateful to Simon Child for his valued discussions with me concerning this talk in draft and for his great improvement to the diagram that summarises key themes in the text. Also to Jake Lyne for a helpful comment.

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AT HOME IN GREAT STILLNESS  
FOR SALLY MASHEDER

*Pat Simmons*

*“Write for me,” says Sally “the only poem  
you find you can write truthfully. The one  
that’s left when you’ve chipped away  
the imagined comforts, the sweetened tears,  
the words that tell it softer than it is.  
No cliches, and if you must use metaphors,  
keep them short and to the point.  
A bit of frivolity is fine, of course, if you’re up to it.”*

*So Sally of the crazy earrings,  
Sally of the picnic griddle cakes  
stacked neatly in their airtight tin,  
Sally of the knowing eyebrows raised  
in tender wickedness,*

*What is left?*

*No need for spiritual gymnastics, ethereal arabesques.  
Just a wide-eyed focused noticing,  
a quiet awakening to things as they are.*

*And Sally striding through life and death  
with equal confidence, trusting the moment,  
knowing beyond all confusion who she is.*

*So Sally of the immaculate filing  
Sally of the whirlwind house and ordered kitchen  
Sally sharp-brained and gentle-hearted*

*What else is left?*

*No need for heroics, just a heroic  
tackling of the moment with the person sitting there.  
A common-sense bothering with the details  
that might bring comfort, a kind acceptance  
of human nonsense, and a firm impatience  
with suffering’s convoluted and unnecessary causes.*

*And Sally who told me how to combat slugs on my allotment,  
Sally of the spotted purple socks,  
Sally who knew just about everyone,*

*Then what's left?*

*Sally lying felled and luminous, each breath a task,  
Worrying still about everyone else,  
Sally at home in a great stillness.*



## FINDING THE SACRED IN THE EVERYDAY: THE BODHISATTVA PATH IN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

*Fiona Nuttall*

For years I was beset by the question; ‘What is serious practice?’ This was a sincere question, for my Buddhism was important to me, I had seen the impact that it had had on me and knew that somehow it had altered my life and the way I felt that I should live it. I wanted to pursue this path, it felt right and I wanted to get it right. I threw myself into the practice; by which I mean that I went on retreats of various sorts, I went to Teachings with various Teachers, I practised and I read voraciously. I read people’s stories, of how they were enlightened, of their lives, of how the Dharma moved across the world and I read of Bodhisattvas; real and mythical operating in the world. I read of people devoting their life to the Dharma; teachers, renunciates, Bhikkus and Bhikkunis, wandering ascetics and I met modern day monks and nuns of various Orders and various nationalities. These people seemed to be ‘doing it for real’; by which I mean that they were living out the Dharma in their daily lives and the Dharma was present or uppermost in their existence in the world.

As is the way with these things, I developed, over time, a number of spiritual heroes. Hakuin, because when I read Hakuin, I heard a Geordie accent coming through those words; meaning that I heard a very direct approach, no mincing of words, a tone of ‘This is how it is – get on with it.’ Shabkar because he wandered over present day Tibet living the Dharma life singing spontaneous songs, sometimes to crowds of thousands who wanted to listen. This was reinforced when I went with one of John’s parties to Qinghai Lake 30-odd miles long and home to Bird Island where Shabkar would hang out for months at a time. In the winters, the lake would freeze and villagers would walk across the ice to the island to speak with him and listen to his teachings. He described them as lines of ants stretching out across the horizon coming in hordes to visit. Layman Pang and his daughter were another two; giving up everything and travelling China making a living by weaving baskets and with those two, the final denouement of dying in a Zen way, aware and prepared. Even in the days before I called myself a Buddhist, there was Yeshe Tsogyal and her exploits in mythical and historical Tibet.

These heroes were not limited to historical figures. They included Maura ‘Soshin’ O’Halloran; an Irish woman who went to Japan, joined a Zen monastery and had her Enlightenment experience there. She was beloved by the Japanese people around her and after dying en-route to another country was described as a Saint and had a memorial erected to her memory. Another was Jiyu Kennet Roshi, another adventurer going to Japan and struggling heroically with culture and circumstance until ‘the bottom fell out’, just when she thought she had had enough. Another was Charlotte Joko Beck whose books on Zen were the first that made any sense to me and who translated ‘Chop wood and carry water’ into ‘Make love and drive freeway’.

There were also the people that I met who inspired me, or whom I wished to emulate. I’ll refrain from name dropping here, but one was an old Tibetan monk who had escaped from China across the

Himalayas on foot, after being incarcerated and tortured in prison and who made me weep by joyously showing us his new false teeth, since his own had fallen and been knocked out. Another was an American woman who ran a city Zen Centre and who had a personal centre as pliable and flexible as bamboo. They also included our own John and Simon and Shifu. These people had a way of looking at and into one with what seemed like openness and clarity. They were also 'serious' about practice, whatever that meant.

Inevitably, my own internal search was on. The usual questions; 'Who am I' 'What is love/another/this/it?' How does compassion feel? How to live my life? What does it mean to keep the precepts? What is my suffering? Where are the friction points in my life? How do I deal with my friction points? Where do the six perfections fit in? What are the 'shoulds' that drive me?

There were the moments of clarity and brief insight into my internal workings and mental meanderings. There were occasional blissful experiences, emotional dam breaking, senses of unity and glances of the transcendent. But was I serious enough? What was devotion to practice? Where did practice and life end and overlap?

Buddhism 'worked' for me. It took my questions and gave me a way to work with them. It allowed me to 'be' with the transcendent without feeling as though I was out of 'synch' with society. I took refuge, took the five lay precepts and started trying to live my life as a Buddhist. What did that mean? Was it living from an aspiration? Was it following a set of rules? Was it living outside of myself? What might it mean to live without a 'Self'? What needed to be given up? What was renunciation? Who was renouncing what? What was 'being good'? What was avoiding bad deeds, words and thoughts? Were there people that I should avoid, or choose not to spend time with? How did this match with the Zen poet who spent his time at the brothels and bars?

Then there was the Bodhisattva ideal. The impossible Bodhisattva Vows; to deliver every being of sentience, to remove all vexations, to get to grips with uncountable methods of working with the Dharma and to reach each and every aspect of the Buddhas and abide with that. This gave an awful lot of scope for striving, for achievement, for goals. It also seemed like a lot of work. How could I do that and carry on with ordinary life? Did it mean that I had to become a nun? Was living the Dharma full-time the only way to do it? I had a couple of friends who did make that choice, who chose to take robes and vows and for whom that was a valid expression of how they wanted to live life. But I chose not to take that route. I considered it, carefully and seriously, but chose not to go down that path.

What does this leave me with? On a simple level, it leaves me living life as a lay Buddhist. Is this the same as living life as any other Joanne Bloggs? Well, no, it doesn't because I still have a framework of refuges and precepts and vows. That doesn't preclude me doing any of the things that Joanne Bloggs may do; good or bad. I can help my neighbour, be kind to a stray dog, smile at the person behind the checkout till in the supermarket, reduce my carbon footprint and pay my taxes. I can drop out of society, spend my time reading Nagarjuna and wander round India. I can be pious and devotional and goody-two-



shoes. I can be holier than thou or so much less worthy than others. I can stop buying capitalist consumables and transfer my economic energy to Dharma knick-knacks. I can fill my house with Buddhist books instead of crime fiction or literary masterpieces. I can buy antique thanka paintings rather than Damien Hirsts. I can decorate myself with malas rather than jewels. Are any of these things wrong? No. Are any of them Buddhist? Well, yes, actually, since all of human existence is Buddhist. The Dharma exists within the dharma of the everyday. I have long wanted to write about 'the drama of the dharma'. And at the same time, no, of the above lists they are not Buddhist since they mostly emanate from the 'I'. These things are not wrong, but nor are they right. The philosophers might say that right and wrong themselves are incorrect. Given all of this, how do I know what to do, how to behave, how to conduct myself since I do operate in the real or relative world? Simplistically, this is clearly the point at which the Eightfold Path comes into play; right meditation, right livelihood, right speech and so on. But how do I know what is 'right'? I have friends who will not make a major decision without consulting a Lama. Maybe there is nothing wrong with that, but ultimately we have to make the final decision ourselves. We decide to go along with our Lama or not. And then we live with the consequences. The simple side of cause and effect.

A lot of life's decisions are even simpler than the things that we might take to the Lama. Do I drink this, eat that, drive there, go on a plane, apply for that job, shout at the kids, resent the partner, do what I feel like, sit on my cushion, watch the telly, and buy new boots? Do I compare any possible action with the Bodhisattva ideal and make a decision based on that? Do I try to see where it fits in terms of being 'right' and decide from there? Can I 'insert reflection before I speak or act' as John would say? Can I even wait that millisecond before doing something on automatic pilot? Do my emotions carry me away so that I am into self-justification and a next step in my own narrative even before the action is complete? 'Well, it's only a beer and it's been a hell of a week with the kids and their exams and I'm so tired and I'm the only one that ever does anything around here anyway. I'm sick of it. It's always the same – Joanne will do it – my name should be 'Mugs', not Bloggs'.

Seen in this way, Buddhism can become a complicated system of hoop jumping and fence negotiating. Comparison against an ideal brings one up against a comparison of oneself. The ego will always revert to type. 'I must try harder'. 'I must please John/Simon/Shifu/the Buddha'. 'I must get it right'. 'It/I must be perfect'. 'I must be in charge'. 'I must control it'. 'I can't'. 'I never'. 'We don't'. 'I should'. Psychologists may talk about 'Self 1 and Self 2', where Self 2 is a freer, more intuitive point from which to act, more childlike, in terms of simplicity rather than naivety and less driven by accumulated scripts and personal history – in Buddhists terms; samskaras. Self 2 is a nice concept and one that is permissive, but still comes from the 'I'. What would it be to live from the point of nowhere to go and no rules or map to get there? What would it be to truly live as a woman or man of no rank – a true person of Zen?

Increasingly, I feel that this is the question. At least, for me, this is the question for now.

The difficulty is that it is very easy to fall into mistaken views here. According to Zen, there is no name, no rank and no fortune, apart perhaps from the 3 Jewels. So maybe there is no need to 'engage' in conventional terms. I can take myself off to the mountains and live as a hermit. Of course, there is a two thousand year old tradition of doing this that still exists. I can devote myself to the Dharma, perhaps becoming a nun or monk. Of course, that option also still exists. One can join a Western style monastic sangha or an oriental one. But rest assured that this is no easy option. Confined communities can be hell-holes of division and strife as well as being centres of devotion and practice. I can carry on doing the type of thing that I have done before but with a new layer of consciousness; raising a family, holding down a job, contributing to my community. How does engagement apply? Need I engage in some way in order simply to 'Do Dharma'? Can I live from a Dharma perspective?

How do I apply these thoughts to the institutional settings to which I belong, or with which I have some association in a Buddhist context? There are Pali scriptures aplenty that say the Dharma should be freely given and not given for monetary gain. How does this fit with Western Capitalism? There is the question of how do we run Centres and make the Dharma available without finance, which some might say is neither possible in the West nor the East. There is no tradition of 'Dana' in the West still extant. People donate regularly to charities but more rarely, these days to religious institutions. Where is my engagement with such established forms of custom? Is the WCF such an organisation? Frankly, I hope so. Institutions have a regulatory function that can keep individuals in check, by monitoring and directing. Perhaps a 'true person of no rank' has no need of such restriction, but how many of us operate from that position on a regular basis, let alone consistently? I wonder if the rampant individualism prevalent in the West makes this one of the hardest lessons to learn for us Westerners. There are plenty of cases of people left to their own devices going 'off the rails' in the move of Buddhism to the West to illustrate this point. So can one live from Dharma, quite alone, without the support of peers and others with greater experience than oneself and is this a form of non-engagement in society and its mores? Why would one even choose such a path?

My personal thought is that engagement is a requirement of Buddhism. Even the hermit has seekers arriving at his cave, asking questions; looking for answers. We all need to go off and spend time with ourselves, whether in community on retreat or in solitary self-chosen isolation. But we also need to return to general life in order to test out what we think we may have learnt. And even when there is no more to learn – and I am not sure that I believe that point exists, we need to share our learning with others. The original ox-herding pictures may have ended with 'Mu' a bright, dynamic circle of no-thing, but later editions have the man riding the ox, back to the market-place, back to engagement with the world, clearly at ease and often playing a flute, legs a-dangling with no harness or rein on the ox-mind and yet with the ox going where the rider needs to be taken. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Bodhisattva-oriented Buddhism needs engagement, since the liberation of sentient beings needs engagement. Ksitigarba goes to the hell realms to speak to beings there and to offer to lead them to another state.



Moreover, the Bodhisattva needs those other sentient beings to fulfil their role. This is not to imply co-dependency, however, since once the job is done; a Bodhisattva has no need to return to the samsaric cycle. This consideration of the role of Bodhisattva can be seen not merely as engagement but also as responsibility. You take the vows: you have work to engage with. This bodhi-work is not something apart from the world; apart from the everyday hum-drum of life in the workplace. It is the workplace itself and all that goes on there. All the office politics and all the interpersonal wrangling; these all need the influence of a Bodhisattva. Indeed, in order not to be swamped by these conditions, one may need to invoke the Bodhisattva within. I have taken to having Mahakala on my desk at work. An occasional glimpse next to my computer screen reminds me that wrathful forms exist that are more effective than my own personal rage against the machine.

So how might this engagement manifest? There is no need to look for new options and ways of being. There are opportunities aplenty in daily life. Family, friends, work, communities all exist giving activities of daily living that can be and must be shared. Our highly mutually dependent society is a very clear example of co-dependent arising. These very areas that give rise to conditions of suffering are also the areas of opportunity. It is naïve and simplistic to say that these are opportunities for practice, for we need help to see through our attachment, hatred and desires on a minute to minute basis, but they are the proving ground. They are the places where we cannot live as persons of no rank, because we are assigned rank within them, rank and roles and tasks. Can we fulfil those duties and not get carried away by praise and blame? Can we be a 'Heart Buddhist' and not just a surface Buddhist? Can we engage and make our mistakes and live with them, without destroying ourselves and others?

If we can, then we too can plant a grass stem in the ground and say 'The Temple has been built'. We too will be people who look into another's eyes and know them as ourselves. We too will be able to face whatever comes and bend and not break, be solid and yet soft, be both human and humane. The everyday will have transcendence and the sacred will be mundane and common. We will know and forgive ourselves and others. We will take all that we are, wherever we go, and continue.

Onwards, then with our journeys. We have no on-going need for spiritual heroes. There is no need to be someone else, someone special. Life will present us with hard enough lessons. Perhaps the learning is the finding of the internal compass that is everywhere; that points not to North, but to Right.

*June 2009*

## THE CHINESE INSCRIPTIONS IN THE LOUNGE AND YARD AT MAENLLWYD

All of us doing retreats at the Maenllwyd will have seen the big black Chinese characters framed in the lounge of the house (*see Figure 1*) and also the red signs in Chinese placed on the outsides of Hall and House during retreats (*see Figure 2*). What do they mean?

The idea for the calligraphy in the lounge came from a similar picture seen by John Crook in Daitokoji monastery in Kyoto, Japan that said 'Go to where the water ends.' In discussing this with his friend Yiu Yan Nang in Hong Kong, John wrote a verse from which Yan Nang composed the calligraphy shown here.

The character in the centre reads CHAN. On either side the characters mean:

CHAN		BUDDHA
ESSENCE		MIND
CLEAR REFRESHING		RUNNING
WIND	CHAN	STREAM
HOWEVER		FUNDAMENTAL
NOT		ALWAYS
TRACED		PRESENT

The translation of this back into John's brief poem goes as follows (Right to left):

*Like the running stream, the Buddha mind is always present.*

*CHAN*

*Like a refreshing wind, the essence of Chan leaves no trace.*

Stream and wind are indeed features of the Maenllwyd world. Can you hear them?

The red hanging signs in the yard outside read:

Shr San Chan Se = Rock Mountain Chan Monastery

Nan Shr San = Blue Rock Mountain (i.e. Maen-llwyd = Grey/blue stone)



FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2



## WISDOM

*Jane Spray (nee Rogers) aged about 12.*

*The knowledgeable are as vacuum cleaners,  
able to suck in or blow out information at will.*

*Some have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge:  
these suck more than they blow.*

*While others bombard anyone who'll listen,  
smothering their victims in an avalanche of fact upon fact,  
at the same time consuming admiration, real or virtual,  
to satisfy the ego's craving, its addiction.*

*These are as hoovers gone haywire:  
soon the last fuse will blow.*

*The wise could not get into such a mess.  
They have a built in safety mechanism, called wisdom,  
which compels them, and advises their followers,  
to do what is right without faltering.*

*Wisdom views knowledge from above, and in perspective,  
realising its dangers as well as its usefulness,  
and thinks that truth was less concealed  
when life was simpler.*

*Wisdom, hand in hand with love, 'makes the world go round'.  
So how much faster would we spin through time and space  
if every one lived up to the name  
somebody gave the human race?*

School homework, on the subject of wisdom and knowledge.

*January 2010*

## AN APPOINTMENT WITH YAMA

*Ken Jones*

*Vanishing in the smoke  
of burning leaves  
a weathered Buddha*

At the Enno-ji temple in Kamakura the Lord of Death is in session with his ten officials at their desks. Hardwood carvings, life sized. It is not so much a judge and jury. More a data processing unit of functionaries charged with assessing your life story and making the necessary karmic calculations for a favourable or unfavourable rebirth. For the terminally ill a waiting room is provided for creative writing, to pass the time.

*EXIT sign --  
the intensity of waiting  
at a revolving door*

For the past four years, on the first of each month, I have been presenting myself to one of the officials. He gives me that “Not you again!” look and, out of the side of his mouth, a decimal number. If the number – hitherto stable – has commenced to rise, the spell has broken and it’s time to pack my bags.

And so, on the last days of each month (like these) my sky begins to darken. Then — so far — it lightens again. And for about three weeks I can rejoin the throng who feel they are immortal.

*Crazy fence  
every barb  
rich in rust*

## MOTHERS' DAY POEM 2008

*By Yeshe, aged 6.*

*Mum is a lady who likes*

*the shaydy day.*

*My Mum is in a windy*

*day that turns out to*

*be a good day.*

*On a Fogy day*

*Mummy says*

*HOORAY.*

*('Every day is a good day...')*

## SOUNDS, 2010

*by Yeshe aged 8*

*The tiniest sound must be*

*dust falling onto a large piece of paper.*

*The wierdest sound in the world must be*

*icing dropping onto the nose of the baker.*

*The noisiest sound in the world must be*

*A strong man smashing a drum hard.*

*The quietest sound in the world must be*

*A granny's hand saying its numb.*



## 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*

### HOLDING SILENCE

#### FIVE DAY CHAN RETREAT, DARTMOOR, OCTOBER 2008

This was a very valuable short retreat, with excellent leadership and talks by Jake, and wonderful interview support from Jake and Eddy.

For the first two days, I settled down easily into quite spacious sits, with much quiet delight. I felt comfortable, with no uprisings of previously common self-sabotaging thoughts about 'not deserving to be happy'. I think the work I have done on ten years of retreats has been profoundly beneficial at weakening this samskara, although I have no illusions that it might not reappear in ever more subtle forms.

The retreat followed a familiar format for me, with the early calm being replaced by unsettled mental activity and a knot of fear in the solar plexus. With Jake's help I was able to release this fear of loss of control to some extent and relax into short periods of Silent Illumination.

My mind still wouldn't quieten, however, there was something preventing me stabilising the state of Silent Illumination. Once again, a habitual pattern on retreats.

With the help of Eddy's insightful 'guesswork', we identified this problem as a deep old pre-verbal 'existential angst'. He explained it as a fundamental non-acceptance of some 'essence' of me – which makes sense knowing my mother and my upbringing! It seems rather weird in Buddhist terms though. Anyway, his recommendation was to allow the compassionate energy of Avalokitesvara to nurture and love this underdeveloped kernel, so that it can grow and flourish.

I found that by calling on Avalokitesvara's warm compassion to the area of energetic weakness and distress in my coccyx, the Kundalini energy could readily rise and infuse all my chakras. This led to my entire being feeling integrated and dissolving naturally and rapidly into a feeling of non-differentiation and oneness with the universe. Once this energy had developed, there was no fear or difficulty because my vibrational frequency was then no different from the rest of the universe. The image of a moth beautifully camouflaged against its background tree seemed to sum up this feeling.

But I still couldn't maintain this depth of Silent Illumination! As in earlier retreats, I became increasingly troubled by unbidden memories of stories of torture. These were deeply distressing and I spent hours in tears. Once again, Eddy helped me work through this pattern of distress and resistance. I felt as if there was a great reservoir of unexpressed pain and sorrow inside me, waiting for the dam to burst and

overwhelm me. Eddy suggested that I could try letting it out as it probably wouldn't drown me. Alternatively I could allow a little of the pain to arise when it occurs, trusting that it will pass away (rather than immediately repressing and swallowing it down).

He suggested that if I am able to continue working with extending the compassion of the universe to the tiny underdeveloped 'kernel', I am likely to then be able to 'power through' some of this psychological 'stuff' and thereby be able to maintain and deepen the meditative state.

The learning on this retreat led me to conclude that the (my) self needs to be fully integrated and secure before it can be temporarily relinquished. Yet another Buddhist paradox. It did, however, seem to make perfect sense experientially. I hope I will be able to make wise use of these insights in the future.

Much gratitude to Jake and to Eddy.

With deep bows to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

#### ALLOWING THE PRACTICE TO WORK: POLAND MARCH 2010 RETREAT

I am very grateful to John and Simon for their teachings. Before I went to this retreat, I was practicing a hua-tou. Instead of producing Great Doubt it produced great mess, confusion and depression in my mind. Silent Illumination turned out to be a practice I love. But it was very hard to "catch" what is it about. All the time I was trying to build whole body awareness. I was gathering every single part of my body, keeping it in memory and trying to build general feeling. It was tiring, impossible to do. Finally, on the last day of retreat, after dokusan with John, I understood, that it is about allowing the practice to work, rather than forcing it to give some results. It's very, very good lesson for me, that fully changed my meditation.

What is more, I really liked John's Dharma Talks. It seemed to me, that every speech was dedicated to me. If I was having some problem or difficulties in my practice, next day after John's speech the problem was totally dissolved. Sometimes I suspected John that he sees my thoughts, he reads in my mind.

All in all, I loved the atmosphere of retreat. I could feel that everyone is doing his/her best. It made my practice easier, thanks to everyone there, I survived.

#### PRESENCE IS IMPERMANENT? ABSENCE IS PERMANENT?

*The following three reports from the Spring Koan retreat 2010 at Gaia House all come from people working with the same new koan. They are placed together here to illustrate the range of effects and insights such work on the same challenge can produce. The koan is actually based on a true quotation from a conversation I had had with a practitioner only a few days before whose husband had recently died from cancer. JHC*

#### EXPLORING THE HEART

*The grieving Lady said, "Master, truly — presence is impermanent, but absence is permanent". "Indeed so", said the Master. What did the Lady understand?*

I am not really clear why I chose to work on this koan. I was looking for one that would address my primary concern: how to more fully understand and express our human participation in the more than human world and through this help address the crisis of sustainability. I ended up choosing one that emphasizes human suffering, which is in itself curious.

As we were encouraged to first address the koan with our rational Western minds, I analyzed it with some enthusiasm. I first of all noticed that the Master did not behave like Zen Masters usually do in these stories, kicking things around and being thoroughly disruptive, if not disreputable; but was rather mild and sympathetic. I also noted that the protagonist was a Lady and not a monk. It also seemed to me that the core statement in the koan—presence is impermanent, but absence is permanent—while true, and clearly understandable in the context of grief, was not very subtle, and indeed might be seen as creating a dualism between presence and absence, an approach that would not find approval in Zen. So why was the Master willing to go along with it by saying “Indeed so”?

I wondered if the koan was a demonstration of compassion: the Master was unwilling to disturb the Lady’s somewhat comforting insight. I also wondered if she might be a benefactress to his monastery and his desire not to confront her was more political!

But then, if the analysis was so easy, why was it offered as a koan? I walked around the garden at Gaia House repeating the words, and found myself comparing presence is impermanent, but absence is permanent with the words of the Heart Sutra we chanted every morning Form is emptiness, emptiness itself is form. In this comparison, while the Heart Sutra shows an interpenetration of form and emptiness, the Lady’s insight continued to seem more dualistic. This must, I thought, be the key to the koan, so I decided to work on the two key words: presence and absence. Is presence impermanent, I wondered? While form is emptiness, and the impermanence of form is central to the Dharma, presence is not the same as form. Things in themselves may pass, but the presence of the present moment, and indeed the presence of the cosmos and of co-dependent arising, these are not impermanent, it seemed to me. So I spend some time in one of my favourite occupations, seeing how I could sense the presence of the trees and the wind and the stars, but they didn’t seem to be speaking to me very clearly at that time.

I should say that during this time, on the second and third days of the retreat, my meditation practice, which often feels very scattered, was deepening to new (for me) places of silence. I could find a silent mind, although it was quite hard work keeping thoughts away, usually about practical problems.

I then turned to explore the idea of absence, starting quite intellectually. If absence can be related to emptiness, and emptiness is characteristic of all things, then absence is indeed permanent. But, I thought, absence in this koan is in the context of grief, presumably the loss of a loved one, not the context of an intellectual debate. Memories of my own griefs and losses came to mind and I explored them intentionally.

I remembered the phone call in the middle of the night from the hospital that told me of my father’s death, a week after he had a stroke. I go downstairs to wake my sister, who has been staying with us during his

illness. “He’s gone”, I tell her, and we go together to the hospital to see him before they lay him out. He is lying on his side, wrapped up in bedclothes as if asleep, looking peaceful. I touch his forehead, which is still warm. “You’ve gone, Daddy, you are dead”, I tell him. I have always been grateful for the way he died, active up to the day of his stroke and giving us enough time to say goodbye before he finally went.

Then I recalled my brother’s suicide, some two years ago. I remembered how he had been seriously depressed most of his life, although under the circumstances he had been remarkably successful. But his depression, and second divorce, had got too much for him and he hanged himself in his house in New York, to be discovered by his housekeeper. I recall, when my nephew had called me with the news, how he had said this was something he had dreaded all his adult life. I begin to weep. What a dreadful thing! I imagine his body hanging. Did he manage to break his neck or did he suffocate? I begin to howl, throwing myself around in my meditation place, feeling short of breath, panicking, at one stage feeling the noose tightening around my own neck. Did he feel it like that as it closed around him? Did he at that moment realize the finality of what he was doing (as I did reliving it)? What a dreadful, dreadful thing; and terrible to experience so directly.

When I had recovered some composure, I returned to the koan: absence is permanent says the Lady as she reflects on her loss (I had decided by this time that her husband has died after a long marriage). And the realization of finality grows in me, which I express in the phrase: When it’s gone, it’s gone. All living beings, from a flower to a human person to the great atmospheric systems which provide stability to our climate, all maintain themselves through intricate and beautiful processes of self-creation and self-organization; and when these fail or are damaged beyond a certain point (through age or outside interference) the self-maintenance breaks down, the pattern which connects (to borrow Gregory Bateson’s phrase) disappears, and they are gone. I saw all these living beings as temporary self-organized perturbations in the cosmos, which, when they fall apart, cannot be put back together again. When it’s gone, it’s gone.

I now saw my earlier intellectual analysis (with which I had been quite pleased!) as hollow and uncaring. I returned to the theme of compassion and kindness, seeing that the compassionate presence of the Master allows the Lady to express her insight and her grief. And I could see how the koan brings the Dharma into everyday life, putting the insight into the emptiness of all things directly together with the tragedy of human life. And somehow in the back of my mind I could see a link between, When it’s gone, it’s gone, with the mantra Gate Gate paragate parasmagate... (Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly beyond...)

I was pretty exhausted by all this catharsis and insight. I saw no movement in the koan for the following few sessions. It was at this time that John and Simon asked us to stop working the koan directly and to “allow to the koan to work on us”. I drew on silent illumination meditation to keep my mind as still as I could, allowing the koan to drop in from time to time.

Then one evening session (was this Wednesday?) something moved me to attack the koan in a different way: I literally smashed it up in my imagination. I shook it “like a Victorian parent might shake a naughty child”, as I said to John in interview later, and broke it into pieces which I scattered all over the Ch’an Hall floor in front of me, the Master lying here and the Lady there. Looking at this mess, I asked the Lady directly what she had to say about it all, and she simply replied, “I loved him”.

I was deeply affected. In an extraordinary way, this simple statement took the human side of the koan to a universal level I had not seen before; now I was less concerned with my own memories of grief, but rather with an experience of grief as part of the human condition. As I circled the Ch’an Hall in walking meditation, weeping and scarcely able to see where I was going, two particular images played in my mind: Picasso’s Weeping Woman (painted in response to the bombing of Guernica) in which the woman’s face is tragically broken up into separate facets by the cubist painting style; and Ofili’s No Woman, No Cry, which shows an elegant Black woman, hair neatly coiffed, with tears running down her face and over her shoulders; in each tear is a portrait of Stephen Lawrence. This is Ifili’s tribute to Stephen’s mother, Doreen. The first picture is one of utter wreckage, the second of equally profound yet contained grief. (I was able to see this painting for myself shortly after the retreat: it must be one of the great political and aesthetic achievements of the C20.)

And again I came to a pause in my explorations. How much further could I persist with this koan? Was there an ‘answer’ somewhere, some neat, Zen-like response which I could take to John and Simon? It seemed not. In time, I turned again, this time to the third character in the story, who is mute and almost invisible: the dead man. Would I be worthy of such grief, I mused? What would my funeral look like? Would I be remembered and honoured? Several good old men, friends and teachers of mine, have died over the past two years, and I saw that I wanted to be ‘special’ like them. Increasingly, I recognized that under all else was concern for my own importance and specialness, and however hard I tried to avoid it and distract myself, eventually I had to look it squarely in the face.

I also realized that I was ‘secretly’ trying to have an enlightenment experience, as if to add to my tally of profound experiences. “It’s as if I’m saying, ‘I’ll have one of those too’”, I confessed to my partner in one communications exercise. And I was troubled and not a little ashamed at this realization of my own self-importance. Remembering how, long ago in a sweat lodge, I had watched my companions enter the lodge, each naked on hands and knees, and seen each as my sisters and brothers, I looked around the Ch’an hall, choosing to see these companions in silence also as brothers and sisters.

I had been working hard at my meditation practice, keeping a close eye on each breath and on each errant thought, as if I could make my mind be quiet by force of my own will. And remembering John’s account of the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment when the ‘ridge pole’ of his ego broke, I began to drop the struggle for clarity and enlightenment and specialness. I tried relaxing into my Silent Illumination practice: I wasn’t sure what I was relaxing, but I slowly seemed to be able to let go of the hard work of keeping a clear mind. I found a place of deeper peace and more profound quiet, allowing the meditation

to do itself more. In one of the walking meditation periods I had a tiny glimpse that 'walking was happening' rather than that I was walking. And I was able to move gently in and out of this quality of practice for the rest of the retreat.

What am I left with? I went through layers and layers of human grief. What I saw was that such grief can be experienced so much more directly than grief about loss in the more than human world. And even then, while we may grieve for our pets, maybe for a much-loved tree as did the poet John Clare ("With axe at foot he felled thee to the ground"), how much more challenging it is to grieve for the loss of species and ecosystems, or even for the disturbance and maybe even failure of our climate systems? For these too, as Gaia theory teaches us, are best considered as living processes, if not as sentient beings. If our human concerns so easily and understandably take up our attention, how will we ever truly learn to give enough attention to the loss of other beings, of whole species, of the planetary systems of which support human life and of which we are all a part?

#### MY HEART BECAME A MOUNTAIN LAKE

When this Koan grabbed me, I thought it was about death, about grief for lives lost, about the grief of Iris and Sally, about the impermanence of our lives. This was "Indeed so" but the Koan proved to hold so much more than at first sight, and I continue to use it.

I came to the retreat hoping to find a way out of busy-ness, a way to live that includes looking after others but that is not dominated by looking after others, a way to be free of the load of caring that I choose to carry. I did not want to spend the Koan Retreat in my head, so when trying to calm my mind I decided to use my heart, which resulted in purposeful moves of attention from my head to my heart. In my heart, there is much less analysis, far fewer words, less definition, grey areas and a lot that is unexplored. The koan lodged in my heart, life/death, permanence/impermanence, male/female, opposites and middle ways. The grieving lady became Kuan Yin and the Master became the Buddha, the two figures sitting to my right in the meditation hall. Kuan Yin shedding tears of compassion for the world and the Buddha saying "Indeed so."

I developed a sense of spaciousness in my heart, which I described in the first communication exercise as a black hole. My heart is not a black hole but with the difficulty in finding words and the need to say something in the communication exercise I explored this idea and came up with the idea of a white dwarf – my partner laughed. I have since looked up White Dwarfs on Wikipedia, quoted below:

"We learn about the stars by receiving and interpreting the messages which their light brings to us. The message of the Companion of Sirius (a White Dwarf) when it was decoded ran: "I am composed of material 3,000 times denser than anything you have ever come across; a ton of my material would be a little nugget that you could put in a matchbox." What reply can one make to such a message?"

On the cushion, I allowed my koan to explore the space in my heart. It became a sitting room. Here were Iris and Sally and several of my dead relatives, sitting comfortably in Parker Knoll arm chairs, available





for conversation, all quite OK. Through a door to another room were my grandchildren, my children, husband and the rest of my friends and relatives all there milling about, attention needed to prevent the toddlers running over the elderly, care needed at the beginning and ending of life, but the predominant sense of the environment was of love. As the day went on the images in my heart changed. It felt as though my heart became a mountain lake, with reflections and storms, but containing my loved ones in the depths. In the water too was my job, my childhood, holidays, homes, griefs and disasters, joys and successes. The lake became a mirror and my heart seemed to reflect all. I have learned in the practice of Silent Illumination that my mind can become a mirror. My heart as a mirror seemed less glaring, more inclusive, wider, deeper and more loving - though these words do not explain adequately.

In an interview with Simon I spoke of not needing to do it any longer, more of it doing me, less hard work, more allowing, I no longer need to carry a load, but it carries me. I am part of a whole connected in every way to the Universe and maybe it is me, I don't need to struggle and do it any longer. The phrase that John was fond of saying "Let the Universe do it" seemed to be happening in me.

In allowing images to present and change in my heart I could see attachment and letting go. When I let go of the mirror, my heart became an ocean. The small space in my chest was a sandy beach, the ocean lapping on my shores. All could be washed up, all that the ocean contains, shipwrecks, treasure, rubbish, life, death or nothing. I talked about this in interview with John. About when "I" am absent then what is there is the permanent flux of Being. John suspected that this was another aspect of great mind, a gift that I can allow to wash through me as I explore growing older.

So "What did the lady understand?"

Perhaps it was the interconnectedness of all things. Perhaps she understood the third place equidistant from the absolute and the relative and encompassing both.

Perhaps she understood the resource Iris and Sally knew when they were dying.

Thank you both John and Simon.

## SNOW FLAKE MELTING

It all started with the snow flake.

But to begin at the beginning, I was on a spring-time Koan retreat led by John and Simon at Gaia House. It was good to be being taught by two wise teachers and helpful to be with a group of supportive fellow retreatants. It was also nice to have John back on form as a teacher after his spell of being unwell. My Koan about grief and loss, summarised as “presence is impermanent but absence is permanent”, was challenging but also intriguing. In the interview room, I had seen the painting of a monk sitting in meditation facing a cliff and I had wondered whether I would ever be able to climb with my Koan to the top of that cliff or whether I would fall off. Simon had encouraged me to have a go.

On the downside, my sleeping accommodation was unsatisfactory and I was angry about the fact that I hadn't had much sleep the previous night. I was disgruntled with everything about that – with the organisers for putting me in such a position, with my neighbours for being so inconsiderate as to even come on a retreat to grunt and snore in their sleep, and with myself for allowing my attachment to a good night's sleep to be such a vexation that it had stopped me sleeping. So, it was in a reflective mood of mixed feelings that I went for my afternoon walk. During the walk, it snowed. Quite surprising considering that this was a fine spring day – very cold but with blue skies and white fluffy clouds. Here was a gentle snow shower giving an almost imperceptible dusting of white on the grass. For no particular reason I wanted to catch a snowflake. Realising that if I tried to actively catch one I would fail, I held out my arm and a single perfect snowflake alighted on my sleeve.

As I watched, it melted in the bright sunlight. It was now transformed and on my sleeve instead was a single, perfect drop of water. I didn't need to grieve for my snowflake – it had not died, it had simply changed its form. Its form? But is not form precisely emptiness, and emptiness precisely form? Could life and death be just part of the natural wholeness of the Universe, and is it only our attachment to form that is both noble and grievous when expressed as love? Suddenly, I understood. The cliff that I had been facing fell down and I was hit by a wave of emotion.

Over the next day, I was able to work things through both in formal meditation and elsewhere. I was taking a shower when I realised that, of course, the five skandas are empty. How else could they be? It was during one of John's talks that I understood exactly his reference to the hua-tou “When the morning star first was, there too am I”. It was in the morning service that I appreciated the true meaning of the prayer “In my heart, I turn to the three jewels of refuge”. There was still a lot I couldn't understand – where was my Koan that seemed to have dropped away after leading me to this strange place? Where was I in all this, come to that? And if time and space are all simply part of “the ring through which the tiger jumps”, what is the difference between permanent and impermanent? It was all very confusing, and in retrospect it is not surprising that I was very emotional.

At my interview with Simon, I really couldn't explain how I felt except that my tears were most definitely not tears of unhappiness, but that I had not got the right capacity to express how I did feel. The feelings and the understanding were beyond my capacity to put in words. I had previously read a book about the astronauts in the moon landings. Although they had studied the moon intensively, it was only when they stood on its surface that they appreciated that nothing could have prepared them for the experience and they found their familiar senses challenged. I said that I felt as though I was in a similar situation without map or compass.

At interview with John the next day I was much calmer – the emotional intensity had subsided and we were able to discuss much more clearly my realisations and how they had happened. I was not going mad. All that had happened was that as soon as I had stopped trying to obtain it, I had received a gift beyond words from the Universe. John told me, "This is for you". His advice on what to do next was to quote Master Sheng-yen, "Continue".

Here on the mountain where the path stops, you go on into the snow alone.

I wrote the first part of this report immediately on my return home. Reviewing it a week later, the experience still seems very real – the universe ringing in my ears. The emotions associated with the experience have thankfully subsided. They were not unpleasant and are now risking becoming an attachment. I have been able to reflect on the way forward. I certainly need to learn and have started reading. I also need to practise, and to bring the practice and enquiry more into my everyday life and not just in the time spent on the cushion. On the final day of the retreat, John's talk was on disinterested love and belonging to one Universe. This can be my compass for this new way of being in this place.

#### WAITING PATIENTLY

I just wanted to send unlimited metta for the amazing retreat in April. It's really transformed my life view and especially my relationship with my daughter which is like the cornerstone of my life.

After the inevitable bumpy re-entry about 24 hours later she was hugging and being so affectionate which is not usually her nature. We both knew something had changed and I thanked her for waiting for me so patiently to change and you know what she said "I trusted you Daddy that you would"...a four year old. Well, it's just been like that ever since - very loving without the stress that I always thought responsibility brought.

So my main interest at the moment is unlearning responsibility and in fact relearning it anew. But whatever I do I always come back to an unshakable feeling at my foundation and that came to fruition on that retreat with the assured stewardship of the leaders. That they managed to nail so precisely the mental states we might be going through at each stage and express responsibility with such good humour and warm heartedness was extremely helpful. Please accept metta from me and my daughter.

## DAVID CLARK: IN MEMORIAM

*John Crook*

When I was fourteen and safely at boarding school in Dorset, David was plummeting out of the sky on a parachute descending into a fierce and disastrous conflict in France. Several years older than I, this difference underlined the contrast in our lives. His wartime experiences were heroic in the ways of war but David wrote with humility about them all. His wartime autobiography <sup>1</sup> tells us so much about his character. His parents always wanted him to be intelligent, scientific and brave and he was to be all those things. Few of us have had the experience of visiting a camp of Hitler Youths in the 30s and gone on to help win the war against them! Doctor, socialist, humanist adventurer, psychiatrist not without a warm self-doubt, David was a striking personality.

I first met this large, friendly almost boisterous man at a conference in Dartington where we began to share our spiritual interests. David was a sceptical humanist but also a Quaker with a characteristically wide vision of spirituality. He had come out of a personal crisis partly through some experiences of bliss and insight that he recognised as characteristically 'Zen'. This was to bring him into 'sitting' with us on our Chinese Zen retreats at the Maenllwyd in Wales.

I have many happy memories of David. His warm, honest character and his deep concern with spirituality of an essentially practical kind made him a great companion in talking about such things. He wrote an account of his experiences for our journal <sup>2</sup> and joined us on a retreat in the lighthouse on Lundy Island where I recall the immense fun of cooking with him in the tiny kitchen there. He loved the island and always wanted us to go there again.

At the Maenllwyd, our local farmer with a lamb that had broken a leg tendon once challenged his surgical skill. Together with another doctor, he sowed it up and soon had it walking about again. David dug drains with enthusiasm and brought a lightness to what we were doing that many appreciated. He was one of the 'toughies' who appreciated the relatively primitive condition of the old farmhouse of those early days.

I have been sad not to see David more in recent years but we corresponded from time to time and I know his involvement in Zen meant a lot to him. Many of us fellow practitioners remember him with happiness and miss him and his presence amongst us with sadness.

### NOTES

1. Clark, David H. 1995. *Descent into Conflict. A Doctors' War*. The Book Guild, Lewes.
2. Clark, David H. 1992. *Transcendence in my life. New Chan Forum 4*. Spring issue. [www.westernchanfellowship.org](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org).

## IN APPRECIATION OF SALLY

*We remember Sally Masheder*

JOHN CROOK

When Sally told me about her medical diagnosis we were together at the International Mindfulness Meeting in Bristol. I was shocked but also struck by the extraordinarily calm way in which Sally was responding to this dreadful news. Strangely, we had just listened to Jean-Marc Mantel's talk about moment-to-moment awareness and, in her own way, this was to be Sally's profound response to her illness. I have been deeply moved and touched by her manner of dying, deeply marked by Chan understanding all the way to the end.

Sally gave much of herself to helping Buddhist practitioners on their way, not only by becoming a valued group leader in Bristol but perhaps most importantly through her work in stabilising the NBO and bringing it though to an effectively organised and functional institution. All British Buddhist practitioners are deeply in debt to her for her wise, diplomatic and thoughtful management. Sally was professionally a well-loved Doctor in a difficult area of Bristol. Her broad-based medical practice included much attention to the social and personal problems of her patients and included special thought concerning the more unfortunate people of that tough district, including the often-abused street women of the city.

Yet, it was her more personal understanding of Chan that became so notable in her last months. Sally was always a generous, thoughtful person, devoted to her work and willing to give advice and help and she had found herself suddenly confronted with a dire illness. From the beginning, she clearly realised the pain that her possible death would cause others and used her understanding of Chan to empower great courage in facing it. She was able to use her faith in the Dharma to support her own spirit of calm endurance and at the same time respond to the needs of others grieving around her.

For example, on one occasion, she was talking with Hughie who came to visit her. As she told him about her illness, Hughie felt overwhelmed by the sadness of so early a death. As he was about to weep, Sally leaned forward and said "But Hughie – you must know that life is perfect".

Such a remark in such a circumstance is only possible from a spontaneous practitioner for whom immediate sensitive compassion is as important as wisdom. One cannot help but be reminded of the Buddha's own compassionate understanding as Ananda grieved his potential going; "Ananda, have you not learned that all compounded things must pass away?"

Sally maintained her inner peace in spite of the difficulties of her treatment and finally decided to go her way rather than endure further chemotherapy. She took this decision with calm understanding and was quite annoyed at the slowness of her gradual passing that followed. She was anxious to get "on the train" and be on her way. Somehow, this was a response quite typical of her resolute and practical personality.



The manner of her passing is inspirational for us, for we all have to face our own departure one day. On this occasion, therefore I want to say how grateful I am to Sally for all she has given us – and especially for the wisdom and compassion of her last days. A profound practitioner has gone on her journey. We can all be happy and grateful for the example she has given us.

#### MIKE MASHEDER

She always said: “No eulogies at my funeral”, never liking people to blow her trumpet for her, preferring just to get on with what she felt she needed to do. Actually, I rather agree with “No eulogies”, but for the opposite reason – whatever I say would never really be enough. Nevertheless, I will try my best to convey a few of my feelings.

For me it all started way back in 1968 at Sheffield University, although we had known each other for nearly 3 years by then. Indeed, I remember a 21st party for a mutual friend in her flat for which she cooked. Oddly, I finished up spending a lot of the time in the kitchen, and thinking ‘this lass will make a fine wife for somebody’, really not thinking it would be me!! We started ‘going out’ only 3 weeks before finals in 1968, being really quick off the mark.

We had arranged different summer holidays, but afterwards we spent much of the summer of 1968 together in London. Shortly after I started my post-grad work at Jodrell Bank, we met at my uncle and aunt’s house in Sheffield for my birthday weekend in October and I suggested we get married. She agreed! We were married in the following September, the day after my parents’ Silver Wedding. My wonderful mother-in-law managed to throw a party for them as well. Sally and I therefore celebrated our Ruby Wedding just eight months ago. We had intended to have two parties and a holiday in Scotland; we did manage a very nice and moving family tea party. Much joy had been brought to our lives by the arrival of Jane (now Jiva) in 1973 and of Nicholas (Nick) in 1975. It is wonderful to have their love and support now. Nick’s feeling’s are well summarised by the poem written by his son, Jay. (see page ?)

In 1970, while I was a postgraduate at Jodrell Bank, Sally started work as a trainee psychiatric social worker in Salford – a tough job and a challenge to which she rose wonderfully. She loved the buzz of the energetic team dedicated to getting on with the job of helping those unfortunate people who came into their care. Salford in the 1970s was not a happy place. It was one of the poorest and most run-down places in the country. There was much work to be done and Sally launched herself into it in a way that I later found to be characteristic of her. Actually, I think it was a life-changing experience for her.

In 1981 Sally finally heeded my encouragement to study medicine. I had seen this medic in her, straining to be let out. After 10 years of training, some locum work and an unsatisfactory job elsewhere, she finally landed working at Montpelier Health Centre, in Bristol, where we were now living. Just as in Salford, she seemed to have found her proper slot in her professional life. Being a doctor was such an important part of being Sally and Montpelier provided all the medical and social challenges she could need – and I don’t mean just the doctors!



Sometime in the early 1990s she – that is both of us, really – ‘discovered’ Chan Buddhism, which gradually became a big part of our lives as we found its Wisdom very much ‘speaks to our condition’. Its deep apprehension of the nature of the human condition and its impermanence, and the interconnectedness of all happenings and the many things that follow from that understanding have been a source of great strength to us both. Sally’s more practical and energetic work with the NBO has been very beneficial to Buddhism in Britain and was much appreciated by many and will be greatly missed.

So, these are some of the wonderful things that Sally was: wife; mother; doctor; Buddhist. There were other important things – like our little wood, which was one of her ‘good ideas’. Throughout all this, there has been an over-arching concern for other people. Indeed, sometimes I had to work quite hard to persuade her to do things just for herself and for her own enjoyment. I think I succeeded somewhat and she appreciated that. This concern continued on her death-bed. Of the doctor, I am just so glad that I was able to let the medic out of the bottle. At the time, people asked: could you not do something easier as a second training, but no, nothing else seemed worth the effort. How right she was.

Some years ago, at a family wedding, the conversation, bizarrely enough, turned to the difference between a mistress and a girlfriend. I think we decided something like:

Mistress: a lady whom you visit from time to time, probably clandestinely

Girlfriend: somebody with whom you go out to parties, theatres etc.

One is never quick enough on the uptake – what I wanted to go on to add was something like:

- Lover: somebody you just want to be with all the time
- Mentor: somebody whose wisdom you respect and who guides you through life’s little and big moments
- Muse: somebody whose presence inspires your creativity
- Wife: somebody to share your life, your children and possibly your bank account.

So easy for these to be separate, but I was lucky enough to find a Sally who was all these people at one and the same time. But most of all, she was my friend, my very special friend, my bestest friend, and I think that is what I will miss the most. I have found myself saying to people, “It would have been a privilege to know her for 5 minutes, let alone be married to her for 40 years”. Wonderful, just wonderful.

So, Sally, as I wish you farewell, I thank you for your love, your constancy, your care, our children and so much more. Thank you for showing me how to live and, indeed, how to die – I hope I have learned enough to continue now without you at my side.

Lastly, I’d like to express Sally’s and my deep gratitude for all the various expressions of love and kindness, the help and support we have received from so many people over these last months. It moved us both to tears quite often.

## JIVA MASHEDER

In memory of my mother...words that I always knew I would write one day but hoped it would be some years down the line. They say 'Death is the greatest teacher'. I am not in a position to make comparisons, but I can say that my experience over the last year of Mum's illness and eventual death have been a profound time of learning just what is possible in our human hearts.

From diagnosis to death, almost exactly 6 months, I was both humbled and inspired by the courage and equanimity with which Mum faced her progressively worsening physical condition and impending death. I'm told she surprised herself with the depth of her equanimity; when I asked her about her state of mind she replied 'watching various thoughts flying round'. She didn't specify; I could only imagine what they could have been.

I can only surmise that when her life was suddenly so much shorter than expected, she deeply understood the cliché that we bat around so freely, 'Life's too short'. I certainly understood this – too short to waste on self-pity, petty resentments and grudges. And all that is left, is love. And yes, we really can die any time.

And Mum was, in her final months, a beacon of love, surrounded by love from so many quarters. It touched me deeply to see how love, compassion and pure presence flowed during her illness and immediately afterwards, both from her and to her. The house was full of cards and well-wishers, gifts of food and offers of help in whatever way possible.

Despite the unpleasantness of the medical treatments she had, and the unpromising prognosis, she never complained and expressed instead her concern for how hard it was for us to live with our impending loss. My only regret is that I never asked her what it was like to face death at such an early age, and how she did it with such steadfastness. Somehow it was a difficult thing to ask.

During one teary conversation as I washed her hair, Mum told me of how when her mother died of cancer, when her oldest grandchild (me) was the same age as Mum's (Zak) is now, she came through the grief of the loss to come to celebrate her mother's life. I feel I am approaching that stage now and can appreciate what she passed on to me and Nick, and to so many other people that she had contact with. She unswervingly held to her values of care for others, and for the precious planet and the creatures that we share it with, as more important than anything else. With that went, and goes on today in Nick and myself, a curiosity, interest and love for all living beings.

Being present with her, as Dad, Nick and I were, throughout her illness right to the last breath, was the most extraordinary experience. It has shown me how it is possible to die with dignity and kindness even in the last days; her last gift to us. In some ways her calm approach made it much easier for us around her; in others it reminded us of just what a huge loss was coming.

Just after midnight on Christmas Day she said to me, only managing one word to each breath, that she was glad she hadn't died on Christmas Day; and my last conversation with her was a running joke about drilling holes in her skull (an ancient medical procedure - she wasn't keen).

I hope that when my time comes to die, I can find those qualities of compassion and equanimity. The latter is the last of the ten Paramis, last of the four Brahmaviharas and last of the seven Factors of Enlightenment. And at the last, it is all we can do.

JAY MASHEDER

sally the granny

There once was a granny.  
Who's name was Sally.  
She was very kind.  
And had a good mind.  
And made us all happy.



### JAMIE CRESSWELL

Sally became the WCF representative to the NBO shortly after its inception, and its Secretary in 2002, when it was going through a particularly difficult patch. She remained in that position until her death. Her work then and during the next eight years was central to reviving the spirit and function of the NBO, firstly by organising a Conference at the Jamyang Buddhist Centre and then through her continued hard work and great support of the NBO itself and for those connected with it. At NBO meetings she was always to be seen warmly greeting both new and established members and she brought to the meeting her very own particular sense of fun and often well placed comments or glances during the many deliberations.

Sally's very being was conveyed in the way she 'walked the talk' and in how she lived her life. The NBO was created in order to build friendship and understanding and Sally was driven by a strong wish to bring Buddhists of all kinds together so that they could become friends and learn from each other. She realised how easy it is for minor differences between Buddhist traditions to deepen until major barriers become established. For those who knew and worked with her she was often the person who came to mind when faced with a difficult and complex problem. Sally's wise, diplomatic and thoughtful management and energetic work with the NBO has been very beneficial to Buddhism in Britain, and all British Buddhist practitioners are deeply in debt to her.

### ERICA HANDOLL

Sally Masheder was a GP with a difference. We worked together at Montpelier Health Centre: a busy, multicultural, socially diverse, inner city surgery in Bristol. I work as a Health Visitor for Older People and we shared many discussions about the social, mental and medical problems of our older patients. Despite the challenges of this work, Sally usually maintained an aura of bright calmness. I remember her warmth, bright-eyed and smiling, her lively wit, her long full hair tied back, her long full skirts, as she floated about the premises with her particular upright and elegant poise.

It was some years before I attended a Wednesday evening with the Bristol Chan Group, it was my delight, to see her sitting there. These wonderful teachings and practice; is this what had made the 'difference'? The penny dropped. It was clear that Sally developed her practice mindfully at work, without fuss or trumpet-blowing, in a manner that could only be said to be admirable and inspiring. Perhaps, it was a case of good material enhanced. (Sally had a phrase 'you need good clay to make a good pot'.) After all, "Sally was Sally before she become a Buddhist", as John Crook, quite rightly, reminded us all her at memorial service.

She was always interested in people, and thorough in investigating their problems. These attributes often led me, while grappling with complex cases, to the thought...."umm...I think Sally would be the best doctor to talk to about this patient". She exhibited a deep concern to get to the heart of all the issues presenting, whether they were physical or psychosocial in origin. She was, to quote the other GPs'



recollections of her, “often teased by them for ordering weird and wonderful tests that they had not heard of”. She is remembered in the practice not only for her thoroughness and willingness to consider the wider aspects of health and ill-health, but in particular for the quality of attention and respect that she gave to everyone, patients or colleagues. Patients, shocked by her sudden illness and death feel the loss keenly. They say things like such as “she was more than my GP, she was my friend”; “she listened to you, and let you say all what you wanted”. We all know it will be different now.

#### HILARY RICHARDS

Sally exemplified many of the qualities of Quan Yin the Bodhisattva of Compassion. I remember her cheerfulness and her ability to find words for everything. Life with Sally was never dull. She had extraordinary courage and when I visited her shortly before her death there was a radiance about her which was as if she was helping us to say goodbye. That radiant look is something I shall never forget.



## BOOK REVIEWS

### WORLD CRISIS AND BUDDHIST HUMANISM END GAMES: COLLAPSE OR RENEWAL OF CIVILISATION

*Review by Jake Lyne*

*WCF has purchased a stock of Dr John Crook's major new book and is able to offer it at a discounted price.*

This is a book that will have an immediate appeal to Buddhists, since it provides a sophisticated, readable overview of the history of ideas within Buddhism and shows clearly the significance of a 'buddhistic' insight to meeting 21st Century challenges.

However, the scope of the book goes beyond Buddhism and will interest a much wider audience. John Crook's scientific background is in evolutionary psychology. During his career he became especially interested in the scientific study of human behaviour in the context of environment, which necessarily leads to an attempt to understand the influence of language, thought, culture and human experience. Human behaviour is an issue of central importance in our world with its burgeoning population, the threat of global warming; and with the potential for human conflict, supported as it is by extremely dangerous weapons, to be a serious threat to survival.

In contrasting western philosophical dualism with a buddhistic perspective, John Crook shows how our world is shaped by our world view and how a shift in world view is a necessary precursor to a more healthy way of living on this vast though finite planet. Most people have only a tiny and short-term influence in life, but ideas are powerful and can live on, e.g. witness the power of the theory of evolution in shaping the way we understand the world. This book contains fundamental ideas that were developed around two thousand years ago, but more or less failed to penetrate the 'western' world. They are now being introduced through many sources, but few authors are able to present them so clearly or with such relevance as in this publication.

People who have been on meditation retreats with John Crook will already have a sense of the message in this book, though it is unlikely that anyone will have been fully aware of the range of his thought, and perhaps even he wasn't until he began to write this! Our challenge is to widen the readership of this important book in the hope that the ideas it conveys are disseminated so that they may be of long term benefit.

### KOANS OF LAYMAN JOHN: STORIES AND POEMS BY JOHN CROOK

These stories from a modern Chan Master tell us of enlightening interactions with teachers. The poems offer us spontaneous verses expressing a Zen spirit touching on the many emotions that paint the colours of human experience.



## BUY BOOKS & MALAS FROM WCF

- *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism*  
WCF price: £11 inc p&p within UK
- *Koans of Layman John*  
WCF price £5 inc p&p within UK

To Order:

Send your delivery name and address with your payment cheque or postal order made payable to "Western Chan Fellowship" to: Jeremy Woodward, 46 Wood Park, Ivybridge, Devon, PL21 0PP  
Email: jemwoodward@aol.com, Tel: 01752 893165.

More details at: <http://tinyurl.com/wcfbooks>

- *Western Chan Fellowship Malas*  
These malas are available to purchase. They have been made for us in Myanmar from rosewood and jade and are designed to be used with John Crook's Aspirational Prayer – more details here:  
<http://swindonchan.org/index.php?pageID=24>  
They are £7 'as is' with nylon cord and a big green tassle. A restringing service is available –  
<http://swindonchan.org/images/malaKnots.jpg> Contact [membership@westernchanfellowship.org](mailto:membership@westernchanfellowship.org)



## RETREATS &amp; EVENTS

## WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP RETREATS 2010–11

The retreats below are scheduled in 2010/2011. Keep an eye on the website for any updates and to read full booking details including how you may now book and pay online using debit or credit card: <http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/retreats.html>

## 2010 WCF RETREATS

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ■ 16TH OCTOBER – 23RD OCTOBER:  | <i>Huatou Retreat</i><br>LEADER: JOHN CROOK   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES  |
| ■ 23RD OCTOBER – 28TH OCTOBER:  | <i>An Introduction to Chan:<br/>Following the Path of Bodhidharma</i><br>LEADER: EDDY STREET   VENUE: HOURNE FARM, E. SUSSEX |
| ■ 1ST NOVEMBER – 6TH NOVEMBER:  | <i>Western Zen Retreat</i><br>LEADER: SIMON CHILD   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES  |
| ■ 30TH NOVEMBER – 6TH DECEMBER: | <i>Mahamudra on the Tantric Path</i><br>LEADER: JOHN CROOK   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES   |
| ■ 4TH DECEMBER – 11TH DECEMBER: | <i>Silent Illumination</i><br>LEADER: SIMON CHILD   VENUE: HOURNE FARM, E. SUSSEX  |

## 2011 WCF RETREATS

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ■ 22ND JANUARY – 27TH JANUARY:   | <i>Western Zen Retreat</i><br>LEADER: SIMON CHILD   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES  |
| ■ 19TH FEBRUARY – 24TH FEBRUARY: | <i>Ordinary Mind is the Path: Five Day Chan Retreat</i><br>LEADER: JAKE LYNE   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES                 |
| ■ 19TH MARCH – 26TH MARCH:       | <i>Koan Retreat</i><br>LEADER: SIMON CHILD   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES   |
| ■ 9TH APRIL – 14TH APRIL:        | <i>An Introduction to Chan:<br/>Following the Path of Bodhidharma</i><br>LEADER: EDDY STREET   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES |
| ■ 21ST MAY – 26TH MAY            | <i>Western Zen Retreat</i><br>LEADER: HILARY RICHARDS   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES  |
| ■ 2ND JULY – 7TH JULY            | <i>Pitfalls, Blocks and Delusions on The Great Way</i><br>LEADER: KEN JONES   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES                  |
| ■ 24TH JULY – 30TH JULY          | <i>Beyond Meditation: Meaning in Koans</i><br>LEADER: JOHN CROOK   VENUE: HOLY ISLE, SCOTLAND                          |
| ■ 24TH AUGUST – 29TH AUGUST      | <i>Western Zen Retreat</i><br>LEADER: FIONA NUTTALL   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES  |
| ■ 9TH OCTOBER – 16TH OCTOBER     | <i>Huatou Retreat</i><br>LEADER: JOHN CROOK   VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES  |

## CHAN EVENTS OF INTEREST

■	13TH NOVEMBER – 14TH NOVEMBER 2010	<p><i>Two Day Retreat in Glastonbury</i></p> <p>LEADERS: NED REITER &amp; JAKE LYNE   GLASTONBURY            CONTACT: NED REITER – TEL: 01458 833663            EMAIL: info@glastonburychan.org</p>
■	17TH NOVEMBER – 21ST NOVEMBER 2010	<p><i>You Yourself Retreat</i></p> <p>LEADER: KEN JONES   VENUE: HOURNE FARM, E. SUSSEX            CONTACT: STUART MCLEOD – TEL: 01634 571659            EMAIL: s.i.mcleod@blueyonder.co.uk</p>
■	11 JUNE 2011	<p><i>Cambridge Day Retreat</i></p> <p>LEADERS: DAVID BROWN (CHAN MEDITATION)            HELEN STEPHENSON (CLASSICAL YOGA)   CAMBRIDGE            EMAIL: cambridgechan@westernchanfellowship.org            WEB: <a href="http://cambridge.westernchanfellowship.org">http://cambridge.westernchanfellowship.org</a></p>

Several other WCF groups organise additional events such as day retreats from time to time. Keep an eye on their web-pages at [www.westernchanfellowship.org/local-groups.html](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/local-groups.html)

## ADDITIONAL CHAN RETREATS

- *Simon Child will lead a Western Zen Retreat in New York, USA, October 15th – 20th 2010*
- *Simon Child will lead a Silent Illumination Retreat in New York, USA, November 20th – 27th 2010*
- *Hilary Richards will lead a retreat at Gaia House, UK, February 4th – 9th 2011*
- *John Crook and Simon Child will lead a Silent Illumination retreat in Poland, in May 2011*
- *Simon Child will lead a Western Zen Retreat in New York, USA, in October 2011*
- *John Crook and Simon Child will lead a Silent Illumination retreat in New York, USA, in November 2011*

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*is published and distributed by the Western Chan Fellowship [www.westernchanfellowship.org](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org)*  
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*Beyond Meditation:*  
MEANING IN KOANS

A RETREAT WITH JOHN CROOK

HOLY ISLE, SCOTLAND

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JULY 24<sup>TH</sup> – 30<sup>TH</sup> 2011

*If meditation becomes merely quietism, simply calming the mind, that is not Zen. Zen is perpetual enquiry into life – whatever it may present. While a degree of calming is usually essential for practice, the essence of this enquiry lies in exploring what lies beyond thought in order to place our everyday themes in the wider context of a universal understanding. From such a perspective we can develop a ‘world-view’ capable of facing the world crisis of today. This will be our task on this retreat. Our starting koan can be “Why did the Saint come to the Island?”*

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*Master! How can I understand enlightenment?*

*Have you had your breakfast?*

*Yes, Master.*

*Then perhaps you had better wash your bowl.*

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