

NEW CH'AN FORUM

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No. 21 Spring 2000

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Price: £2.50

ZEN CREATIVITY 2000

Zen entails the fullest expression of human creativity based in the meditative experience of life.

At the onset of the millennium we celebrate the creativity of Zen. Creativity comes in several forms, artistic, literary, intellectual-philosophical and in drama. This issue contains articles discussing Zen in poetry, the philosophy of enlightenment and Zen in the world of drama. These thoughtful presentations reveal the width of Zen's participation in life and the capacity within Buddha dharma for critical thought and reflection. We hope they will help broaden our readers engagement with Zen.

We are grateful to Adrian Cairns, C.T. Song and Ken Jones for sharing their thoughts with us. We need copy to sustain our journal. We welcome comments and original articles of your own. Please consider what you may have to say! Good wishes in the years to come.

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EDITORIAL FROM THE CH'AN HALL

Millennial Zen

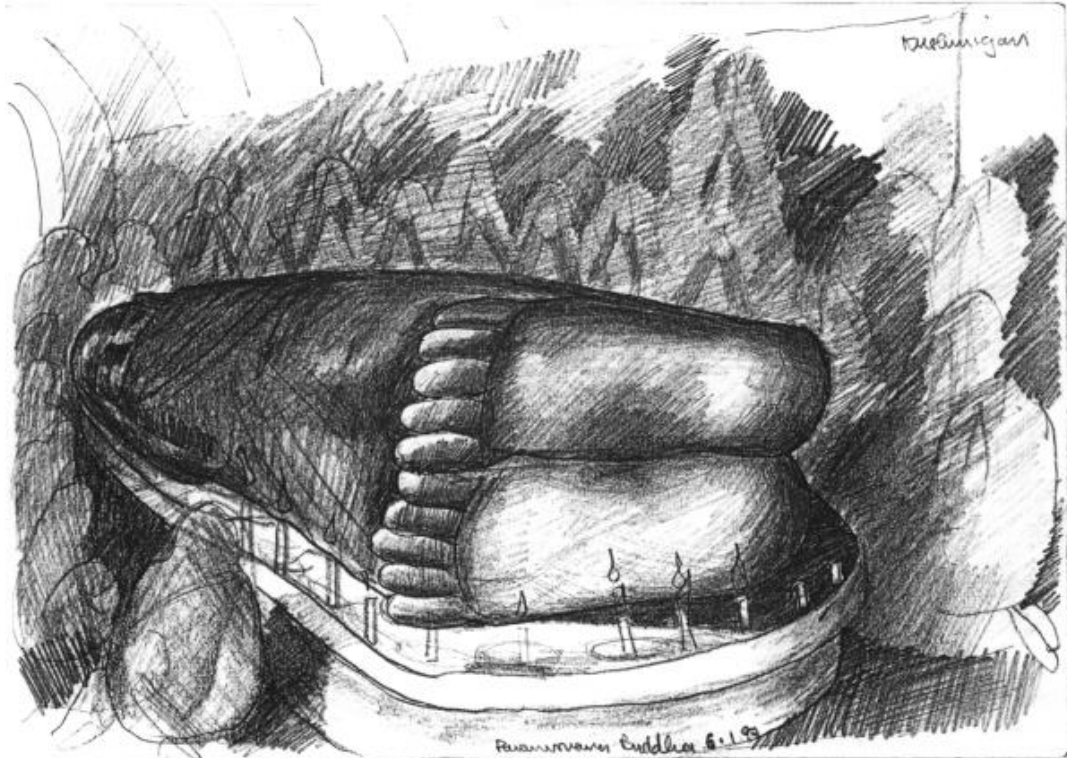
So the millennium came upon us. I cannot say I felt any excitement or anticipation. I was in fact distinctly underwhelmed. All Christmas some hundred people sat miserably bound and gagged in a shit-stinking aeroplane slowly freezing on an Afghani airfield, innocent Indians caught in the continuing inability of India and Pakistan to sort out their confusions over Kashmir. The Russian army, true to a reputation for brutality, destroys Grozny with excessive bombardment forgetting that even the heaviest bombing hardly ever produces the results expected. Against these tidings the glitz of fireworks on the Thames and the splendour of The Dome and the Eye seemed merely the trivia of capitalism's controversial successes. Probably only a few revellers consider what this 2000 years represents.

Two thousand years ago Jesus the Christ was born. We Westerners dispute his historicity, we treat God as dead, we are left with the ruminations of the Don Cupitts of this world doing their best with this century's loss of conventional Christian meanings. Underlying this is severe disorientation. With no external source of meaning, self-identity loses value. We are prone to subtle depressions from which we run as if from hell - into sexual hedonism, a crudity of humour that even lovers of ancient bawdy must disdain, the administration of 400 brands of psychotherapy and the nonsense of uprooted religious ethics carelessly grafted on unsuitable roots. Even so the cheerful energy of London swinging into the new millennium yet beguiles. There is a careless joy here, like a sort of fiddling while the stock exchange keeps rising.

The excitement of the crowd on the Embankment as Big Ben toiled towards midnight was a thrill. The immense crush of good-natured, friendly, Christmas-spirited people showed what human good will could comprehend. Around us were smiling faces of many nations, many cultures reminding us of the amazing mix that is now contemporary Britain. How to use this good will, this creativity for the good of us all? Here lies the deepest question.

The Millennium is like a baby. Babies are born in many circumstances but whether these are of comfort or dislocation the baby always needs first attention. Whatever our view of our time the Baby needs help, needs love, needs our care. As time runs forward, babies are born every minute. What is our responsibility to them? Perhaps one responsibility is to look again at what Christ said. There are deep parallels with Buddha's way, his existentialism; and the Dalai Lama himself has been looking over the similarities of these two great religions of compassion. The secret must lie in a re-evaluation of which the churches themselves seem incapable. We should do it. Who else?

Our extraordinary century, now ended, leaves us in a state never before experienced. A global integration of economics and information means that the whole planet is now networked into a mix of complex opportunities and risk that is totally new. On the one hand, the steady spread of democracy makes the possibility of world war increasingly remote, yet the likelihood of internal strife in unstable states more probable. The danger of some confrontation between the West and an authoritarian China that fails to moderate its flouting of human rights in Tibet and other minority regions increases rather than decreases with time. Yet, we have to remember that, in spite of a their discrete racial arrogance, the Chinese are not a people prone to war. The dangers of ever fewer transnational companies of immense ecopolitical power imposing their commercial wiles upon the planet without thought for the



benefit of the human race and indeed life on the planet as a whole, remain great but is at last being confronted- as the Monsanto affair and the events at Seattle have shown.

I have faith in the voice of people-power. Unfortunately the character of people power depends on people education. In many parts of the world it is an education in the meaning of global affairs that is lacking - witness Iran, witness Burundi, witness Afghanistan and what of Russia? - a country that needs to resolve an understandable and dangerous paranoia.

Zen means mindfulness of the everyday. The issues of our time concern us all - especially as lay practitioners who avoid the relatively unconcerned luxury of monasticism. We need to know clearly what we stand for - we need to have our definition of humanity and human needs always before us and informing our practices. While Buddhism is a 'refuge', it is also the basis for movement outwards into the world, the source of 'right livelihood'. We are not Prime Ministers or Presidents. We are ordinary members of the body politic and we need to get our values straight. For this reason buddhistic social criticism is an important aspect of our 'witness'.

Buddhism is not merely a source of togetherness in an alienating world, nor a source of comfort in a world lacking external meaning, it is a challenge to enquiry based on ancient insights and values that are demonstrably workable in our time. The koan of our time is to live from generated meanings that come from empirically verifiable experience in life. In a world of ethical confusion dominated by markets rather than persons this project becomes the enlightenment project of our time.

Ch'uan-Teng Chien-Ti
January 2000

MEETING SHI-FU

Master Sheng-yen

On retreat with Shi-fu many people have had encounters with him that must have surprised them. Shi-fu, too, encounters people who surprise him! The outcome of such meetings is often valuable. Sometimes when you meet a Buddha on the road it might be worthwhile seeing what he has to say before you kill him! At the beginning of a new Millennium let us see what happens when you bump into a Master. Of course all stories relate to the immediate context - and yet there is always more to say too. What is that? Here, from Shi-fu's own accounts, are a few such encounters for you to contemplate. (Ed)

Disturbances can happen even in the seeming quiet of the Ch'an hall. One woman who attends many retreats always wears a large shawl which she wraps around herself and which she takes with her wherever she goes. At the beginning of one retreat the woman sitting next to her became distressed by this behaviour. In interview she said she was afraid she would experience her retreat as a waste of time because this woman sitting in her shawl next to her seemed so disturbing to her. I said that it was part of practice to remain undisturbed by whatever went on around her and that she should use the retreat as a means to cultivate patience. At the end of the retreat this woman thanked the shawl wearer for wearing her irritating shawl because it had provided her with such a great opportunity for practice.

(Ch'an Magazine 17.3. p5)

A couple came to the last retreat. I told them I was going to seat them far apart so they would not be able to see one another. I informed them that they should not think about each other at all. Both of them replied "No problem. We have been married for many years and the last thing we want to do is to think about each other on retreat!"

It sounded promising but soon, during interview, the woman asked, "So how's my husband doing?" I answered. "Funny - your husband was asking the same question about you only a few minutes ago!" I am sure that many of you have already experienced spending entire periods pondering nonsense.

(Ch'an Magazine 17.3. p8)

On one retreat there were two women who used to massage each other during the work periods. While they respected the silence rule, they never the less signed to each other and slipped off to their room. On the third day one of them came to me.

"Shi-fu I can't take it any more! What have I got myself into? I'll never be able to sit well on this retreat?"

I said, "You do not have to do these things for her."

She answered, "Yes, I know, but when she comes to me begging for a massage I do not know how to get out of it." What would you do? Could you ignore a fellow practitioner in pain? For most of you such a situation could be very vexatious.

I said "This is a Ch'an retreat. It is not daily life. You must use the time wisely. You have come here to practice for seven days. That is your prime responsibility - your only concern."

Now these women were disobeying the rules. They should have been with everyone else during the work periods. You must all remember you are here to do a Ch'an retreat. If you are like the woman with a nagging back pain or any other such problem then you must come to me or one of the attendants. Such matters are our responsibility. We will then try to help you solve your difficulty.

(Ch'an Magazine 17.3. p6)

Practitioners may retire far off into the mountains where they think they can practice without making any discriminations. However such practitioners are still discriminating. They may feel apart from both good and bad and that they are liberated. But if they were truly liberated then it would not matter whether they were in the mountains or in the middle of a metropolis. They are discriminating between the characteristics they read into locations of practice.

Of course there are those who, on hearing this, might ask, "If this is true, why adopt the lifestyle of a practitioner at all? Why consider left-home practice at all? Why not live just as ordinary people do?" The answer is that there is more to being a left-home practitioner than just going on retreats.

Someone once asked me. "Shi-fu do you discriminate?"

I asked "What do you think?"

He said, "Yes, I think you do discriminate."

I replied "Yes. You are right but why do you think so?"

He answered, "If you were truly liberated then you would go to movies, eat meat, drink alcohol and wear ordinary clothes. You are attached to the role of being a monk and following precepts."

To this I said, "If I were to discard my robe and behave like you then I would lose my position as a monk. Just because you do whatever you wish does not mean you are freer than I. Does having fewer restrictions mean you make fewer distinctions? Why insist that I should be like you? If you are either attached to or bothered by the idea that I am a monk, that I do not eat meat, that I do not drink alcohol, and so on then, in fact, you make more distinctions than I do."

Those who are genuinely enlightened see no differences between monks and lay people. For example, drinking alcohol is considered an act of ignorance, but it is also regarded as a means of wisdom. In the Japanese Zen tradition it is in fact called "soup of wisdom!" Does this mean that ordinary people who drink will acquire wisdom? No, of course not. But for those who already have wisdom and do not discriminate, alcohol and wisdom are not separate, and in fact alcohol can be used as an expedient means to help others.

Ch'an practitioners who are enlightened may exhibit behaviour different from ordinary monks and nuns. They might even go to brothels, drink alcohol and eat meat. There have been such cases in Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese history. Genuinely enlightened people may look very rough and untidy and their actions are not constrained by formalities. But beware. Are you yet that enlightened?

(Ch'an Magazine 12.2. p3)

Of course, practitioners must still make distinctions. Without the ideas of samsara and nirvana, of vexation and wisdom, there would be no way to make the effort towards realisation. Yet, when one reaches the state of non-discrimination, both samsara and nirvana vanish, becoming part of yesterday's dream. Something that must be left behind or rejected cannot be real. Only that which can be neither lost nor gained is true reality. What this is you must discover for yourself.

(Ch'an Magazine 12.2. p4)

ONE THOUGHT FOR A THOUSAND YEARS: A Ch'an Hall meditation

John Crook

Out of the corner of my eye I catch a glimpse of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbharaja seated upon the offering table in the Ch'an hall. As usual his serene countenance glows quietly there. I take a closer look. His expression of peace and tranquillity begins to enter and then to flood my mind. Time becomes motionless yet the soft wind gently moves the branches beyond the window, the distant rustle of the stream goes on. I am once again amazed at the power of this little statue to induce so profound a shift in attention, in awareness.

Whoever carved this little figure seems to have been able to place his own inner equanimity in the carving of this face. The inner peace emerges again and again from this iconic expression and becomes transmissible to those sensitive enough to receive it. The Bodhisattva enters the problematique of our minds and shifts something there. Time falls still, it seems.

The statue may be seventeenth or eighteenth century or possibly not so old, the iconography is not unusual and there are many such carvings on the offering tables of Buddhists in China. I have seen many of them but in most of them the face, even if well carved, does not radiate anything special. The genius of this carver was to create an expression that penetrates. How? I do not know. Perhaps it is not true for everyone. I am eternally thankful that this little statue came my way and now adorns our Ch'an Hall.

But what is it telling me? Whenever I carry through this communion I have an opening to stillness, a falling out of time. My thoughts of past and future fade away and there I am on my cushion hearing the breeze, seeing sunshine or rain and aware of the tranquillity emanating from the figure before me. And a thought comes to my mind, a single line quotation from the Hsin Hsin Ming - "*one thought for a thousand years*"!

A thousand years ago, maybe someone had that thought. What was it? No-thought in fact. Simply the dropping into the present moment, the moment that being timeless has no past or future in it. It seems not to move. One seems to have entered the eternity of the present continuum. Outside time indeed lies eternity. But the Bodhisattva here is not *outside* of time, rather he is *within* the timeless moment *as it moves*, the continuity of the timeless moment as it flows like a leaf borne on the current of a river. The leaf is still, in itself it has no time, yet it flows on the current of time. It rides the wave of time like a motionless fly on the inside of a train window doing a hundred miles an hour. Surfing the wave of time the figure on the board is motionless, it is the wave that moves. The wave and the surfer are one and in unity they flow towards the shore.

The continuity of the present moment arises experientially only when one flows with time in time. This is what Dogen meant by "Being Time" in his wondrous fascicle 'Uji'. This is not the timeless outside time, the eternity in which time happens, a void that has no continuity. Rather this is the flow of the universe itself. To enter that timeless moment of flow, this continuous present, is the same whenever one may do it. Within a thousand years one may enter the same 'thought' again and again. There is only one moment flowing in the timeless present, a movement synonymous with the expanding edge of the universe itself. Only as the mind drops into past or contemplates the future is one outside this moment. Yet for us samsaric beings that is for most of our existence. We categorise time to make it so.

This moment is the only moment one ever has. It is the only real. To be outside the present is to have the mind engaged with the past that is dead or the future that has yet to come. Such a mind is not alive to the living present where it actually resides. As soon as the rider dismounts the moment is lost, the surfer is stranded on the bank of time, the continuity of the present flows on without him. He has lost nirvana and is back in samsara's threefold time.



Finding this moment is when Ch'an begins. All the rest is preparatory, stage setting for the moment, seeking a way to it. The preliminaries of Ch'an fill most of our life on or off the cushion. Only the one who surfs the wave of the timeless present knows the continuity of time, being time.

Our practice is rarely thus. The World Honoured One climbs the seat. He appears about to speak. Manjusri strikes the gavel and the World Honoured One descends from his seat. Nothing can be said in the timeless moment flowing with the river. One word and one falls back into the three times, their divisiveness, their apparent movement from birth to death. All of that indeed is death. Only on the ridge of the wave is life. And to say a word is to dismount.

We train in Ch'an to be able to enter this moment. There is no other. Ksitigarbharaja enters our world of the three times to bring us out as surfers. Only then does meditation begin. Only in that one thought for a thousand years does meditation deepen. The rest is preliminary. In entering that thought, that moment, one enters the same moment the carver knew as he carved this icon. No past, no future, simply the present continuity of the wave's crest moving always onwards as the universe itself evolves.

This is what Ch'an as a way, as a practice, is all about. This is why Bodhidharma said, "Direct seeing, no scriptures, no words". And why Hui-neng knew there was neither mirror bright nor stand and nowhere for the dust to alight.

Do not be mistaken about Ch'an. Most of what we do is merely preliminary, a clearing of undergrowth on the way to the beach to find a wave. Riding the steed of time, surfing the wave, flying in a thermal like an eagle: these metaphors point the way. Our koan is to turn such reflection into the continuity of the living moment, old yet ever young.

RIVER BLACKWATER

Sophie Temple-Muir

By the Blackwater
and the rush of the mill-race over the fall
where the wheel used to turn,
the scent is sweet, of water
stone and moss,
leaf-mould and laurel mixed
with the sound of the river chasing away time,
leaving eternity like a lost taste
discovered upon the tongue.

Light searches
grey and gold through the trees,
watches the water
lap along the dark bank.
Green ribbons of weed
drag under the surface
beside the speed of fish-backs
flashing into view
then vanishing.

Return after return
the treetops hold the sky
like the rim of a feather-soft bowl,
and it seems the sky remembers,
while the water continues
weaving amongst the roots:
friend of childhood, blood companion,
over hundreds of miles, your quietness
still sings through my bones.



ZEN AND THE ART OF HAIKU

Ken Jones

What is it about haiku that imparts that mysterious little whiff of insight, so difficult to describe and yet so strangely satisfying? I would like to offer some pointers from my experience as a long term Zen Buddhist for whom the Way of haiku has become a valued part of my practice.

Characteristically we endeavour to secure and console our fragile self-identity by processing, shaping and colouring the raw experience of existence. Even - or especially - in the face of discouraging external circumstances, our minds strive to maximise the 'feel good' factor both emotionally and intellectually, helped and amplified by a social culture which includes plenty of imaginative literature. The worst of this offers merely escape from who we really are; the best offers a sometimes magnificent creative and cathartic treatment of our existential evasion. However, as imaginative literature, it remains ultimately subjective in the sense used by R. H. Blyth as "the state of mind in which a man looks at the outside world, or at himself, as he would like it to be" The example he quotes from Byron would be hard to beat:

And Ardennes waves above them her green leaves,
Dewy with nature's tear-drops as they pass,
Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,
Over the unreturning brave.¹

For Buddhism our root unease originates in the countless and subtle ways in which we try to evade, by action, thought and emotion, the totally open experience of just how it is and how we are. Trying to make it otherwise has been described as a life-long lawsuit against reality, which we can never win. Spirituality itself, even Zen Buddhism, may be expropriated by the needy ego as the ultimate evasion. Here is a beautiful warning from the eighteenth century Zen Master Hakuin:

At the north window, icy draughts whistle through the cracks,
At the south pond, wild geese huddle in snowy reeds.
Above, the mountain moon is pinched thin with cold,
Freezing clouds threaten to plunge from the sky.
Buddhas might descend to this world by the thousands,
They couldn't add or subtract one thing.²

Ultimately the only effective remedy is, in Blake's words, to learn to "cleanse the doors of perception" and let reality flood in. As all the spiritual traditions affirm, this brings a sense of joy and release and an ability to live more fully and freely in the world - and in the moment. Zen is a school of Buddhism concerned with the cultivation of a profound down-to-earth awareness of this 'suchness', unmediated by doctrine or other concepts. Haiku are the most thoroughgoing expression of literary Zen. They are also one of the several meditative 'Ways' (like calligraphy and the minimal ink paintings, *zenga* and *haiga*) whose form both gives expression to insight and helps to deepen it. The 'haiku moment' is thus no less than a tiny flash of an ultimate reality which in fact is just what is under our noses. Haiku which most clearly embody 'suchness' as the ground of our being I shall, in the Blyth tradition, call 'Zen haiku' and it is with these that I am

particularly concerned. Exceptionally they may be quite didactic, like this from George Swede (which sums up the argument so far):

**After the search for meaning
bills in the mail**

Empty of self-need

It follows that haiku must spring from a mind open and unobstructed by any urge to make something of the reality that has come to the poet's attention. Those who go searching after haiku will find them shy and few and far between. Look for them and you will not find them.. Don't look for them, and they are not to be found. Of subjective meddling the 13th century Zen Master Dogen observed, "When the self withdraws the ten thousand things advance; when the self advances, the ten thousand things withdraw". And Basho advised: "When composing a verse let there not be a hair's breadth separating your mind from what you write; composition of a poem must be done in an instant, like a woodcutter felling a huge tree or a swordsman leaping at a dangerous enemy." ³

**Just washed
how chill
the white leeks!**

In Zen parlance there is no need to "put legs on the snake" - not even poetic metaphysical ones, as does Nicholas Virgilio:

**Lily:
out of the water
out of itself**

Similarly, Bruce Ross identifies a "tendency in the fourth generation of American haiku writers of the late seventies, eighties and early nineties unfortunately to frequently offer catchy moments of sensibility that often rely on obvious metaphoric figures. These American poets desire to create 'haiku moments'. But a subjective ego, call it sentiment or call it imagination, intrudes upon their perception of the object".⁴ Typical is the poem by Steve Sanfield quoted later in this paper in another context.

'How it is' doesn't come with meanings and explanations attached to give us the illusion of a more secure grip on it. Nor does it come tricked out with distracting embellishments. Allusive brevity is one invariable characteristic of the haiku form. We have an itch to add in order - as we fondly suppose - to clarify. Too much verbiage muffles the spark: the shorter the poem the more space for the reader.

The insight of the haiku moment is fresh, new-minted perception, though it may be so ordinarily expressed as to risk failing the "So What?" test unless the reader's reception is similarly attuned, as with Shiki:

**A single butterfly
fluttering and drifting
in the wind**

If haiku were no more than a reflection of how it is ("so what?") they would not engage our attention as they do. But they express how it is as experienced by a human being. Thus, in Martin Lucas's words, they are "open metaphors" for our human condition and resonate with that

condition. They offer a glancing opportunity, without the poetic prompting of another, to accept for ourselves how it is. Such pure acceptance has qualities of compassion, release, quiet joy, subtle humour. It is well known to the mystics, like Julian of Norwich: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well". However, as T S Eliot observed:

**For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight.⁵**

Haiku moments offer a little bit of existential therapy shared between writer and reader, a little bit of mutual compassion. For of all literary forms haiku are, in the current telltale slang, the least 'in your face'; they have the least 'attitude'. Indeed, they may leave us momentarily suspended in an emptiness which nevertheless feels authentic and moving, as with Shiki:

**The long night
a light passes along
the shoji (screen)**

At the other extreme the reader may just occasionally be prodded with a question, as in this example from Basho:

**In the dense mist
what is being shouted
between hill and boat?**

The sense of metaphor may be particularly strong when the poet has his own feelings in mind.. In this example, old age is deeply felt by Shiseki. He acknowledges the self-pity that comes with it, but he does not massage this feeling with the any expressions of consolation:

**My old thighs
how thin
by firelight**

However, these 'open metaphors' retain their power only so long as readers leave them open and do not hasten to fill them with their own meanings. R. H. Blyth warns: "Where Basho is at his greatest is where he seems most insignificant, the neck of a firefly, hailstones in the sun, the chirp of an insect ... these are full of meaning, interest, value, that is, poetry, but not as symbols of the Infinite, not as types of Eternity, but in themselves. Their meaning is just as direct, as clear, as unmistakable, as complete and perfect, as devoid of reference to other things, as dipping the hand suddenly into boiling water."⁶

Traditionally, haiku poets have taken nature as their subject matter, as being more contemplatively accessible. Presumably human goings-on were assumed to be more likely to excite the poet's impulse to comment. But this is not necessarily so, as Jim Norton demonstrates below. Zen is commonplace: the ordinary is extraordinary when we are jolted out of our habitual selves; there is no need to hype it up. So it is with Jim Norton in a Dublin tenement:

What blue! through my dirty lace curtain April night	Coughing and the stranger upstairs coughs, too
---	---

But when nature turns dramatic only the best haiku poets can both express the drama and retain the haiku spirit without tipping over into subjective melodrama. In such highly tuned haiku the translator also will be put to the test. Here are two examples from Basho, translated by Lucien Stryk,⁷ with all the dramatic down-to-earth energy of Zen:

Mogami river, yanking
the burning sky
into the sea

Shrieking plovers
calling darkness
around Hoshizaki Cape

Varieties of awareness

Undistorted by self-need, reality displays characteristics of transience and insubstantiality which, deeply experienced (as at moments of lifetime crisis) may feel very threatening. Meditation enables a gradually prepared opening to them and joyful release from the lifetime effort of denying them at a deep existential level. When “how it is” (‘suchness’, *sono-mama*) is ‘empty’ of the weight of self-need we feel a sense of release, of lightness of spirit. This is the *karumi* experienced in miniature in haiku, many of which give little intimations of this ‘emptiness’. In some instances it may move us very deeply: *yugen* - profound awareness to which we cannot put words. In Japanese culture certain mood responses, of elusive and overlapping meaning, have been identified. Unless appreciated in the spiritual context of Zen these easily become no more than haiku conventions or ‘values’, or Japanese mannerisms. “Willow pattern haiku”, haiku *à la Japonaise*, may result. Thus Bruce Ross refers to “the stylistically self-conscious underscoring of Zen-like experiences” to be found in many contemporary American haiku poets.⁸

Sabi is an acceptance of the ‘emptiness’, insubstantiality and vulnerability of phenomena (including oneself). But it is an acceptance coloured with a gentle, compassionate sadness, a delicate frisson, and not of stoic indifference. In Brian Tasker’s words, “*Sabi* is a kind of pure and sublime melancholy and detached emotion which is not received in a self-centred way but simply honoured for what it is - a symptom of the human condition ... *Sabi* is the existential aloneness that can only be resolved by acknowledging its inevitability coupled with the joy and gratitude that can arise from its acceptance.”⁹ Consider the following haunting example from Basho (loneliness, deserted, aged, wild):

The loneliness
of this deserted mountain
the aged farmer
digging wild potatoes

On more superficial view *sabi* can refer to anything that is old, worn, tranquil, mellow and dignified. Like the other haiku ‘moods’, in the absence of real insight it can all too easily lend itself to tired and well worn ‘oriental’ haiku.

Wabi essentially denotes respect for the ordinary, the commonplace as opposed to the sensational. Simplicity, restraint, austerity are related meanings, with “rustic solitude” as a rather more mannered expression. Here is a nice contemporary example from Garry Hotham:

Coffee
in a paper cup -
far from home

When the self withdraws its confirming sharpness and specificity of perception it leaves space for a more subtle, subdued, low key beauty to manifest. This is *shibui*, as in the following from Martin Lucas (silent, white, empty):

First darkness of dusk
silently a white owl
flies in the empty lane

Aware is the mood of transience, defined by Makoto Ueda as “sadness or melancholy arising from a deep, empathetic appreciation of the ephemeral beauty manifested in nature, human life, or a work of art”.¹⁰ It commonly translates as a nostalgic sadness connected with autumn, as with Marlene Mountain:

Faded flowers on the bed sheet
autumn night

Finally, another noteworthy haiku mood is surely that of understated humour, sometimes black or tinged with irony. It typically arises when one of our cherished delusions impacts with reality in the one haiku. Alexis Rotella has many delightful examples:

Undressed -
today's role dangles
from a metal hanger

The Zen of the cutting line

The majority of haiku achieve their main effect through a device called “the cutting line” or “eye opener”. Some Zen preliminaries may help us to understand more profoundly how this device works. In order to free their students from the conventional self-assuring perceptual patterns, Zen teachers commonly resort to mutually contradictory words and phrases: iron women give birth; the sun rises at midnight, or, in this verse by the 15th c. Master Ikkyu:

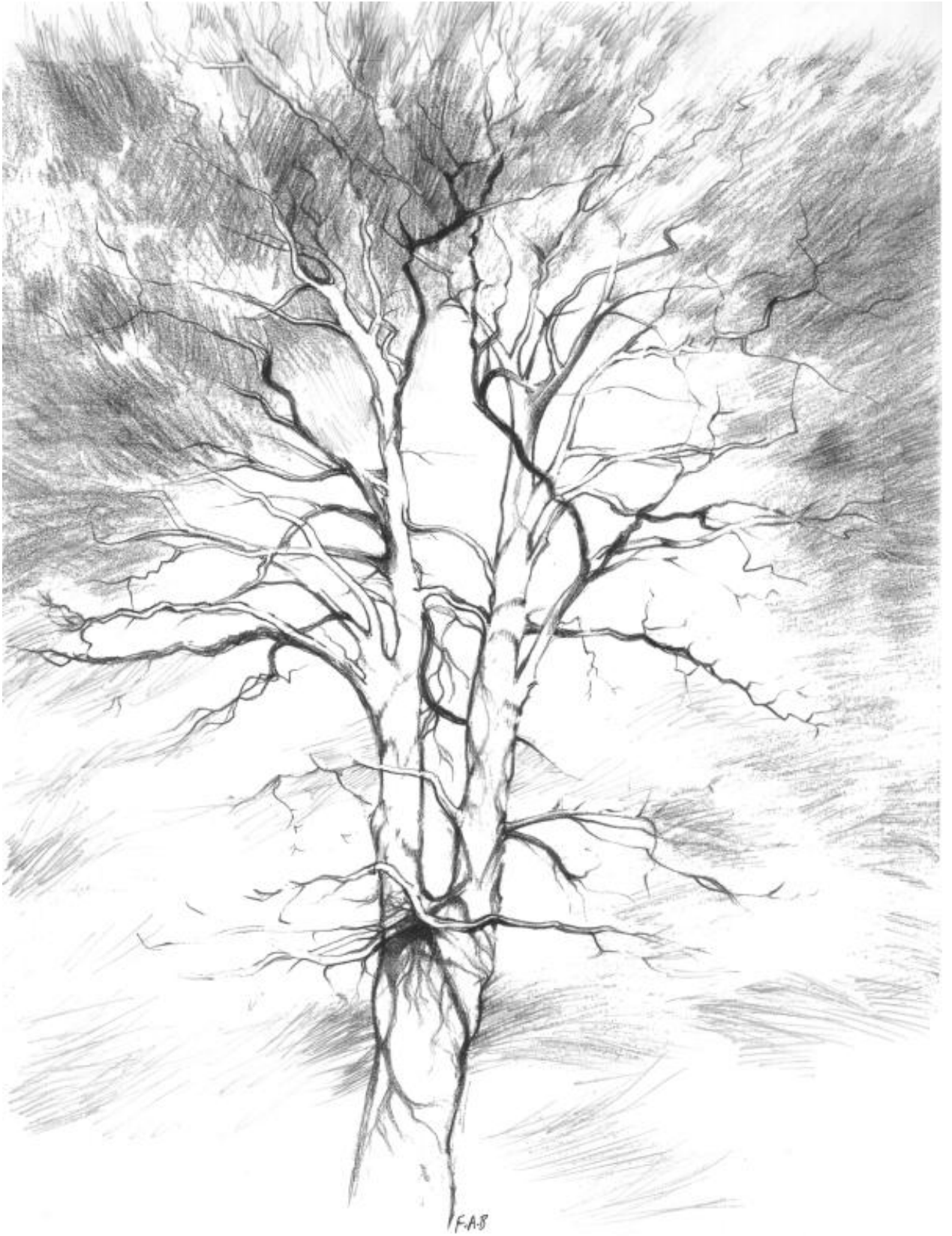
Hearing a crow with no mouth
cry in the darkness of the night
I feel a longing for
my father before he was born.¹¹

So characteristic of all spirituality, paradox is only baffling, only paradoxical, to a mind unable to step out of a logically structured world of *this* defining *that*. In all spiritual traditions, what is is the same as what is not; one thing is all things and all things are one thing:

The infinitely small is as large as the infinitely great
when boundaries and distinctions are forgotten;
The infinitely large is as small as the infinitely minute
when its outlines are not seen by any eye. ¹²

There is all the solidity of the world of form in “a wooden hen sits on a coffin warming an egg” (Hakuin again). But it is empty of ‘sense’ - ‘pure nonsense’ - in that the self cannot confirm the self by making any sense of it. In Buddhist terminology, form is in fact ‘empty’ - of the order, solidity and permanence we need to attribute to it. But, paradoxically, it is also more real and factitious than the many ways in which we dress it up to escape its sharp edges. Ikkyu explains:

A well nobody dug filled with no water
ripples and a shapeless, weightless man drinks¹³



In Buddhist terminology, the power of Zen haiku lies in their embodiment of form-and-emptiness. The best of them come to us out of the moment in an insight so right, yet so beyond our ordinary habitual perception, as to dumbfound us. We find ourselves saying more than we mean and more than we know.

Two lines set the scene and a third, cutting line throws them out of gear by switching attention to a different perception, sparking across the gap between the phrases and momentarily illuminating the whole poem in a fresh light. Our customary - and solidified - perceptual associations are fractured. Self momentarily loses its foothold. Selfless space (emptiness) opens for an instant of naked clarity. We have been caught off balance. Trying to figure it out is like figuring out a joke: we miss the point. Occasionally the cutting line is wholly contradictory. Thus Sodo (1641-1715) says:

**In my hut this spring
there is nothing -
there is everything¹⁴**

However, haiku are usually more subtle, insinuating - and accessible - in their none-sense, as in this from Yamei:

**In one shrill cry
the pheasant has swallowed
the broad field¹⁴**

It would be possible (though probably not very useful) to attempt a classification of different uses of the cutting line. There is, for example, the double cutting line, where the second line magicks the third into being as a throwback illumination of the first. R. H. Blyth (in a different connection) quotes Kikaku:

**The beggar wears
Heaven and Earth
as his summer clothes¹⁴**

The cutting line provides a ready, specific device in haiku making and lends itself to the cleverness of what I call 'artful haiku' which lie at the opposite end of a continuum from 'insightful haiku'. This doesn't make them 'better' or 'worse', even as a genre, let alone individually. Most haikai probably write and enjoy both. Good 'artful haiku' can be quite clever at tweaking our fancy - and a bit more as in this one by Steve Sanfield:

**Sleep on the couch she says
cutting his fantasies
in two**

Altogether different is the distinction I would like to make between 'broad' and 'narrow' ends of the spectrum of insightful haiku. The broader profoundly illuminate our whole human condition, and are what I have specifically in mind as 'Zen haiku'; the narrower do so in a more limited and specific way. However the use of the words broad and narrow is not intended to refer to the quality of the haiku. Zen haiku are not necessarily good haiku. Here are two examples, broad (about the shortness..., and yet... of life) and narrow (about the tedium of matrimony), from Buson and Issa respectively:

In a short life
an hour of leisure
this autumn evening

Those two tired dolls
in the corner there - ah yes,
they are man and wife

Note that although Issa's is the narrow one it is more than merely 'artful'. The man and wife are dolls: the metaphor is open ...

Finally, there is a Zen perspective on the optimum conditions for the making of haiku. Two conditions seem to be needful. First there is the priming and internalising of the form - getting into haiku mood and haiku mode. Hearing or reading haiku, and particularly sharing in a group, are valuable in this respect. For presumed contemplatives, haijin have usually been a sociable lot. Secondly, and more important, is opening to a contemplative state of mind.

My own experience of solitary meditation retreats of a week or more may be of interest here. The meditation I use is that of 'bare awareness' (*shikantaza*), in which the mind is a mirror, not a lens. Whatever comes up is simply observed, without mental comment, and dissolves like a bubble. After some practice the mind becomes still for quite long periods. This transparency carries over from the meditation periods. Primed with 'dry' haiku (through reading) it translates into haiku 'readiness'. I am far from being either a gifted meditator or haiku poet, and it is usually not until the second or third day that haiku begin to flow freely.

For company
an empty chair

Bruce Ross has argued that the writing of "the fourth generation of American and Canadian haiku poets ... attests to the presiding importance of Japanese haiku values to the haiku form as a whole."¹⁵ Some awareness of the Zen Buddhist tradition underlying those values can be helpful. This is not a matter of taking on board some oriental philosophy or modelling classic Zen haiku; quite the contrary. Zen would condemn that, again, as "adding legs to a snake". It is rather a deepening of contemplative sensibility that is at the heart of the matter ...

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GREEN BUDS

Luan Dinh 1999

Footsteps echo all around
Dewdrops on the spiders web
How many times will I not arrive
Not coming I come home.

Lost in the jungle of time
Tracks forever changing
Shifting lands wreak havoc
Monkeys forever swinging.

Time is a master of illusion
The illusion is only change
The ruler is neither straight nor bent
A race without conclusion.

Everyday I dream when I awake
An actor on the stage of life
Playing my small and weary part
forgetting I am the great play.

The red rose glistens with rain
Tears of nature moisten leaves
Each petal reveals its secret
Our blood floods the world.

Swept away by tides
Shores are always shifting
Sun and moon cycles
Waves that never break.

The blast of wind
Eye of the storm
Still in motion
The lake is clear.

Freshly cut spring
The grass so green
The smell of life
Forever young.

Crispy curled
A dried up cocoon
A shade of red
The smell of Autumn.

From inside to out
Where is the mirror?
How bright the stars
Empty of space.

Bring forth your might
Wash the sky white
The stain of wet ink
Blemish your tongue.

Wisdom has emptied
Heavy the fruits
The scent of compost
the calling of spring.

A drop in the ocean
A rainbow in the sky
A lifetime of travel
Searching for home.

THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

As revealed by a simple mathematical equation:

A merging of science and religions

C.T. Song

Since the beginning of history mankind has been searching for the ultimate truth about our existence and the nature of the universe; theologians in the spiritual world and scientists in the physical world. However, because of the separation of time and space, different religions and scientific theories evolved. As with everything else in this world, they are never static through the passage of time. The author of this article attempts to overcome this barrier by using a universal language that transcends time and space to explain human nature and the path of enlightenment. Thus I conceived a simple mathematical formula from which a graphical picture followed.

Scientific theories like quantum physics and Einstein's General Theory of Relativity ($E=mc^2$) govern respectively the physical world on a micro and macro scale. Similarly, a formula can be postulated to express human nature on a spiritual level. Since human nature cannot be quantified, the formula discussed in detail below only tries to correlate the relationship of three of the many different aspects of human qualities. Its purpose is to show where we are on our path to enlightenment.

Let us assume the following:

Let $W =$ Wisdom

$I =$ Intelligence or IQ

$E =$ Ego

Here Wisdom is taken to mean the degree of enlightenment. Intelligence represents the ability to learn and understand. Ego is the self of an individual person, the conscious subject. Egotism means conceitedness, self-importance and vanity.

The relationship among the three can be expressed in a simple formula:

$$W = I / E$$

We can derive from the equation that Wisdom is directly proportional to Intelligence but inversely proportional to Ego. We have to make a further assumption that both W and E can be either positive or negative but Intelligence (I) can only be positive because we all know the lowest IQ achievable is zero. When we plot this equation into a graph with I / E along the x-axis and W along the y-axis, we get the following graph (Diagram 1):

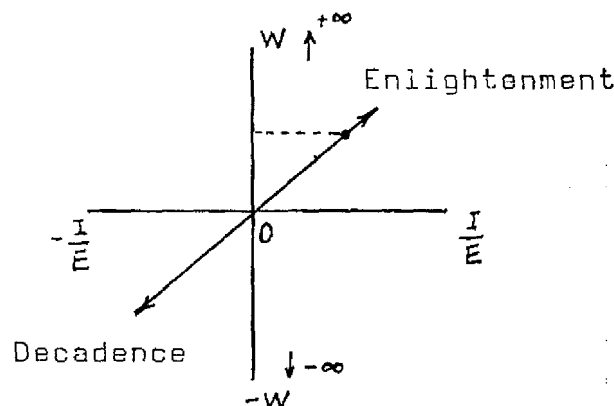


Diagram 1

When we increase I or reduce E, the value of W increases proportionally as expected. Now the value of I is arguably finite because of the limited intelligence of human race. We may also observe that wisdom W may lie above or below the horizontal axis depending on whether the value E is positive or negative. Positive wisdom leads to enlightenment and negative wisdom to decadence. It is obvious that selflessness (E decreasing) leads to the positive, and selfishness (E increasing) the negative, areas of the graph respectively.

Now an interesting phenomena occurs when $E = 0$. In arithmetic when a number is divided by zero, its quotient becomes infinity. This implies that our wisdom approaches infinity as we forsake our ego. Whether we may or may not reach infinite wisdom is subject to argument. Christians claim only God has infinite wisdom and in Buddhism it is the state of Nirvana achieved by Buddha. On the other hand we become possessed by the devil if we are totally engulfed by our ego. Our positions on the line depend on the state of our mind at that particular moment. The degree of enlightenment is the horizontal projection of that point on the vertical axis, lying somewhere between the two extremes. A corollary of this theorem is that a person need not be well educated to become enlightened provided that he is completely selfless.

Good and evil, as can be seen from the above graph, are essentially two sides of the same coin. Human beings are born with both qualities existing side by side. The coexistence of the two may be illustrated by a physical analogy. Assuming our individual soul as represented by a sealed glass bottle containing water and suspended impurities, it is logical to believe that as we are equally endowed by our creator there are no differences in both the quantity or quality of the contents for each individual. Water symbolises purity and the suspended particles evil. Let us further suppose the particles are pure carbon powder. When the bottle is agitated, the contents of the bottle become murky. This is analogous to a muddle-minded person who fails to see things clearly. As the bottle lies motionless for a longer period, the process of sedimentation starts to take place. Eventually the suspended carbon powder will settle down at the bottom and the clarity of the water is resumed. Should the fine particles of carbon be compressed to form larger lumps, it would take less time to settle down. This is analogous to elevating our souls to a higher level of awareness. Suppose the carbon particles were subject to sufficiently high temperate and pressure, a transformation of the molecular structure begins to take place. The result is a crystalline substance known as diamond. The basic elements in the sealed bottle have not been changed. It does not matter how vigorously the bottle is being shaken, the water always remains clear. Instead of the amorphous black carbon particles that cloud the water, the sparkle of the diamond adds beauty to it. This represents the ultimate goal of our achievement. Thus, by dissociating our minds from external disturbances and achieving inner peace, we develop wisdom that will take us one level higher in the long journey to enlightenment. Have we not all noticed that inspiration only comes when our minds are still?

The above formula is the simplest form giving rise to a straight line graph which in mathematics is called a linear equation. To express the complicated relationship of the three variables as they are known, a more general equation can be derived as follows:

$$W = \text{Function}(I / E)$$

where this function could take any form that makes sense. Without delving into the detailed mathematical discussion of this equation, we will explore its implication which is the subject of this article. Depending on the formula, a series of curves could be drawn as shown in Diagram 2; each path could be represented by a particular religious belief. The ultimate goal of each is the same but the paths they take may vary. But not necessarily all religious beliefs lead to enlightenment. Line 3 in the diagram obviously does not. This formula makes no attempt to point out which path one must take to achieve spiritual enlightenment. In actual

fact there is no fixed path as truth is never a static object that can be pursued methodically or represented as a point on the graph where one can draw a line through it. In other words, there is no formula to enlightenment. Truth manifests itself without any effort on our part only when our ego disappears entirely. The harder we consciously try, the further away we are from it, because a striving mind can never be quiet and only a quiet mind can see the truth. This formula nevertheless provides a fresh approach to the understanding of human nature and points to a correct mental attitude that we should all adopt no matter what our religious belief. The crucial point to remember is that it is not what we believe but how we behave.

To explore this formula further, we realise that letting E to represent human 'self' is oversimplified. The entity 'self' has two inseparable components, viz. a positive part and a negative part like two sides of the same coin. Even the most dangerous criminals have moments of kindness. Let us represent the former by E(+) and the latter by E(-). We may call them True or Higher Self and Egotism or Lesser Self respectively. Then E can be expressed by the equation: $E = E(-)/E(+)$.

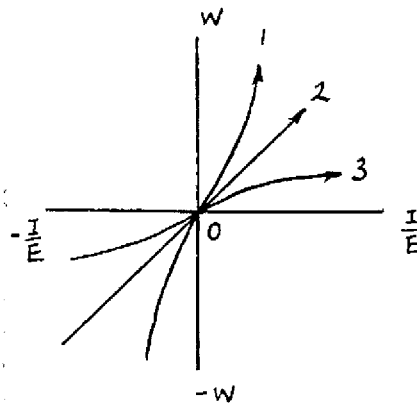


Diagram 2

We may test the validity of this equation by letting $E(-) = 0$. E therefore equals to zero and from the first formula wisdom becomes infinity. Similarly if $E(+)$ becomes infinity, we arrive at the same answer. We may conclude that there are two ways to reach enlightenment, viz. either we reduce our egotism to zero or allow our higher self to expand to infinity which is equivalent to letting our love encompass the whole universe. The former is a form of total surrender to infinite intelligence and the latter equals the compassion of Jesus or Buddha. In Buddhism these are represented by the two schools, Hinayana (or Theravada) and Mahayana, respectively.

Now, what is the consequence of letting $E(+)$ equal zero? It is not difficult to find out that this is the central point in the above graph where there is no differentiation between the positive or the negative, the good or the evil, Heaven or Hell. These concepts are relative and exist only in the world of duality; but in the world of absolute they have no place because it embodies everything and nothing. Some scientists may call this the Unified Field or in Buddhism, a unity that is simultaneously full and empty. Does this not imply that when our higher self surrenders itself completely, we become one with the universe?

It will be interesting at this point to explore Christianity and Buddhism in greater depth. The view expressed here may be controversial but if we keep an open mind and perceive it merely as an insight of another mortal being, we will not fall into the trap of passing a judgement (at which point the self takes over) because there is no right or wrong answer. Having set the ground for our discussion, we may postulate that a Super Intelligence occupies the central point of the graph where we define it as All That Is and All That is Not. In Christianity we call it God and in Buddhism Nirvana. Separately, individual souls are fractions of God (or

His children as some may prefer to call them), when merged into one we become indistinguishable from God. The sum total of our individual intelligence is the infinite intelligence of God. Scientifically this is also true as the universe is nothing but energy and information (or intelligence).

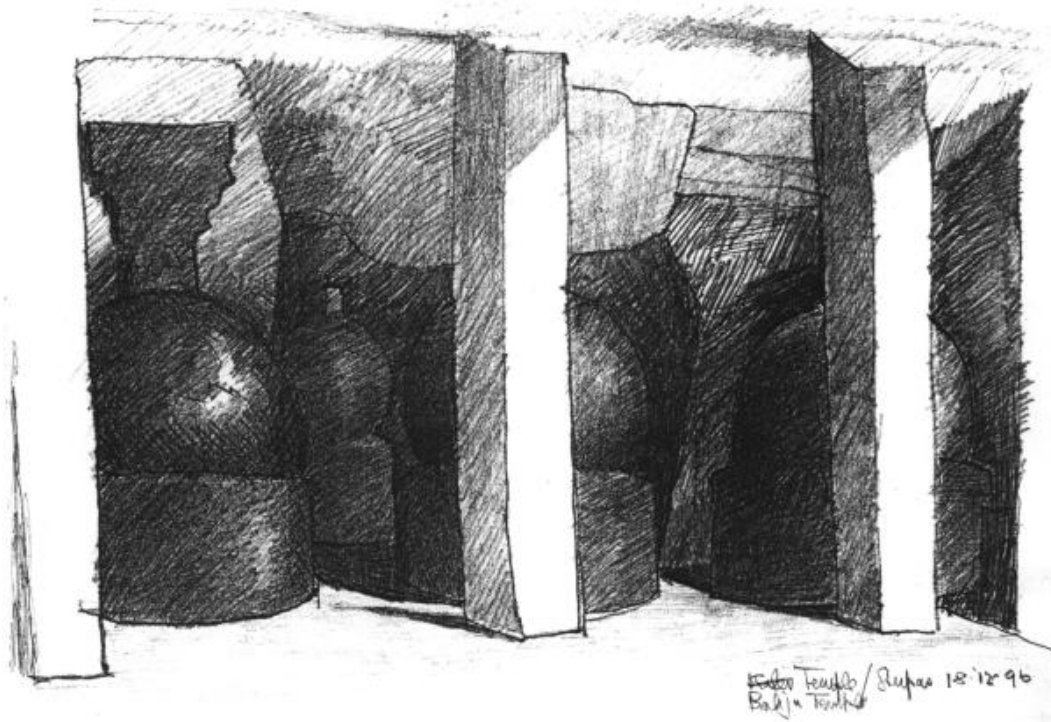
Although Buddhism never discusses a creator because any such being would be beyond our comprehension, this idea of a Super Intelligence with no identity does not go against Buddhist teaching. According to Buddhism, the Lord Buddha is only our teacher and all sentient beings are capable of arriving at the same achievement as the Buddha because they are born with the same virtues as he. Enlightenment is nothing more than the rediscovery of ourselves. Irrespective of our different religious beliefs, when all the enlightened souls surrender their identities, we arrive at the same point. Jesus and Buddha are simply two of the outstanding messengers of this Super Intelligence and the best teachers that we ever had.

The above leads to an interesting observation. There is a parallel between the spiritual and material world as mentioned in the second paragraph of this article. The equivalent of Karma is the Law of Action & Reaction in physics. This is not surprising because they are all forms of energy vibrating at different frequencies. Astronomers have discovered that the universe (the visible material world) is expanding since the Big Bang and may eventually contract to its original state after the expanding energy is dissipated. This is the grand Cosmic Cycle and according to Buddhism, the cycle of creation and destruction has no beginning and end. Strictly speaking, matter and energy are never created or destroyed. They only change from one form to another. Impermanence is what the Buddha taught. The same could be said about the spiritual world - a Spiritual Big Bang. All souls (including extra-terrestrial) originate from the same source and will return to the same source. In other words, we are all one, i.e. all in one and one in all. If we harm another, we inevitably harm ourselves.

The underlying message of this equation is that in material pursuit and physical survival, we have to rely on our brain, but in spiritual enlightenment we must let our heart lead. We can never expect to reach infinite intelligence consciously by learning but it is within our capacity to reduce our ego. In this inward journey, we can only be guided by our own light and take the actual steps ourselves rather than indulging in intellectual discussion. Spiritual evolution is simply our conscious self taking a step closer to that super consciousness and for this we need constant awareness. With this in mind, the reader should discard this equation once it has served its purpose, for knowledge can be a hindrance and we must not let it become our crutch. It is like seeing a finger pointing to the moon. We should look in the direction it is pointing and not focus our attention on the finger itself. In walking along this path to enlightenment there is neither beginning nor final destination but only direction. The formula merely serves as a spiritual compass for our guidance.

Knowing the direction but without taking any action leads us nowhere. It is said that we reap what we sow and the first thought that enters our mind, whether consciously or unconsciously, results in what we experience. In our life on this planet the process from conception to experience may be instantaneous or take an entire lifetime (or several lifetimes if one believes in reincarnation). What then should we be aware of when the first seed is planted? We learned that it is our ego that prevents us from enlightenment. So an understanding of the self should be the first step.

We are nothing but a life-time collection of experiences stored in our memory. Both experience and memory are time-related. We must therefore understand what time is. In this world of ours we define time as the revolution of the earth on its own axis and around the sun, i.e. for a body to move from one position in space to another. This is physical time applicable to us on earth and is meaningless to someone from outer space. A second way to define time is that which links our previous thought to our next thought. This is our psychological time. Our memory is a collection of thoughts which is psychological time itself. It follows that the



self is a product of time defined as such. The present is simply psychological time standing still; the here and now.

A person living in his past memory or in the illusion of the future is confined by his own ego. Truth as we know is independent of time and when there is ego, the person cannot see the truth. Any action motivated by ego bears no desired fruit. This is why the first thought that arises in our mind is so important. The first seed could be planted consciously in our mind by ourselves and we will be solely responsible for the fruit that we reap. Unfortunately our consciousnesses are interwoven in a complex matrix and the seed that is planted could be affected by our collective consciousness. In which case we will be wondering what we received may not be what we deserve.

An enlightened person is aware of raising his own consciousness above that of the collective. This awareness is what enlightenment is all about. Aware but without choice and conscious effort to achieve, pointed out by J. Krishnamurti. Otherwise, it implies a division between the self and what is to be chosen and achieved. Division inevitably leads to separation and conflict. The return to Oneness, as illustrated by the graph, is the elimination of the self. To arrive at this point, our mind must be in a constant state of meditation. This should not be misinterpreted as taking a sitting pose and thinking about nothing. When psychological time stands still as in meditation, ego disappears. Therefore living in the here and now is the simplest way to face reality without looking through coloured glasses tinted by our pride or prejudice and be on the way to a higher level of spiritual evolution.

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APRIL SHOWERS

JHC

Everybody's back
everyone is singing
willow warbler, chiff chaff
flycatchers, redstart
and even the cuckoo too.

Hares are running in the April showers,
the brook churns rounded stones
downhill, shafts of sunlight
crafting the green-grass view
late daffodils bent by an Easter snow.

Deep clouds obscure the moon,
it's chilly yet in the old hills
and hearth light glows warmly in the coals,
lamplight falling in yellow pools
the open book mirrors words in silence.

ZEN AND THE ART OF ACTING

Adrian Cairns

As a philosophy which is in effect a way of life. Zen has offered insights into most aspects of human activity from the martial arts to motorcycle maintenance. Here. Adrian Cairns, formerly associate principal of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in Bristol, analyses the ways in which, despite their widely different origins, development, and purposes, the tenets of an Eastern philosophy actually mesh with the principles common to most western styles of acting.

In this century, much effort has been spent by great teachers¹ in a search for a discipline of mind and body which would serve the actor in pursuit of his art and craft. Their analyses and exercises have often come up with findings and procedures closely resembling those of the masters of the ancient philosophy. It is my purpose here to examine a little of this interesting relationship by considering some of the actor's ways and means in relation to a few tenets of Soto Zen. The tenets are drawn from the informal talks of Shunryu Suzuki.²

Zen, and Japanese Soto Zen in particular, offers instructions for 'a way of life', a manner of existence, a behaviour, which happens also to adumbrate the requirements for training an actor in the techniques of simulation. Zen, as a philosophy and procedure, may be appropriately used in the 'doing' of anything, from archery and painting to flower-arrangement and motor-cycle maintenance; so it is not surprising that it applies so closely to personal expression in acting. Drama, of course, by a linguistic subtlety known best to Greek scholars, means a thing performed, as when ritual became theatrical art - the *dromenon* itself (a thing done, or being done, a rite). The actor's *raison d'être* is to engage in the preparation for, and the performance of, this 'thing' called a play - which in Zen is "life".

A Zen School is something like a rehearsal for life, a way to be taken onto the stage of the world outside. For the monk with a vocation, the rehearsal itself may become the way, the induced 'state of being' permanently repeating the action which is 'non-action', desiring nothing further than the given pattern of self-less existence in a monastery. The actor in his vocation, too, often may prefer the rehearsal process to the actual performance in public. Peter Brook once commented that his famous production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was never more satisfying than on a semi-private occasion when performed especially for some children.

Soto Zen is mainly concerned with 'just sitting', a form of meditation known as *zazen*. As in acting, *zazen* entails directing one's attention. The actor commits his train of thought to the business in hand, interpreting his script and simulating the 'life' for which it asks. The object of *zazen* is simply 'to be'; and simply 'to be' on-stage, in character, with nothing to block or detract from the realisation of that character, is the object of acting.

Acting has in common with meditation the image that it walks a knife-edge between spontaneity and control. The actor's split attention, the means by which he plays being a character at the same time as watching himself do so, is analogous to our own character — our life-role, our subjective consciousness — being watched by that part of our mind, our objective consciousness, which sees it 'on-stage', as it were, in the theatre of the world. The Zen comment on this is that true mind is watching mind.³

There is a quality of directness in both the right conduct of life and the right acting of a character on-stage which leaves nothing uncertain or tentative. As the saying goes, right thinking leaves no shadow:⁴ that is, it has no accretion of separate notions and irrelevant connections which might confuse its true shape. Both right acting and right living communicate by means of an uncluttered demonstration. They both use only the essential actions and words. Zen calligraphy and painting, in a similar way, prepare for the quintessential stroke, the statement which is already liberated from mind and hand, which already 'exists' in the instant of execution when thought and muscle act together. And so it is with the expert player interpreting his role.

Metaphysical explanations of human nature are not the point.⁵ They are not relevant for the actor, who has to think *as* his character, not *about* him, while he is playing him. It is for the audience to

observe the character in its larger context, if they wish. Indeed, it is for their profit to do so, for they may then recognise the cause of some tragic or unnecessary conflict in the play as coming from some fixed, one-sided idea in the mind and life of the character, which they can then more readily recognise when similar conflicts may be trapping themselves or others in the real world.

Most western acting in our age is behavioural: that is, it is meant to give the illusion of life observed through the keyhole, the 'fourth wall' of the average set, or the mirror-window of television. Actually, of course, there is nothing 'natural' about behavioural acting. It is just as technical in performance as opera or old-fashioned melodrama; which is why amateur behaviourist acting can sometimes be such an agony of false pretension. Yet, for a plant or a stone to be 'natural' is no problem. Why, then, should the human being, the actor, often find it difficult to reproduce the illusion?

The special human quality of self-consciousness would seem to contain the answer; and the resolving of the problem is achieved by taking the consciousness away from the self and placing it (that is, giving attention) somewhere else. In meditation, the attention may be on the breath, or in the hands and other parts of the body, or it may be focused on some object outside the body. In action, it will be given to the muscular business in hand. In everyday life, it may be given to the consideration of others and their problems rather than to one's own welfare.

For the actor, the secret lies in the handing-over of oneself to the character being played. It involves a giving of the self rather than a hiding of the self, it is to be private in public; and sometimes there is such happiness experienced in the process — at least in recollection — that life inside the theatre seems more real than life outside. Likewise, in the 'sitting meditation' there can be more reality experienced than in the most frenetic achievements of an everyday life.

Nature takes her time. To achieve the benefits of meditation, we have to co-operate with nature; we have to take it easy, relax, and give our feelings, our sensitivities, a chance to take root in the essence of our being. That is also what the actor has to try and do in rehearsing his character, and indeed, each time he performs.

In Zen philosophy, a work of art is considered not so much as representing nature as being a work of nature itself. The very technique of Zen art is artlessness, or the 'controlled accident'.⁶ This is also the paradoxical difficulty in the art of acting — that the harder you try, the more technical effort expended, very often the worse the result. Most great acting looks so easy, almost effortless. It is, of course, the art which conceals art, like the master water-colourist who lays such few and simple washes to achieve a complex effect.

What is essential is the judgement and experience which can recognise difficulties before they arise and which silently precede the simple act of execution. Real difficulty is when you don't know there is a difficulty.⁷ Moreover, 'the secret lies in knowing how to balance form with emptiness and, above all, in knowing when one has said enough'.⁸ The precept of Zen for acting technique, as of Zen for archery, is to practice relentlessly without ever 'trying'. After much practice, the action — whatever it is — just happens. The point is the doing rather than the accomplishment, and the joy of encountering the unexpected, the unintended, on the way.

The real secret of the arts is: always be a beginner.⁹ This tenet aligns itself with the constant requirement for the actor to play any performance 'as if for the first time'. It is also vital in taking an open-minded approach to well-known classic roles, as if they had just been delivered into the hands of the actor with the ink still wet.

The beginner can trust nothing to expertise alone. He must test all his ways and means, weigh his ideas, take action only with care and singular intent, and try to retain something of that freshness which, in the first encounter with a role, is his alone. Truly original work is always a new departure: a beginning which, although it may not be able to see its own ultimate destination or development, is nevertheless a vital part of the journey.

In the beginning of anything, as with a seed, lie all its future possibilities. We often speak of 'getting off on the wrong foot', of making a bad start; in other words, we miss the rhythm, the timing, the accurate placing of our initial effort. In both life and acting, we are advised to give our

attention to the moment, the ever-changing 'now'. It is said to be the secret of happiness; it is also the secret of acting a role successfully — one 'lives it' as one goes along, neither looking back nor too far forward. It is not just living for the moment, it is living in the moment: that is, with one's attention fully conscious of 'now' and not dreaming of the past or future.

One of the main reasons for forgetting lines on-stage is letting the attention wander from the present moment in the play, either to something which may have just happened unexpectedly, or over-anticipating some line or action which is about to come. The best way of remembering lines when you 'dry up' in this way is to stop trying to remember. Very often, the text will return to mind unaided. Attention, albeit like an automatic pilot, has been allowed to take over the present again. The Zen philosopher notes that, in life, giving up trying to do something often achieves something.¹⁰

Closely related to the foregoing is the way an actor should listen on stage. He has to listen in character (which is not to say that he will not also hear and be conscious of coughs in the audience, a noise in the wings, or a siren outside the theatre). By listening in character, the actor will find himself correctly seated in his performance. This is because a person usually hears statements as a kind of echo of themselves; they are actually listening to their own opinion.¹¹

Zen and acting, then, are correlated so closely because, in the final analysis, they are both essentially concerned with the 'thing being done' in its timeless present. Drama and 'theatre' itself, however, are another matter. If, as Aldous Huxley suggested, drama only begins where there is freedom of choice, then there can be no such thing as Zen theatre. "Choosing is absurd because there is no choice."¹² Conflict is only one of life's illusions. There is no side to be taken when all opposites are seen in each other, and by virtue of each other.

Zen's fundamental vision is of harmony and completeness. Zen drama is a contradiction in terms because Zen sees the end in the beginning and the idea of dramatic development has nowhere to start and nowhere to go. It is only in western drama that the *dialogos* (the creative word) and its use, dialectic, have taken root and developed as a philosophy and a way of life. Without contraries there is no progression.

Since the ancient Greeks, western civilisation has favoured the process of reasoning, of refining arguments and human conflict of ideas to a logical conclusion, rather than trusting a direct apprehension. Aristotle's theatrical principle of *anagnorisis* — of making clear that which is not clear through a gradual unravelling of truth — is still with us.

Most plays still state a dilemma, develop it like a musician playing variations on a theme, and eventually resolve things to a final chord. Zen, on the other hand, would tend to see the experience directly, as a whole. There would be no travelling, no destination to be sought, no argument to be resolved nor judgement to be made. The only theatre of Zen is all apprehended creation: things are.

Notes and References

1. For example: Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, Michael Chekhov, Saint-Denis, Grotowski, and Peter Brook.
2. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill. 1970
3. op. cit., p. 134.
4. op. cit., p. 62.
5. op. cit., p. 56.
6. Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1972. p. 193.
7. Suzuki. op. cit., p. 61.
8. Watts, op. cit., p. 198.
9. Suzuki, op. cit., p. 22.
10. Suzuki. op. cit., p. 47.
11. Suzuki, op. cit., p. 87.
12. Watts, op. cit., p. 137.

MAWGAN CREEK

Sophie Temple-Muir

Out of the old wood,
where the deer hide
and forest air mixes with salt,
the water flows north like music
under the stone bridge
and meets the incoming tide.

The sea visit brings jumping fish
and a wooden boat,
once in a while, along the coil
of the thin Ch'annel, secret
and winding amid the wide mud reaches;
from across the hill flies the call of the seal.

Egret and swan glide like a white blessing.
Heron waits discreet beneath the trees;
blue kingfishers speed- and red- surprises,
dashing from the shadow on the quay
and over the valley in the sun-fire
a buzzard turns briefly to gold.

RETREAT REPORTS

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

SO MUCH MORE FUN Ch'an Retreat June 1999

Twenty-four of us talked about ourselves, why we had come and our hopes for the coming week. 'Coming home' was a theme for many. My struggles on three previous Shifu-led retreats made it feel more like school camp. My hopes were to learn more about off-cushion practice and the second stage of Silent Illumination, to avoid my usual frustration and despair ... and to lose some weight.

My first sit that evening was good - calm and focused. "This is better! A week like this would be great!"

5am Day 1. Bad headache; bad start. Take two aspirin and settle down. The familiar struggle commences; trying not to try. Moments of calm, but a choppy sea.

Day 2. Still the headache. (It dawned on me that this was coffee-withdrawal. After the week was over I discovered that others had been similarly afflicted. Next time I'll wean myself the week before.)

I am Timekeeper. Oh Heaven; I'll be able to move around and whack people! Interview with John: "A few glimpses." "Good. The treasure house awaits." Advice about moving from total body awareness (TBA) to letting in the world around. "This is when things start to get interesting. 'Flying like an eagle'." Evening sits much calmer and more one-pointed; the table in front of me turned to shining gold.

Days 3/4. Increasing difficulty with TBA. Bloody hell! Being merely tantalised, frustration once again, despair round the corner. Out in the yard, walking ... sudden chuckle of realisation ... frustration is *crazy* ... so it went.

Direct contemplation in the field. Not easy. No apparent 'effects'. Listening seems easier than looking; but the usual 'naming'. However, later on in the day there's so much to hear that there's no *time* for labels. *Is this impermanence?* Floating with the stream.

Interview with Simon: "Good. You're having a few tastes. Just carry on."

Day 5. Dawn. Words: "Easy mind; no wanting." Continuing difficulty with sits, scatteredness and TBA clarity. Yet there was one clear sit on the grass above John's new Dharma tent. Further interview with Simon: "Oh, to be able to stop wanting!" "Wanting requires the self - no self, no wanting... no wanting, no self." Relaxing outside later the penny drops - big chuckle. Here am I still farting around after 12 years, and this is the first time I've really *realised* this simple truth!

Day 6. "We're going to try an experiment - a different type of interview, more formal. Simon and I will be sitting meditating on our cushion when you come in. You will sit on your cushion facing whichever one of us you are seeing. You then have five minutes to use as you please; say as much or as little as you like. We then may ask you a few questions and/or comment before you return to the Ch'an hall. I don't want you to worry about what you are going to say before your time arrives."

So... the next two sits are taken up, of course, with trying to, and trying not to, work out what to say. Something to do with the 'tangle' of self and wanting.

In to see Simon. Eyes averted; rambling start. I am usually reasonably articulate but not now. I look up into Simon's eyes.

"I ..."

"What happened?"

"My mind stopped"

I started to sob.

"Are you feeling upset?"

"No; I'm weeping."

I returned to sit feeling amazed, dazed and confused, continuing to cry. "What's happened?" Everything, the world, seemed perfectly ordinary; no 'shining'. "What does it mean? What should I do? This must be some sort of 'important' experience. John will want to see me." The next sit was the most scattered of the week. "It can't have been anything *very* special if it's produced such self-concern!" A calmness then gradually settled on me. I began to feel more matter-of-fact. However, at the evening 'feedback session' I felt totally unable to articulate what I'd experienced - and as a result felt *very* inadequate and shy.

Day 7. I woke with an immediately still mind. I continued to be puzzled, however. Simon agreed to give me an interview while everyone was clearing up to go.

"Were you aware of things around you?"

"Yes; everything was as normal. It was as if someone had flicked a switch ... all thought stopped. I can't describe it properly. I was *stupefied*. I really didn't believe this sort of thing could happen to *me*."

"So there was silence and illumination - Silent Illumination", Simon remarked with his gentle kindly smile.

"Life's so much more fun when one's not bothered by thoughts all the time."

Away home in the car I soon found an amazing new freedom. I could watch the world whizzing by without a thought (except this thought!). It was rather like an indefinitely extended period of calmed mind. As I continued to drive, although the world appeared totally 'normal', I felt 'spacey', a flavour of 'no head'; a sensation of somehow driving the car but not doing the driving. I realised that this was the first time I have ever experienced my thinking mind as a 'tool' - to be used only when I need it - rather than as a source of ceaseless chatter and self-reference. As Simon said, it's so much more fun!

Since returning home - it's now two days ago - I've retained this calm, 'free' mind. My thoughts, decisions and actions feel so much more straightforward. Not all calm, however ... within hours of arriving I was having to discipline my grandson, but in a much more focused and effective way than usual. My calm returned almost immediately.

I realise that something extraordinary happened to me on this retreat; something I never believed could happen. I feel changed - for the better. But ... I can also detect more than a flavour of 'Dharma pride'. There's an inflated ego lurking ... I have a new appreciation of the 'Warning to the Assembly'

This day is past;

Our lives too are closing.

Like fish with little water

Joy will not last.

Let us work with pure effort,

Work as we would were our heads aflame.

Be mindful of impermanence;

Be careful of idleness.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE ENTITY THAT WAS ME?

Ch'an Retreat June 1998

This was my first retreat of any kind and it was very difficult to start with the rigorous Ch'an approach. However, I felt very privileged to be accepted onto the retreat and I did not want to miss such an incredible opportunity to improve my practice. I undertook the retreat on the basis of intuition; it seemed entirely the right thing to do and the right time to be doing it.

Three years ago Zen helped to change my life after an intense period of losses. There was no need to give up my hectic lifestyle but I did change my attitude towards it. In fact, I enjoyed taking on more commitments, and I found true happiness where I least expected it with a wonderful partner who had made the same journey by a different route, using the same values and principles as exist in the teachings of Zen. I also developed greater emotional awareness, and I became kinder and less critical towards myself. Zen and some lovely people in my life at the time made this possible.

I was mentally prepared for a harsh week on retreat, but it was worsened by the fact that I was unwell for the first day and a half. My illness was a familiar one, but it imposed additional pain and fatigue. I admit I nearly gave up. Thankfully, I became acutely aware of the suffering of others as well as myself, and I rapidly developed a strong sense of community with my retreat companions.

Although silence from conversation was a relief to me, I was anticipating a great feeling of loss for music in my life, especially Bach and Tallis. Imagine my joy when we were given the gift of chanting throughout the whole retreat!

My work-task involved a lot of contact with the cook whose pure delight in cooking for us all was very sustaining. The food was glorious - all my favourite ingredients were included and it was perfectly prepared. I was very fortunate to witness our cook harmonising with the steam engine of a kitchen (as she put it) and I found the whole group generally harmonised well in activities. I so much wanted to play my part and not let the illness get the better of me. I largely succeeded and only missed one sitting session but it was very, very hard.

I came on retreat with an awareness of something stopping my progress. I knew from past experience that it was likely to be an emotional issue but it manifested itself as a very physical phenomenon. It felt as if a huge concrete block was stuck in the upper part of my chest. I knew it had to be confronted but I was afraid of it. I examined it closely. I looked at its shape, size, texture and colour. It was from a time before speech - some very old emotional pain. This frightened me. I am a skilled therapist and I used to be in therapy myself. I had already dealt with some unpleasant truths about myself - what could this new one be?

The process of 'finding out' happened during the retreat and it was a gentle one. I told myself I would try to accept as part of me whatever the concrete block might represent - and that if necessary I would forgive myself for feeling it. This may sound simple to do but, I can assure you, it isn't, even with practice! Outside the Ch'an hall, during a rest period, I was gradually overtaken by waves of immense grief. I had experienced this before but I obviously needed to do so again. I was distressed for several hours, drenched in tears of regret and loss.

Once I knew what had been confronting me, it was no longer terrifying. When the expression of grief left me I was exhausted but I felt somehow cleansed. The feeling of a concrete block in my chest disappeared and an intense pulsating started in the region just above and below the diaphragm. My heart was racing for many hours. It seemed like a prolonged panic attack and I began to worry that it might not go away. The next day, the pulsating continued upwards and formed a line between my abdomen and my throat.

When I consulted John, he explained this sensation as a release of energy in the channel which had been blocked. Since the retreat, this open channel, as I call it, still emits a less intense, pulsating sensation which is often with me both during and outside sitting. Now it is very like the warm glow of being truly and comfortably in love, which I feel for my partner.



What happened to my practice as a result of the retreat was amazing. I had been practising for about two years without really knowing the right posture (a result of learning to fold my legs originally from books, I suppose). John rectified my posture by placing a knee in the small of my back and pulling on my shoulders. This worked well, and I entered a phase of meditation which left me ‘gazing in wonder’ like a child, presumably a form of silent illumination. This child-like quality of ‘gazing in wonder’ remained with me during the rest of the retreat, making my actions more spontaneous.

My phase of ‘gazing in wonder’ was so beautiful it reduced me to tears. I left the Ch’an hall and burst into uncontrollable weeping. This was mainly an expression of joy, though that may not have been apparent to an observer. If there were any observers, they did not come near me which was entirely the correct way to behave towards me. The emotional release was all my own and would not have benefited from any outside intrusion. I was left trembling throughout lunch but again experiencing immense joy.

It happened again during the prostrations when repentance and gratitude seemed wholly fitting to my previous expression of grief. Again I wept copiously. The weeping of another person in the room intensified my reaction. Once over, the feelings which had led to this emotional release were ‘washed out’ and it was very important that the privacy of my distress was respected. I stress this again because at the time my reaction may have seemed in need of some intervention to an outsider. I wanted others to care about what I was going through but not to take it away from me.

Before the retreat, I had been practising silent illumination via observing the breath, and in one interview I explored the idea of using a koan. I had become very emotionally expressive and I thought using a koan might help to re-balance my intellectual side. John advised me to watch and see if any enquiry arose naturally for me and he gave me the idea of asking “What is my true nature?” I had some thoughts on that question but they were just that, thoughts not insights. Then a question did arise spontaneously during the phase when I was ‘gazing in wonder’. This was “Where am I?” meaning “What is this place I have now entered?” That question gradually changed to “Where am I?” meaning “What has happened to the entity which was me?”

WELL THERE WE ARE THEN ¹

Mahamudra Retreat. February 1999

My practice at home had been going well. I had read *'The Yogins of Ladakh'* shortly after it was published and had enjoyed it very much. I particularly found Tipun's Notebook revealing. Often I have found the words we use not useful for me in working out where I am in terms of practice (a karmic problem). But somehow the Notebook approached the matter in a way that was helpful and I glimpsed some inkling of how I was doing. A Dharma confidence arose and I booked for the retreat as soon as it was advertised.

On the first day there seemed a lot of talks and I wondered how much sitting we were going to do. I had a strong feeling that I just wanted to sit. I had always been a bit bothered about visualisation, but the instructions were very clear and, by slowly resting on some elements of my usual method, I found that visualisation was possible for me. I enjoyed the practice and after a few sittings I felt that regular application of this would be beneficial in the growth and development of compassion. I suppose I was a little surprised by this feeling but there it was. My sitting was going well and it felt very light and spacious, undoubtedly a place to abide ...

Then another talk and John says

"Of course the core of Mahamudra practice is ..."

"Oh no," I think, "not another hurdle to jump over."

It has often seemed to me that, as soon as I master something, that there is something else just out of grasp. An end point seems to beckon but it always seems elusive and we have something else to struggle with that I don't really understand.

"... the state of 'not-meditating'."

Well - here we are at a meditation centre being taught how not to meditate. Well of course it makes sense doesn't it!!!!?

So I try - and the usual battle of what I call the 'up and down' of my mind begins-

UP: Try harder, keep going.

DOWN: Don't put too much pressure on your self.

UP: Why not, you have to try. Was that it fleetingly?

DOWN: Don't be silly. Perhaps you're not meant to do it.

UP: Don't talk like that. Effort is what is required.

DOWN: Okay then but relax in to it.

UP: Relax what do you think I'm doing, stupid.

DOWN: Yes but can't you feel the tension in your

OH JUST STOP IT. GIVE IT UP.

Wait a minute. Where am I? Room. Sitting. Airy lightness. Not trying. Just sitting. Just damn well sitting.

It's very familiar, just as it is. Somehow I know it. But what I is that? It comes from itself? It is where it is and I knew it all before.

Check this out with John.

"John - you know this not-meditating thing, does it contain all three states, meditating, not-meditating and definitely not meditating?"

"Yes that's right. A place that has a timeless quality"

"Of course and it's all so familiar."

"Right - because things are as they are and you are just aware. Just aware - not meditating"



“All the ways are just one, no difference between them?”

“Yes, just being.”

“Well, there we are then”

“It’s the beginning. The origin. No middle or end. It is what always is. Nothing added or taken away. The ordinary eternity. And it is always there to be known. And always was.” (Laughs)

Give me back my money. I paid for enlightenment and all I got was the retreat.²

Nothing special.³

I now have a strong desire to go back somehow through all the experiences I have had on and off my cushion and laugh at it all. It was there all the time. It is so easy to be there. I knew it and it can be known. Life is as it is and only the little mind makes it otherwise. It is joyous to be human and there is no alternative. It is there in us all and is present in the moment. I feel a tremendous gratitude to the Path and the Teachers on it. Thank you.

Homage to the Buddhas in all the worlds

Homage to the Bodhisattvas in all the worlds.

Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.

Notes

1. This is the Anglicisation of the Welsh idiomatic phrase ‘Dyna ni’te’. The phrase could also be translated as ‘That’s that’; ‘We can’t add to that’; ‘There is nothing further to say’.

2. An allusion to Dogen’s “Give me back the money I paid for the ninety days of meals”, made in his discussion on the retreat (Chap 79, *Anko, Shobogenzo*). The ninety days being the time a summer retreat lasted and a reference to the retreat just being the retreat.

3. I adopted the phrase ‘Nothing Special’ as a personal motto sometime ago. It is a chapter title in Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. The chapter begins “I do not like speaking after zazen.”

A BUDDHIST READING LIST

John Crook

This reading list is for the guidance of those wishing to acquire a relatively comprehensive understanding of Buddhism, its past and its future in a global world. Naturally any choices from the vast literature available merely reflect a given individual's preferences. These are books that I have personally found useful. If you begin with these then you will soon go on to make your own reading personally creative.

The introductory list is intended for those attending retreats for the first time. The other lists are for those who want to study an issue in greater depth. All works are readably accessible for anyone with a O/A level education although naturally some texts are more demanding than others. A few of the more demanding, academic items are bulleted but many of these are important if you wish to gain a deeper perspective and some are difficult only in part.

The majority of these books are or will be available for consultation in the Maenllwyd Library. Arrangements for a study or reading retreat for fellows may be possible on request. Books may however NOT be borrowed nor taken from the library under any circumstances. A number of the titles listed have been contributed to the library only through kind donations from fellows. Most of the works stem from my own collection.

Books from more obscure publishers in print are often available from Wisdom Books. Some titles have been republished by other publishers. Amazon Books UK on e-mail is often an easy source of many titles

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A Y2K REFLECTION

Jo Horwood has sent us this thought for the Millennium from the sunny side of the world this January. It's good to hear from our Australian friends. One world, one view, one voice. Thus we conclude this issue ...

Will this next dawn really be
Different from any other?
Will the magic of this time
Heal rifts, or will it smother?
There's oh, so much healing
For which Man's soul yearns,
What Life lessons do we need
Before Man truly learns?
We've had our years of struggle,
Of thinking of the "if onlys",
We've triumphed, been majestic,
Then felt lost, confused and lonely,
We keep searching for "the answer",
The one we know is true,
And in so doing lose the moment,
This moment of me and you,
We're long on the "should be's",
And light on "I'm OK",
So what will be any different
At the break of this new day?
It won't be any different,
If nothing inside us sees
The beauty that we already are
The miracle of you's and me's,
'Cos it surely is a miracle
The way we feel and breathe and dance,
Now Life gives us this moment
To go deeper, if we'll take the chance,
So as the clock ticks over
Here's something for us to do,
Give yourself a great big hug
And thank God for the wonder that is YOU!

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

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