

NEW CH'AN FORUM

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THOUGHTS FROM A DARKENED WORLD

The World situation is dark indeed. After Afghanistan, Palestine; after Palestine, India and Pakistan. Where will it end? I continue to receive texts of well meaning intent. I ponder what exactly should be the attitude of Buddhist practitioners to these issues. It is far from clear where the right course lies. This journal is not averse to writings on social and political issues but any partial solution is rapidly outdated and may become inappropriate. A listing of some perspectives that demand our attention is however helpful and these we should consider. A modern Buddhist cannot isolate him/herself from the global situation.

This issue contains thoughtful articles which bear substantially on our world problems and those of Buddhism within it. We recommend them to your attention. Eds.

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ASPIRATIONAL PRAYER FOR DAILY USE

Suggested use: on rising each morning of everyday life.

*May I awake to clarity and throughout this live-long day
sustain mindful awareness.*

*Let me observe my karmic reactivity
so that I may insert reflection before I speak or act.*

*May I restrain my natural pomposity, prejudice and pride
so that I may return to openness, empathy and joy.*

*May my words and actions reflect consideration
and understanding for the stupidities and waywardness of others.*

*Let all beings be as my mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters or children
and let me so care for them.*

*Let me perceive the Dharma in the life of my teacher
setting aside his/ her mundane characteristics.*

*Let me pay attention to my teacher's words
even if I disagree with them.*

*May I train my thinking so that my thought corrects itself
before any harm is done.*

*Choosing one path with which I feel affinity
let me pursue it with diligence without self-centred picking and choosing.*

*Let me put all beings before me on the path to enlightenment.
Setting aside my own ambition may I sincerely help others on the road.*

*Leaving aside my wish for the future
let me realise that life is only now.*

*Homage to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
Throughout my remaining life may I tread the Buddha's way.*

Chuan deng Jing di 2001

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAN HALL

Perspectives on the World predicament April 2002

I have just returned from China where the Great Leap Forward is going on all the way from the coast to innermost western China. I had not heard the news for three weeks and felt relieved and benevolent as a result! So as I read what I had prepared for this issue (below) I felt out of touch with all the global anxieties I had raised. But then I realised nothing had changed, merely shifted from Israel to Pakistan and India – without of course any resolution to earlier issues. So I have kept the text as it is but intend to focus elsewhere in our next issue.

Western Buddhists may belong to a variety of political persuasions, for these differ not so much in good intentions as in policies to fulfil them. Even so, we all start from the Buddha's advice to cultivate compassion and insight, a position necessitating critical appraisal of the political initiatives currently being followed. These appear to arise from the best of intentions but so often lack wisdom of a reflective nature. Politicians, following the latest analysis of people's attitudes, tend to reflect an emotional reactivity that may earn them votes rather than a considered stance based in statesmanship. Is this a process of political deterioration in populist democracies lacking in courageous leadership?

The task of Buddhists in the present situation is to reflect and influence others through careful argument, clear positioning and tolerance. We must bear in mind that the Buddha himself did not eschew politics but often proffered opinions variously taken up by the rulers of his time, not always in a manner he perhaps intended.

I recently visited Robben Island off Cape Town and was shown around by an elderly African who had occupied a cell a few doors down the bleak corridor from Nelson Mandela. He emphasised " I am not a terrorist and was never a terrorist. I was and I remain a freedom fighter. " We need to consider this distinction wisely. Where the law is unjust Robin Hood arises. Who becomes a hangman then? And who should be the hanged? When should laws be changed rather than upheld and who should change them and how?

Consider then the following issues upon which you may wish to consider your own Buddhist perspective. You do not have to agree with them: you do need to think your own stance through.

* Violence, intolerant political activism and terrorism breed where the representation of the people's will is not expressed by a ruling government. Representation in a democratic style allows people to be heard and appropriate action considered in a participatory process which eliminates the need for extremism even if no one gets 100% of what they would like. Consider now the governments of the Middle East. There is no true democracy anywhere in the Islamic world, dictators, religious fanatics, royal aristocrats, dominant and unrepresentative politicians rule. Some Governments are more representative than others, as in Jordan and Egypt, but the repressive and heavy hand is never far away. The need for a restructuring of politics is, as the European position argues, one of the most profound needs in this crisis. This can only come about through long term, democratic participatory negotiation. Few Arab leaders would welcome this and the means for representation has barely been considered.

* It is not anti-Islamic to point out that high-level terrorism will only produce counter terrorism backed by state power against which ultimately the cause will be lost, and the moral high ground vacated. It would be better for Islamic peoples to put their own house in order rather than replaying justified complaints about US dollar imperialism alone, serious as this charge may be.

* It is not anti-American to point out that the republican policies since George Bush's highly questionable election have put national selfishness far ahead of any sort of global responsibility. While everyone sympathises with a great nation humbled on Sept 11th and its angry response, the destruction caused and the innocent casualties suffered by a poverty stricken peasantry in Afghanistan now more than balances that offence. There is something morally repugnant about high flying, unassailable bombers flying in their arm-chairs, carpeting remote deserts with often unexploding bombs left for children to pick up. The failure to follow up such destruction with adequate nation-restoring policies other than money is losing the USA any moral high ground it originally held. And then there is Kyoto and all that stands for

* It is not anti-Semitic to point out that by destroying the Palestine Authority's political structure the Israelis have denied Arafat the possibility of controlling terrorism and created a martyr's myth around him. The invasions of West Bank towns and the televised behaviour of Israeli soldiers bring to mind the Nazi occupation of the Warsaw ghetto. It is tragic that so historically abused a people should fall back on such suggestively similar methods when they become oppressors themselves. Participatory negotiation with the current Saudi plan in mind is the only course tolerable to world opinion. Although Israel, backed by US finance, is one of the last colonial states, in humility rather than arrogance it needs to negotiate its entirely justifiable continuation.

* It is not anti-British to point out that, whatever may be said in private telephone conversations, there is no need for a British Prime Minister to be so uncritical of American policies in public when the rest of Europe is clear cut in its opinion. The Special Relationship resembles a wobbly bridge ever increasingly, and the too easy use by the US of this country's kin-based fondness for America needs to be answered by more alertly critical replies to cross Atlantic opinion.

* It is not stupid to suggest that while uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by rogue nations must be stopped and an insistence on the implementation of United Nations demands upheld, the careless throwing about of military power "going it alone" may not be the best answer, especially when the outcome has neither been foreseen nor replacement regimes created. Forceful diplomacy should at least be properly developed and tried out before yet another war with unpredictable consequences is started. Iraq, Iran, North Korea are separate issues. There is no axis of evil.

Taking a broad, reflective position, Buddhists need to consider what justice, participation and democracy mean in this world and in what way a careful building of a new world political system based in representation and negotiation can undercut this trend to military industrial dominance within capitalism, cheap national interests, dictatorships of various kinds, ethnic and religious hatred, violence and death on an ever widening scale.

Meanwhile, the way the "world" will end is becoming apparent as every hectare of the Antarctic ice shelf falls gracelessly into the warming ocean unheeded by a seemingly obsessed humanity stupefied in its inherent ignorance.

What has happened to the "United Nations"?

Chuan deng Jing di.

Justice, Sustainability, and Participation

An Inaugural Lecture. The University of Bath. January 31st 2002¹

Professor Peter Reason

Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice

School of Management. University of Bath

Peter Reason, in his bold inaugural lecture, provides a wide conspectus of problems surrounding justice in this post-modern world. He brings together numerous themes from contemporary culture to throw light on the koan that affects us all. As I read and re-read this generously spirited enquiry I am struck again and again by the parallels between its message and the fundamental realisation the Buddha – the law of co-dependent arising. In such writing as this we can foresee a modern renaissance of buddhistic teaching of great saving significance in our troubled world. We are grateful to Peter for allowing us to publish it here. (JHC. Ed)

A meditative beginning

Justice, sustainability and participation are three huge words. When I was asked for a title for this lecture I chose them quite easily as representing the themes of my work. As I have attempted to craft them into a lecture for this diverse audience I have found out how complex they are. I want to talk about the state of our world and the way our mind frames and understands that world. Let me start with a story.

Recently I went on a Buddhist meditation retreat in the Chinese Ch'an tradition². On this retreat, in addition to the usual meditation practice to calm and quieten our minds, we were invited to work with a koan. Koans, I learned, are short stories, usually of a paradoxical nature, that the trainee is invited to hold in the mind. Since the koan is essentially paradoxical, the point is not to solve it but to allow insights to arise as one watches the mind work with the koan. In the end, it is hoped, the paradox is cut through.

The koan I worked with goes like this:

"It was a hot, summer day, the windows and verandahs of the Ch'an hall were open to the surrounding lawns and trees. The Master climbed the pulpit and raised his fly whisk (hossu) to indicate he was about to give his sermon. At that moment a bird began to sing in the garden. The Master stood with his hossu motionless. The bird went on singing. Eventually the song ceased. The Master lowered his hossu. He said, " Oh monks, that will be all for today. " and returned to his room. "

Here we have an everyday story of monastery life, but it has resonances in our own culture. We are all startled from time to time from our everyday preoccupations by the sound of birdsong, by the sound of raindrops, or by the silence of snow. On Monday I was arrested, so to speak, by the sound of the hailstorm on the railway station roof. So what is this story about?

I sat in meditation with this story for seven days.

My first line of inquiry, which is linked to my theme of sustainability, is that the koan tells us that we can learn as much from the more than human world than from the wise words of the Masters. Christ told us to consider the lilies of the field. Meister Eckhart in the Christian

¹ This article is also appearing in "Concepts and Transformation" 2002. 7.(1). 7-29.

² The Koan Retreat at the Maenllwyd. January 2002

Mystic tradition tells us that every creature is a word of God and a book about God (Fox, 1983:14). The Sufi poet Hafiz wrote (Hafiz, 1999:269), "Every being is God speaking. Why not be polite and listen to him?"

But what is the birdsong saying to us and how are we to listen? Let's go a little deeper.

The koan reminds me that today we have very little (consciously) to do with the 'other than human'. We live with other humans, with our own human-made technologies, with a human-made countryside yet we can scarcely see the stars. This is a precarious situation, for "We need that which is other than ourselves and our own creations. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with that which is not human" (Abram, 1996:ix). And songbirds are in catastrophic decline, so this sweet story both masks and points toward the tragedy of the current loss of species.

We must, I thought, learn to listen to the wild. But the bird is not in the wild, it is singing in a cultivated garden; and is heard through the windows and verandahs of the Chan hall by monks waiting to hear a sermon. How can we hear the wild if its voice is so radically filtered through our own frames and perspectives, "through the windows of my mind", as Simon and Garfunkel put it. And more than that, I got more and more angry about the rigid roles portrayed in the koan, with this Master gesticulating with his hossu, and dismissing the monks in such a seemingly supercilious fashion. The koan showed me both the necessity and the impossibility of listening to the more than human world, the importance of openness and surprise, and at the same time how we are trapped within our minds and roles. I realised how important it is to walk on the margins of wilderness so as not to be trapped in single vision; and at the same time how fundamentally impossible this was. During the retreat these thoughts gave rise to despair, grief and rage about our human condition, in contrast to the sweet romanticism of the first stage of investigation.

Gradually, I exhausted all these possibilities. The koan ground my mind to a complete halt. There is no one solution, the koan contains all these possibilities, and more. So I stopped struggling to find a meaning and sat in meditation holding the koan more lightly, on the "back burner" as the teacher put it.

And I learned how meditation itself is a continual process of inquiry into mind. I learned how to bring my mind to some point of stillness, almost empty of thought, to notice each thought as it arose, almost like an eddy in calm waters, and then let it go. A delicate place, for if I didn't notice the eddy as it arose, it would soon become a whirlpool of thought that would develop a life of its own, suck me in away from my quiet mind. I think the low point came when I realised I had spent half an hour of zazen tracing in meticulous detail the wiring of the gas alarm on my boat. Yet at other times I was able to sit with my mind quite blissfully quiet, noticing each impulse as it arose. Meditation is a delicate, subtle, moment-by-moment inquiry into these processes of the mind. A delicate process of learning how to avoid one's mind being captured by its own frames and, as such, it is a training for an inquiring life.

And I realised it is only through this kind of inquiry that the koan can be resolved. So in the koan the monks can respond to the birdsong in many ways: they may be bored, they may be angry that the Master doesn't give a proper sermon, or they may think they know what he means and what message the bird is bringing. Or they may be able to notice both the immediacy of the birdsong and the framing mind at the same time. The only adequate response is one of inquiry: What is it? What is this about? What is my response? Where does it come from? Am I awake to all these possibilities? How am I and the bird and the whole context together co-creating this moment? This is about bringing our moment-to-moment inquiring attention into more and more of our lives as we live them. Not easy, not fully possible, but equally essential if we are not to be living asleep. This attitude is not limited to Buddhism. It is fundamental to our practice of action research: "living life as

inquiry" as my colleague Judi Marshall puts it (1999). Meditation retreats are one way of training the mind for this kind of attention.

Richard Rorty suggests that the function of the liberal intellectual is to instil doubts in students minds about their own self-images and about the society to which they belong (1999:127). We don't do this very well. One of my students wrote recently about how difficult it was to write reflectively as she realised that the western world-view was embedded in her mindset:

"From my experience, essay writing is mostly a regurgitation of the relevant facts and theory, presented in a logical, coherent order. As undergraduates, we are generally required to cite other people's opinions without actively engaging with them and expressing a personal view. Writing in the first person is certainly an unusual and exciting experience. This provides an ironic contrast to the much-avowed principles of freedom of inquiry and discourse within academic institutions.

As I approach the end of my studies, I can't help feeling that freedom is a fallacy, and that somehow I have been walking a predetermined path to mortgage repayments and commuting nightmares. Further, I'm not alone. Despite a whole array of "graduate opportunities" there is a growing mood of claustrophobia and sense of powerlessness; for all the relative luxuries of the western world, we are still unsatisfied; there is an unmistakable sense of longing, a deep craving for some kind of release or escape." (Sarah Atkins, 2001)

What is it that this bright young woman, and at least some of her contemporaries, wants to escape from? I want to suggest to you that it is from the all-encompassing frame of the modern worldview, which stops us listening to the world. It is a way of doing and being in the world which has made extraordinary contributions to human affairs in the flourishing of culture, scientific endeavour and material well being, and has brought in its wake human alienation, ecological devastation, and spiritual impoverishment. In particular it has brought the twin global crises of justice and sustainability. I want to suggest to you that these two crises represent an enormous challenge, and one that cannot be fully addressed within the modern worldview because it is that worldview that has substantially brought about these crises.

In very simple terms I want to articulate a dreadful warning: we cannot go on the way we have been doing based on the way we have been thinking. And I want to offer a challenge, an expression of hope for a way forward based on a participatory ethos. I want to explore how a worldview based on the experience of ourselves as participants in the processes of life on earth might provide a more fruitful perspective.

In taking on these big words I am entering territory on which we all have an opinion: I don't expect to get it right, I don't expect you to agree with me all the time. Some of what I say will be contentious, so some of what I say may seem obvious to you, and maybe some of it absurd. There are inevitably gaps in my argument. But I do know that these are issues we don't talk about enough and ignore at our peril.

In search for a participative worldview

When I talk about a worldview, I am talking about the fundamental basis of our perceiving, thinking, valuing and acting, "the windows of our minds" through which we hear the birdsong.

Every society has always rested on some largely tacit, basic assumptions about who we are, what kind of universe we live in and what is ultimately important to us (Harman, 1988)

The worldview of a culture changes from time to time; the shifts from the medieval to the Renaissance to the modern worlds all rest on deep stirrings and intuitions which give a new picture of the cosmos and the nature of being human. Our worldviews are not simply rational things, they are about the mood of the times, the metaphors we use without knowing we are using them, the spirit of the times. A worldview encompasses our total sense of who we are, what the world is, how we know it. It encompasses our sense of what is worthwhile and important, what are the moral goods to pursue. It guides our sense of the aesthetic and the spiritual. And it is the basis of our social organisation and political, personal, professional and craft practices.



The notion that the Western worldview may be currently in revolutionary transition has been part of intellectual currency for quite a while. This worldview was formed some 3-400 years ago in the period we know as the Enlightenment. The older medieval, Christian worldview portrayed a world whose purpose was the glorification of a transcendental God. Bacon broke with this, making the link between knowledge and power, and told us to study nature empirically. Galileo told us that nature was open to our gaze if we understood that it was written in the language of mathematics. Descartes' 'cogito ergo sum' made a radical separation between the human and other modes of being; and Newton revealed the universe as a determinate machine obeying causal laws.

Our worldview channels our thinking and perception in two important ways. It tells us that the world is made of separate things. These objects of nature are composed of inert matter, and operate according to causal laws. They have no subjectivity, consciousness or intelligence, no intrinsic purpose, value and meaning. And it tells us that mind and physical reality are separate. Humans, and humans alone, have the capacity for rational thought and action and for understanding and giving meaning to the world. This split between humanity and nature, and the abrogation of all mind to humans, was what Weber meant by the disenchantment of the world.

The disenchantment of the world is also the disenchantment of the human person, which the modern worldview sees as autonomous, individual, calculating homo economicus, separate not only from the natural world but from our fellow humans. Margaret Thatcher both

captured and showed the absurdity of this in her infamous statement that there is no such thing as society, only individuals.

Of course I oversimplify. A worldview is never so monolithic, so without contradictions, that it can be so briefly sketched. But stay with me in this inquiry, for despite exceptions, this official worldview runs much of our lives.

And of course in many ways these developments have been hugely valuable. For better or worse, we are clearly attached to the apparent comforts and benefits of modern life generated by the genius of scientific investigation.

But at the same time, there are all around us hints that this modern worldview has reached the end of its useful life. This is, I believe, partly because it has strained the limits of what it can encompass, as do all worldviews, and partly because it works in the service of the privileged of this world, against the interests of the poor and powerless.

So what are the origins of the modern worldview?

The philosopher Stephen Toulmin argues (1990) that the perspective of the Enlightenment should not be seen as the first break with medieval thinking. Rather, this break with the Middle Ages occurred considerably earlier, with the Renaissance humanists in late 16th century Northern Europe, men like Michel de Montaigne, Shakespeare, Machiavelli. They were sceptical about the relevance of theory for human experience, more interested in the concrete, the particular and the practical. They argued for a trust in experience, the courage to observe and reflect, a curiosity about the diversity of human nature.

During the 17th century these humanist insights were lost. There was a historical shift from a practical philosophy based on experience and particular practical cases to a theoretical, more metaphysical philosophy concerned with the general, the timeless, and the universal. The philosophies of the Enlightenment were based in a quest for one essentialist truth and a certainty. The shift was fuelled by the extraordinary perils and tragedies of that age, for the old cosmopolis, the political and intellectual order, was falling apart. As John Donne wrote about that time:

'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone'

which bears an uncanny resemblance to Yeats:

'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.'

Now why did this happen? One indication is the assassination of Henri IV of France in 1610. He had tried to decouple nationalist loyalty from religious affiliation, and his violent death was a sign that tolerance between Catholic and Protestants was not a political possibility. European monarchs picked sides in the name of religious loyalty, and Europe was devastated by the dogmatic religious struggles of the Thirty Years War. The bloodshed was appalling as religious armies marched to and fro across the 'gladiatorial ring' of Germany and Bohemia, essentially in an attempt to win the religious and intellectual argument by force of arms, which of course proved impossible. Toulmin argues that this brought about a 'counter-Renaissance', a demand for a new certainty in the face of these appalling crises which neither humanistic scepticism nor religious dogma seemed able to meet. Thus the quest for certainty, which led to the philosophy of Descartes and mathematical kinds of 'rational' certainty and proof, should not be seen as a philosophical advance out of its political context, but as a timely response to a specific historical challenge - the political, social and theological chaos embodied in the Thirty Years War. (1990:70)

Toulmin continues the story to the present time. Through the 18th and 19th centuries, as different sciences developed, a more pragmatic attitude developed: each new discipline had to discover its own methodology, and the hard edges of Enlightenment rationalism were softened. But just as Europe was beginning to rediscover the values of Renaissance humanism in the early 20th century, the roof fell in with the First World War, the inequitable peace and the Great Depression. Re-renaissance was deferred and there was another push toward abstract certainty with the intellectual monopoly of logical positivism, reflected in abstract art (Gablik, 1991) and Le Corbusier's proposition that a house is a machine for living in. It was not until the 1960s that humanism could be re-invented and we could begin to return to more practical philosophies. We are beginning to see that 'Ignorance is not a solvable problem, it is an inescapable part of the human condition'. (Orr, 1994:9).

Toulmin's story shows how the philosophical vision of the Enlightenment, the emphasis on rational knowledge and transcendental truth, was fuelled and amplified by the political circumstance of that time- primarily the bloodbath in Western Europe that was the 30 years war. If the politics of the Eighteenth century were bloody, the political issues of our current times are every bit as significant, challenging and dare I say frightening.

Underneath the blanket of our incredibly prosperous global capitalism, underneath the assumptions of peace and liberty, are huge uncertainties. These have been drawn to our attention by the terrorist acts of September 11, but in many ways this overshadows and maybe obscures the underlying issues: the crisis of sustainability and the crisis of justice and poverty. These are the major problems or challenges to which confront humanity in current times. They will not respond to solutions within the mechanical worldview, but demand of us new ways of thinking and new political structures a 'new cosmopolis' based, I believe, on inquiring participation.

I believe that an ethos of participation could be a new basis for our sense of who we are in this world, for our ways of understanding and knowing each other and the more than human world, for a guide for practice, and indeed as an aesthetic and spiritual principle. In this sense I see a participatory sentiment as emerging in contrast to the largely mechanical metaphor of the world of modernism in which we all grew up.

Let me start with showing that in order to truly understand the crisis of sustainability we must experience ourselves as participants in the planet's life systems.

Gaia

The crisis of sustainability demands that we think again about the nature of our planet and the biosphere which sustains us. The modern worldview makes a clear distinction between rational, thinking, humans and a non-human world devoid of intelligence, determined by chance and necessity. But there is another view which sees planet earth as a self-organising whole, metaphorically a 'living' being. This is Gaia theory, which the philosopher Mary Midgley refers to as the 'next big idea' (2001). Gaia theory derives from scientific inquiry into the systemic, interconnected nature of the planetary systems. It is also a rediscovery of *anima mundi*, the soul of the world; an idea, says Midgley, which is big enough to reunite science and spirituality, to give us an appreciation of how the Earth and her inhabitants matter in themselves, regardless of any use we humans might wish to put them to.

The origins of Gaia theory go back to James Lovelock's work for NASA in the 1960s. Lovelock, a Fellow of the Royal Society, was known in those days for his work on instrumentation. It was he who invented the electron capture detector which demonstrated the build up of DDT in the biosphere and of fluorocarbons in the ozone layer. He was also employed by NASA to develop equipment to be landed on the planet Mars in order to detect the existence of life. As he thought about how to do this, he realized that one could tell whether there was life on Mars without ever sending a spaceship there, by looking at

the chemical composition of the Martian atmosphere. The Martian atmosphere is 95% carbon dioxide; in contrast the Earth's atmosphere is 21% oxygen and 77% nitrogen. So the Martian atmosphere is at chemical equilibrium; all possible chemical reactions have taken place, and there is not much going on there; while the Earth's atmosphere is far from equilibrium with large quantities of oxygen, a highly interactive gas. Something is going on here on earth other than simple chemical interaction to hold the atmosphere at this statistically improbable state. Lovelock concluded that it was the interaction between living things and the earthly environment which not only made Earth's atmosphere but also regulated it, keeping it as a composition favourable for life over billions of years.

In the 1960s and 70s this was far from the conventional paradigm. The non-living world of rock, atmosphere and ocean were seen to determine key variables for life. Living things must adapt to these conditions or die. In this view, life is allowed no major influence on the non-living world.

Gaia theory proposes two radical departures from convention. The first is that life profoundly affects the non-living environment, such as the composition of the atmosphere, and this then feeds back to influence the entirety of the living world. Gaia theorists talk about a tight coupling between living and non-living worlds. The second proposal is that out of this tight coupling between life and non-life comes an unexpected property, the ability of Gaia, of the Earth system as a whole, to maintain key aspects of global environment, such as global temperature, at levels favourable for life, despite shocks and disturbances from both within and outside itself. (Harding, 2001:17)

“Gaia” is a way of describing Earth as an interconnected whole with emergent properties of self-regulation. Let me briefly take the example of the carbon cycle. Carbon dioxide pours out of planet earth in volcanoes. As you will know, carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas, and so if too much were accumulated the planet would get too hot. The Gaia self-regulating system locks up carbon at such a rate as to maintain temperature within appropriate limits. The weathering of granite rock allows calcium ions to escape and combine with rainfall and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to make calcium bicarbonate. This is washed down to the sea and used by algae called coccolithophores to create their shells, which, as they die, sink to the seabed to form layers of chalk. So when you see the white cliffs of Dover you are looking at carbon deposits. And when you see a granite rock you are looking at something which participates in the processes of life on earth.

When the temperature of the planet increases, these chemical reactions speed up, so providing a feedback loop to increase the sequestering of carbon dioxide; and as temperature cools, the reactions slow down. But it has also been shown that these purely physical and chemical reactions are not sufficient to explain how the temperature has stayed at a level suitable for life all these millions of years. Life comes into the picture by increasing the weathering of rock in many ways, so that the calcium ions are more available for the link with the carbon. The roots of trees crack open the rock, bacteria secrete compounds and lichens release acids, all of which accelerate chemical weathering, and again take place faster at higher temperatures, providing further self-regulating feedback. Life participates fully in the creation and maintenance of its own environment.

Again I oversimplify, but the story is correct in its essentials. Much careful research has been conducted to show many other ways in which the life processes are central to the maintenance of the steady state of Earth's temperatures and other essential qualities of the biosphere. All of these can be seen and understood from a lay perspective in Lovelock's books (1979) and Stephan Harding's articles in *Resurgence* (e.g. 2001). The point for my current argument is that Gaia theory shows that there is an intimate and complex connection between life on earth and the self-regulating properties of Gaia, that the whole planetary system is an intricate, self-sustaining and self-organising web of life.

So what is happening to this web of life, and in particular what is happening to the carbon cycle? We humans of the industrialized North, through burning carbon fuels, are releasing the carbon which has been locked up in deposits for millennia and we are doing so at an increasing rate. At the same time we are damaging the planets capacity for self-regulation by, for example, cutting down the forests. As we pursue our short term interests (and in Gaian terms a century is less than a blink of an eyelid) we are cutting through the self-regulatory cycles and causing an upsurge in planetary temperature with the accompanying disturbances to the weather system.



Whatever President Bush and his contrarian advisors may think, this is no longer in doubt. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a body of scientists brought together by the UN to inform governments on the likely causes and consequence of climate change, has been looking at the evidence for the past 12 years. Their third report confirms that global warming is occurring, is largely brought about by human actions, and will increase far faster than previously thought. Carbon dioxide is up 31% from its level in 1750; Earth has lost 10% of snow cover since the 1960s; glaciers are retreating and the Arctic sea has thinned by 40% since the 1950s; all these trends are accelerating. If we go on as we are at present, global temperatures will rise by 5.8°C over the next 100 years. If we use less carbon-based energy, temperatures will only increase by 1.4°C over the same period (which is bad enough). But we are currently embarked on the more extreme scenario. These forecasts do not account for interaction effects between the biosphere and the atmosphere, for example the way in which melting permafrost will release methane into the atmosphere. It was reported at the January meeting of the Royal Geographic Society that Europe's great rivers the Rhine, the Rhone, the Po and the Inn are expected to run dry in summer months in 20-30 years time because the glaciers in the Alps which feed them are melting. Consider that!

The pattern of disturbance which we see in global warming is repeated in many aspects of the life of our planet: the poisoning of the water, the loss of topsoil, the destruction of forest, the devastation of fisheries. We are currently seeing the sixth great extinction of the life on the planet, the greatest and fastest ever, according to Lord May, President of the

Royal Society (see also Leakey & Lewin, 1995), and it is caused by human activity. ALL living systems are in decline. It's that simple. As Lester Brown of the Worldwatch Institute puts it, "The economic policies that have yielded the extraordinary growth in the world economy are the same ones that are destroying its support systems". (Brown, 2001:7)

We well know that humanity and the natural world are on a collision course. And yet I can still read in the Observer a travel feature (in the section headed Escape, presumably with no irony) by Ann Widdecombe about her cruise to the Norways Arctic Wilderness. As she eulogises about the beauty of the places she visits, she remarks that "This is scenery on which man has left no mark". Sorry, Miss Widdecombe, the ice is contaminated with heavy metals, the fish stocks are collapsing, the ice floes and permafrost are melting fast, the polar bear is starving and well on the way to extinction. Humanity is having an impact on the biosphere of macroscopic proportions, while our consciousness remains relatively small scale. As Tom Berry puts it:

"The deepest cause of the present devastation is found in a mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between humans and other modes of being and the bestowal of all rights on the humans. The other-than-human modes of being are seen as having no rights. They have reality and value only through their use by the human, In this context the other than human becomes totally vulnerable to exploitation by the human " (Berry, 1999:4)

Ecological Dimension

The Gaia story shows us how the planet is a deeply interconnected living system, the mother of life on earth, if you wish. It places these dreadful statistics in an intellectual and spiritual framework which makes sense of global warming and other phenomena. Gaia theory shows us that the damage that is being done to the planet's ecosystems and the resultant sustainability crisis has its origins in our failure to appreciate the systemic nature of the planet's ecosystems, and humanity's participation in natural processes. Participation is an ecological imperative. The great systems thinker Gregory Bateson argued that that self-organising and self-maintaining ecosystems, with their intricate feedback loops and their capacity for dynamic equilibrium must be understood not as mechanical, but as expressing a form of Mind; not the autonomous self-awareness of the human mind, but a larger ecology of mind (1972) . Human conscious purpose, as we go about our day-to-day lives, can only comprehend a minute arc of this complexity, and so cuts through the circuits of this larger 'mind' which hold and preserve the stability of the biosphere of which we are a part.

Bateson describes the modernist view of the world and its consequences in graphic terms:

"If you have the idea that you are [outside of creation], you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore as not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will be yours to exploit.

If this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or, simply, of over population and over-grazing". (Bateson, 1972:462)

It seems to me quite simple: unless we learn to experience ourselves as part of the biosphere, and understand that we are participants in a wider community of beings, the damage we will do to the Gaian systems will continue to be devastating.

Ontological dimension

So it is not just our reality that is participative, but the cosmos itself that is a participatory process. The process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead taught that the basic unit of being is not a thing but an event: the reality is the process. (Whitehead, 1926:90). And indeed, this is close to the Buddha's view of co-dependent arising. (Macy, 1991).

For many years I had a lot of difficulty with this idea, for it seemed to me self-evident that the world is made of separate things -- just look around you, it is common sense!

Let me be clear about the depth of the transition I am seeking to articulate. It is not a case of being nice and kind to the environment within a participatory worldview. This is non-sense, for the very notion of 'the environment' already separates us from the world to which we belong. Rather our relationship to the Earth is that of a leaf to a tree. We have no independent existence. No tree, no leaf. Gaia theory shows us that we are participants in this planetary system, for good or for ill. It shows us what we are doing, and I believe, shows us that we must create a way of being which moves from the present devastating influence on earth to a benign presence, a presence that lives with the planetary systems rather than against them.

One way of doing this has been articulated by writers such as Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and David Korten, processes they describe as the 'ecology' of commerce, and Natural Capitalism. The idea here is that we must redesign our industrial processes so that they increasingly mimic those of the natural world, so that we run our affairs entirely from solar income, the waste of one process becomes the food for the next, and we work to increase, rather than decrease, the diversity of all ecosystems. (Hawken, 1993; Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 1999; Korten, 1999). We might call this ecological design intelligence (Orr, 1994:2), designing for participation in the cycles of the planet.

Justice

I think the story of the discovery of Gaia and the stories about Gaian self-regulation are wonderful stories. I find the idea that we are participants in a cosmic process, rather than disembodied minds trying to understand a deterministic universe, inspiring - even though the state of the biosphere is alarming. But when we look around the world we also see poverty, terror of many sorts, cruelty and injustice. I am not sure if there is a 'good story' to tell about poverty and injustice.

Jean Niyonzima is a student on our current MSc Programme in Responsibility and Business Practice. He comes from Africa, and keeps telling us we in the North simply don't begin to understand poverty. I am sure he is right.

The picture is stark; really one statistic is sufficient:

- The richest 20% of world population share 82% of world income.
- The poorest 20% of world population share 1.4% of world income.
- The richest 50 million people, mainly in Europe and N America, have the same income as 2.7 billion poor people. The slice of the cake taken by 1% is the same as that allowed to the poorest 57%. (Larry Elliott, Guardian 21-1-2002)

And of course the richest 20% cause the vast majority of the problems for the Gaian systems I have just discussed. The inhabitants of the industrialised countries constitute only one fifth of the world population but consume per inhabitant nearly 9 times more energy of commercial origin (mainly carbon based) than the inhabitants for developing countries.

Richard Rorty puts the moral problem rather well:

"We should raise our children to find it intolerable that we who sit behind desks and punch keyboards are paid 10 times as much as those people who get their hands dirty cleaning our toilets and 100 times as much as those who fabricate our keyboards in

the third world. Social justice is the only basis for a worthwhile human life". (Rorty, 1999:203-4)

Bill Clinton covered this area well recently in his Dimpleby Lecture, and I strongly recommend those of you who missed it to get the text from the BBC website. I think he got it half right, which is a great achievement for a politician. He and some other leading politicians have argued that this is not only unjust, it is unsustainable, it creates the rage and alienation that leads to terrorism, and that we in the richer North must in some way 'help' the poorer nations through debt relief and more direct means. There is call for some kind of Marshall Plan. I am sure I was not alone in being encouraged by Tony Blair's Labour Party speech and Bill Clinton's Dimpleby lecture, and probably not alone in regretting the gap between speech and action. We have a duty to help them act on these insights as well as talk about them. But in another sense their ideas are still rooted in a perspective that many see are partly creating the problems they seek to address.



The orthodox economic view (Jay 2000) argues that the economic growth fuelled by globalisation, combined with greater equality and justice will raise the living standards of the poor throughout the world and indeed that it is already doing so. Surely, this is not entirely wrong, but it ignores a wider problem of participation.

Many voices from the South see the processes of globalisation, fuelled by a modernist western worldview, as contributing to both damaging ecosystems and creating poverty around the planet. Vandana Shiva tells us that:

"Poverty is the creation of a worldview that has pitted people against nature. That worldview has defined scarcity as the condition of nature, and has then tried to create technologies that are supposed to compensate for that scarcity. But the reality is that these technologies actually create scarcity because they destroy the environment, they destroy ecosystems, and they leave people poorer". (Shiva, 2000:17)

For example, the sea has given enough to fisherfolk for centuries. But new technologies have been generated: trawlers so huge that they can take twelve jumbo jets in the trawl net.

They scrape the entire sea floor, catching everything that comes in their way, disrupting cycles of regeneration. Ninety percent of the fisheries of the world are near collapse. There is not much left to catch. The fisherfolk of India become poorer as a result of these technologies, which were meant to remove poverty.

This is true also of West Africa, where the EU has negotiated fishing rights with governments which ignore the rights of traditional fisherfolk, who have to go further and further to catch food and are in danger of being run down by huge European fishing boats. Our economic processes are part of the wider system of Gaia, and as we impoverish one we impoverish the other.

Participation is at the core of what we call political democracy at all levels of society. And it is encouraging to see that despite setbacks more people now are living under some kind of democratic political system than ever before, although political and legal democracy at a world level is in its infancy. And when you listen to voices from countries of the South you realise how much we pay lip service to democracy and how little we actually do to support it. We are interdependent with other humans in this world.

Participation is also at the core of economic democracy. As James Robertson points out, political democracy has been firmly on the agenda for 200 years and more, while economic democracy has been virtually non-existent (contribution in Reason & Torbert 2001). Indeed, it is arguable that capitalism works by a process of enclosure, privatising what was held in common, in the interests of the relatively few. We started in the UK with the enclosure of the commons for sheep farming and continued it in the Empire. We are now trying to enclose the patterns of life through gene patenting. We need to find ways in which people all around the world can share fairly in decisions that affect them and to share in the commonwealth of the planet as well.

I believe it is well argued that globalisation continues the process of enclosing the commons and thus dispossessing and disempowering people. Who asked the people of West Africa if it would be a good idea to allow the EU fishing boats in? We have no means of accounting for the externalities of global business, the costs imposed on the commons by the activities of the powerful. The argument that our current economic practices exacerbate poverty needs to be taken seriously: Economic structures disempower people; they suck wealth out of developing regions into the centre. Participation is thus the basis for a new economic order. This is the message of the anti-globalisation movement, and the message of the 'new economics movement'. Contrary to the dismissive view of our leading politicians, this approach offers concrete suggestions for changes in tax structure, in accounting processes, and in different forms of money and finance that would bring about a decentralising, multi-level and multi-centred global economy. (see e.g. Robertson 1998) This would be more just and less damaging. My point is, briefly, that we will only see justice as we empower people through more participative decision processes and a participative economy both locally and globally.

Aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of participation

When I spoke of Gaia theory I suggested it can encompass both a scientific and a spiritual dimension. For some, this may be a step too far, but I believe it is a crucial one. The shift from a mechanistic to a participative frame is not just about the nature of knowledge, not just about bio-geo-physical feedback processes, not just about power, politics, economics and development. It is about seeing ourselves as members of a community of beings, of understanding, yes, the importance of humans, all humans in the scheme of things, but also frogs, ants, oaks and oceans. This calls for a transformation which is aesthetic and spiritual. As Tom Berry told me, without this kind of transformation we won't have the psychic energy to make the other, maybe more practical changes.

Aesthetic dimension

As part of our exploration of ecological thinking and experience, we take the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice on a day long eco-hike down the river Dart in Devon, scrambling over rocks and under branches through one of the last pieces of wild nature in England. And along the walk we invite them to undertake some experiential exercises or meditations to get closer to the direct experience of the ecology. In one of these meditations we imaginatively identify with a part of the more than human world, and see if we can experience how it partakes in the cycles of Gaia.

The last time we did this, I was sitting against a tree in a particularly lush and damp piece of woodland. I relaxed against the tree, experienced my body against the wood and the earth, and looked around me. As I quietened my thoughts, and looked at those beings I call trees, earth, stones, birds and opened my imagination to include fungi, insects, bacteria, and then the various chemical substances, the elements and molecules and then again the quantum reality of the particles that lie underneath even that I realised everything I could see and imagine was in the process of becoming something else, that everything was participating in everything else. I realised quite suddenly that to see the world as separate things or beings was to have already abstracted from this ongoing process of being. And I think I understand what Whitehead and the Buddha might have meant.

Such meditations help us to realise the following:

- The experience of deep ecology is a feeling of joy and awe at the beauty of the more-than-human world.
- It is an appreciation of the delicate balance between chaos and order.
- It is the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all living beings, including ourselves, in the endless cycles of the planet.
- The experience is both of the moment and of eternity.
- It is the feeling of homecoming.

These, I suggest to you, are aesthetic qualities. We fully grasp our participation in the world through our appreciation of beauty; we open our eyes to frost on the ground, the buds on a tree, and we are struck by wonder. Through awe, wonder and beauty we can experience our sense of belonging, that we are a part of the whole.

Spiritual dimension

Participative consciousness is part of a re-sacralization of the world, a re-enchantment of the world (Berman, 1981; Berry, 1988; Skolimowski, 1993). Re-enchantment doesn't mean going back to a view of a world crudely populated by spirits. It is based in reverence, in awe and love for creation, valuing it for its own sake, in its own right as a living presence. To deny participation not only offends against human justice, not only leads to errors in epistemology, not only strains the limits of the natural world, but is also troublesome for human souls and for the anima mundi. This is the spiritual dimension of participation, to experience the world we live in and are part of as a sacred place.

And while a participatory vision sees the planet in a spiritual light, so it also sees the human, as nature rendered self-aware and self-conscious:

“The human activates the most profound dimension of the universe, its capacity to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness”. (Berry, 1999:132)

In this view, we are the universe looking at itself, consciously learning about itself.

Toward a participatory world

My proposal is that our world is in crisis (political, economic, moral and ecological), and that this crisis is, in the end, a crisis of worldview. Old patterns of thought and old

institutions, the old cosmopolis, no longer responds to the challenge of our time. We need to explore how the modern world view, which divides self from other, mind from matter, humans from nature, which disenchant our world and our relationships with each other, can give way to a worldview in which we see ourselves as participants in the processes of human and more-than-human life on this planet. It is as if we are sitting in a meditation hall, and the even though the Master is drawing our attention to it, we are unable to hear the voice of otherness, the poor and the planet, through the windows of our collective mind.

The shift we seek is from control to participation as a way of being in our world (Goodwin, 1999). Participation, as I have tried to show, gives us a very different understanding of the world with live in, the wider cosmos, and how we come to know it. It throws a different light on the crisis of sustainability. In immediate practical human terms it is about human rights, power and politics, about how we create democratic human institutions in all fields. And in the end, because participation is intimately bound up with our sense of meaning and purpose, it also has aesthetic and spiritual dimensions.

We are faced with a challenge: will we again seek an illusory certainty, as we did at the time of the Enlightenment, after the First World War, pulling in further to reinforce old patterns of control? Or will we find ways to open ourselves to a participatory view of our world, with all the creative uncertainties that brings about? I believe only such a participatory vision will be adequate for the challenge of our times. And that challenge is immense.

The challenge is to use our human capacity for inquiry, our rational, empirical, intuitive, and aesthetic ways of knowing, and our sense that we are participants with one another and with all beings on the planet, so that human, conscious purpose designs processes which fit in with, match, even help restore the cycles of Gaia. We can meet our needs without destroying our life support systems. Creating a just and sustainable political economy would be inspiring, challenging and fun. But it is going to require a different vision, and a great deal more creative attention than we are giving it at the moment.

Not that it will be a straightforward process, however much we would wish we could easily solve the problems we have created for ourselves. The certainty the Enlightenment project offered proved to be a chimera. For the current world situation is paradoxical, almost koan-like. There is no way we can restore the diversity of species. Whatever we do, global temperatures are going to increase uncomfortably. We have to sit with what we have spoiled. And yet we have also to act, always inadequately, but hopefully with more ecological wisdom than we have so far.

We are beginning on both these fronts. Poverty and justice are a little higher on the global agenda, and we are beginning also to address the harm done by our carbon-based way of life through the negotiations of the Kyoto agreement and other initiatives. But this is painfully slow and limited by our current perspective on the environment as something we need to protect. What would bolder and more radical initiatives, ones more likely to meet the challenge of these times, look like?

National Level

Suppose, for example, that the current Government, which for all its faults is more environmentally aware than many, were to initiate a national debate to explore how the United Kingdom could become a decentralised carbon-free economy and reinvent ourselves as a sustainable society within ten years? I believe that the technologies to do this are present (in conservation design, in fuel cells, in renewable energy, photovoltaic cells etc), it just needs the political and cultural will. Just think where we would be if we had put all the investment in nuclear energy into renewables over the past 50 years! Imagine the ways in which this long-term policy could be a stir for creativity, for new industries, for new forms of investment, for both large-scale industry and the regeneration of impoverished

communities. Imagine the potential for making new links, new forms of participation between the technologies of the information revolution and the Gaian dynamics of the solar economy on which we all depend. Imagine further the inspiration this might give us as a national community, the possibility of new worthy purposes around which we might gather, the new dialogues we might have together, the sense of meaning this might engender. Imagine how this might divert us from the petty controversies in which we indulge ourselves at present. Imagine the possibilities for new technologies, new exports, new forms of wealth creation that do not damage planetary systems. Imagine the example we might set to the world.

Individual level

And what can each one of us do? Wake up! Take these issues seriously. David Korten points out that the world is ruled by institutions that depend for their power on our forgetfulness, waking up is a revolutionary act (1999:16). Use your democratic voice and consumer power to resist processes that degrade the environment and exploit other humans. Raise your own awareness and talk about these issues with other people so we change the climate of opinion, together. And go and find a little bit of wild world every day and wonder at it.

We cannot continue to deny the gravity of the human situation; yet to revise our view so that we experience ourselves fully as participants on this planet and with each other provides for new inspirations. In the end, we have no choice but to engage with these issues, sooner or later. If we do so sooner we can do so with more dignity and more hope. Perhaps we may solve the most pressing living Koan of our time.

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ARMED BY APRICOTS

*All time I was one night
sitting by lowlight from a candle. Free.
The eased grip of rapture,
the mood of the opening bud
that exactly in its nature
has arrived*

But that was now and this is then:

*I'm on a wheel pumping my calves
in the circularity of experience,
the matrix of tendency going from
anomie to epiphany and back
and between.*

*"Clock in. Sign the rota.
We've got you. "*

*I'm sure you meant those last three words to remain as thought
But I'll speak my mind while I'm out here with you;*

*"For me it's not the first call
but the echo,
not the word
but the inflexion,
not the mouth
but the face it won't hide. "*

*We look back over wasted time
moving in and out of focus
hedging with memory we are
opiated, lulled, hypnogogic.*

*Of a sudden we seep into the core
and are energy accelerated to the edge of flame
and are the shine on empty things.*

*Then again the voice resumes
the clatter and harangue
of the edge of the universe,
Pushing on, banging on.*

*The outer reach of consciousness
and the outer reach of the universe
are simultaneous, sure,
but are they the same?*

*A certain life?
A touch of heart?
A stomach warmed by apricots.
The eye filled:*

*Making allowance for happiness
we make our way to the circus
we see
precisely falling clowns
as busy as grey towns
squirting lurid flowers.
We're laughing and it hurts.
We leave.
We sleep.*

*We're waiting for the day and saying nothing 'til it comes.
We are names and faces to a crowd
and so our silence hides
but it is all just a 'yes'
if only we could say it.*

Jason Miller

Meditation As Meme Weeding

Susan Blackmore

In September 2001 Sue Blackmore led a weekend retreat on memes and meditation for the Bristol Chan Group. Afterwards we asked her to write about the exciting ideas behind the retreat. Her intention then, as now, was not to dwell on the science and controversies involved in memetics, but to explain briefly the idea of memes, and explore how this can help us in our practice.

Memetics is a new perspective on cultural change derived from the notion that variation in any replicating entity (such as an idea) can be subject to selection and hence evolution in a changing environment. Sue is currently one of the prime proponents of this view. The root model here of course is the Darwinian theory of natural selection of genes. This approach applied to the cultural level is however academically highly controversial. Readers interested in this controversy may care to read the philosopher Mary Midgley's critique in her chapter in the book "Alas poor Darwin: arguments against evolutionary psychology" edited by Hilary and Stephen Rose, Vintage, Random House, London, 2001, and a more appreciative evaluation in "Human Evolutionary Psychology" by L. Barrett, R. Dunbar and J. Lycett, Palgrave 2002 p360. (Eds)

Why do we think all the time? Why, when we sit down and keep still, does our mind not go quiet? Why do all those thoughts come rushing up, along with reactions, emotions, replies, arguments and yet more thoughts to add to the starters? Why can't I just sit down, say to myself 'now I will sit without thinking' and do it? The answer lies in the memes.

Memes are ideas, habits, skills, stories, or any kind of information that is copied from person to person. The term was invented by Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins, and its origin is important for understanding why memes are so powerful, and how they do the things they do. In his best-selling book, *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins explained the importance and power of replicators. Replicators are information that is copied with variation and selection. That is: lots of slightly different copies of something are made, most are killed off, and the few that survive pass on whatever it was that helped them survive to their offspring - and then it happens again - and again. This was the amazing, and scary, idea that Darwin called "evolution by natural selection". In *The Origin of Species* he showed how all the creatures on this planet could have been designed by natural selection, and that the process needs neither a plan, nor a designer.

More recently American philosopher Daniel Dennett has described the process as the "evolutionary algorithm" a simple mindless process that once the requisites are in place must happen. If you have heredity, variation and selection then you must get evolution or "Design out of Chaos without the aid of Mind". It's as simple as that.

What Dawkins explained, in *The Selfish Gene*, was that this process is not confined to our most familiar replicator, the gene, but must apply to any information that is copied with variation and selection. All around us, he said, still drifting clumsily about in its primeval soup of culture, is another replicator. Ideas, habits, skills, stories, technologies, and artistic creations are all copied by a process that may loosely be called imitation. Copying is not perfect, so there is plenty of variation and recombination, and far more copies are made than can possibly survive. So we have a new replicator, a cultural replicator. Taking it from the Greek for "that which is imitated" and abbreviating it to a word that would sound something like gene, Dawkins called them memes.

Understanding memes as replicators gives us an entirely new vision of what it means to be human and what is going on in our lives. Think of it this way. As soon as our early ancestors first became capable of imitation, a new replicator was let loose and started

evolving. As humans gradually got better at imitation, more and more memes could find homes in human brains and be passed on again; in actions, tunes, traditions and ultimately in language. Once language evolved there were even more possibilities for more memes. People could start telling stories, singing songs, and passing on their knowledge by speech. Then more memes could appear.

This is a never-ending process as long as the conditions are in place. If the selfish memes can get copied they will, and so our world fills up with more and more of them. And our modern world is very full of them indeed.

Note that when I say the memes are selfish I do not mean that they are little magical entities sitting around in our heads thinking "now I must get myself copied". Not at all. Just like genes, memes are only information, but they can be selfish in this sense and this sense alone. If they can get copied they will. And they do not care (because they are only bits of information and cannot care) what are the consequences for us, for our genes, or for our planet. They just go blindly on using us to get themselves copied, and along the way create our complex modern world.

And what is that world like? Look around you now and you will see countless successful memes. Perhaps you can see pictures and images, windows and carpets, books and newspapers. These are all memes because they have been copied again and again. And these are the successful ones because they have beaten the competition to get where they are. Think of all the memes you have come across today, all the memes that have, in their own various ways, shrieked at you 'copy me' 'copy me'. Most of them are words: words on the cereal packet, words on the radio, words in the morning paper, words on the posters in the street, and then all the words that people have spoken to you, on the phone, in your email, and in person. How many of these will you remember and pass on. Not many, but those few will live on to jump into another brain and have another chance to get copied and so shape our world. This is the meme's eye vision.

Now the important question becomes which memes will succeed and why? The general principle is that memes will get copied whenever and wherever they can. Some succeed because they are good or true or useful or beautiful. In other words we copy them because they are valuable to us. Others succeed in spite of the fact that they are not. They may use tricks to get themselves into our heads and get passed on again. They are rather like viruses that take over the copying ability of their host and put it to work for their own propagation.

There are many kinds of meme virus. A good example is an email virus. A typical one shouts Warning, Warning, news just in from IBM (or Bill Gates or...) terrible virus, warn all your friends immediately that if they open a mail called bla bla their hard disk will be wiped clean. This little collection of words can be called a memplex shortened from 'co-adapted meme complex'; in other words, a group of memes that succeeds by hanging out together and getting passed on together. This little memplex has a very simple structure. I call it C-TaP. It is basically a 'copy me' instruction backed up by Threats and Promises. In this case you are told to pass on the message. If you do you will help your friends (the altruism trick), if you don't they will get their hard disk wiped (using fear to threaten). The memplex also uses urgency, status (e.g. IBM), and exploits the fact that passing on an email message to lots of people is quick and easy. And so it is that this stupid little bit of text has been copied around and around the world, infecting millions of computers and still going strong after 5 or 6 years. If you doubt the power of memes to change the world then reflect on this silly little memplex. It has frightened countless people and clogged up whole email systems. A few mindless words have had obvious and serious effects on the physical world. They have even found their way onto this page. This is the power of the memes. Buddhism is a meme.

I began deliberately with a very simple virus but there are far more powerful ones that use exactly the same structure. Dawkins calls them 'viruses of the mind'; he means religions.

Dawkins used the example of Roman Catholicism; a collection of basic teachings that are passed on in church, by learning the catechism, and through prayer, singing hymns and saying grace. Beautiful cathedrals tempt worshippers inside and lift their hearts, making them want to spread the memes again. Beautiful music and songs carry the words of God and Jesus to more ears and minds. Good Catholics pass on all these 'truths' to their children and are encouraged to have lots of children who must, in turn, marry (or convert) a Catholic and bring up their children in the faith. The reward is everlasting life and the punishment, well it's even worse than having your hard disk wiped. In addition the threats and promises are untestable. God can see all you do but you cannot see him. Heaven and hell are only to be seen when you die and cannot come back to let on that it was all a hoax. No wonder such religions and their doctrines fill our world and have survived for thousands of years.

Buddhism might have been an even more interesting example to make his point. In some versions it uses the same tricks, but it has the added feature that the lineage is often preserved. Just as with biological lineages, we can often trace the entire copying history of the central insight from teacher to teacher to teacher, through more than two millennia.

Note that the way to think about these religions is not to imagine someone making up a religion with all these meme-tricks in place, but rather to imagine lots and lots of little cults starting up all over the place at different times, with different tricks. Most would die out, just as most organisms die out without leaving any offspring, but the very few that happen to have the best tricks will win through, persuade people to copy them, and so shape our minds and our cultures. Being infected with a religion at an early age is no trivial matter. It shapes your mind, affects which memes you will subsequently accept or reject, and affects everyone you come into contact with. Very few people choose their religion, even though most think their religion is the best. Most are infected in childhood and never throw the infection off. We are seeing some of the consequences of these religious memes in the world situation we face today.

It is interesting here to compare Zen with Islam or Christianity. At base the memes of Zen are not very sticky or infectious. There is the idea of no-self, the tough practice of meditation, the encouragement to let go, living without clinging or desire and giving up the idea that anything really matters. These are not immediately attractive ideas. No wonder that all too easily Buddhism either fizzles out or becomes a religion like any other with bells and incense and music and beautiful buildings and pictures and statues and promises of gaining merit or being reborn in a better life (a daft idea in view of the insight that the self is not a persisting thing). Memetics helps us understand all this. True Zen treats all these things as so much ephemeral form. Yet as memes they are more likely to get picked up and passed on. Letting them go is not easy.

Now we can come back to the question I asked at the start. Why do we think so much?

There are two good reasons for asking this, perhaps slightly odd, question. First there is all the trouble we have in meditation, and second there is the evolutionary cost. Thinking is expensive in energy terms. Our brains use up a disproportionate amount of our body's energy and we could surely save a lot of valuable resources by just not thinking when we don't absolutely have to. The traditional answer, from evolutionary psychology, is that we must be thinking useful thoughts - perhaps preparing or planning useful actions - but given what tends to come up in meditation, I am not convinced. In any case here is an alternative explanation.

Our minds, at rest - alert and open - are like a beautifully weeded garden, bare brown earth where anything might grow. And just as the weed seeds are ready to jump into all that bare brown earth, so the memes are ready to jump into our open minds. If weed seeds find a space to grow, off they go, and soon all that open space is a mass of dandelions, speedwells and rosebay willow herb.

It is the same with thoughts. Think about what kinds of thoughts are the most troublesome. I don't believe many people are plagued in meditation by the sounds in the room, or by images of scenery once observed, or images of walking or jumping, or even flying. In other words, it is not our immediate perceptions, nor the things we have learned by ourselves that are troublesome; it is the ones we pick up from other people. It is all words and stories that cause the trouble; all memes. You take a simple sound in the room and turn it into words and arguments and likes and dislikes. You fret over what you said to x, agonise about what to do about y, turn over and over those images of destruction and death from the television, and rehearse what you will say or do when z happens. Word, words, and combinations of words. And words are memes.



The reason is simple enough. If a meme can get into your head and get itself passed on it will. Memes that manage this trick do well, get passed on from person to person and keep going. Those that cannot die out. In this way the world becomes filled up with catchy memes; worrying memes and emotional memes; memes you can't resist telling others about, and memes that just have whatever it takes to get you turning them over and over in your mind. These are the survivors in the meme pool. These are the memes we all come across. These are the memes that are ready to jump into the gardens of our minds.

Meditation is the hoe. Meditation is also, of course, a meme. You would never have invented the techniques of Ch'an meditation for yourself. They have been part-invented and part-selected over thousands of years, passing down from person to person in a long evolutionary path. But all of them have this in common - they are ways of defusing the power of other memes. John's wonderfully simple instruction "Let it come; Let it be; Let it go" is a meme-weeding meme. Any other meme that pops up is met with the same response. Its power to stir up your mind is interfered with. Its features designed to get you to store it and pass it on, no longer work so well. "Let it go" gets in its way and the cycle of meme-repetition is broken.

In a similar way the silence and mindfulness we cultivated during the retreat have the same meme-weeding effect. You only have to make eye contact with another human being, or smile in mutual recognition, for a multitude of memes to leap into action, ready for their chance to get spoken or acted out, and hence passed on. There is no need to think of the memes themselves as having intentions or desires (obviously they are only little bits of information and cannot have intentions and desires). Instead think of them this way. Stored in your head are countless ideas, stories, jokes, ways of saying things, words, and ways of putting words together into sentences. Over the long history of the evolution of the English language, and the norms of friendly behaviour in our culture, certain of these have done better at getting copied and most of us have been infected with them. Whenever there is a chance for them to get passed on they will have a go - that is all they do. Look someone in the face and the words "Hi, how are you?" spring ready for action. See someone looking at an empty plate at lunch and the words "Would you like some more bread?" just jump out of your mouth. That is why I suggested we not speak at all during this weekend - not at all - not one word. This is why I suggested we not even look at each other or communicate in any other way (apart from during the discussion periods). There is no need. And when we don't - well the memes have much less chance to jump into our lovely freshly weeded minds. They have to wait their turn, and our minds stay clear and open.

I first got infected by the meme meme about five years ago. What made the ideas so exciting was that memetics can provide new answers to difficult questions, such as why we humans have such big brains, where language came from, and why we can be so altruistic. But gradually I found that the ideas spawned a new attitude in my practice. In meditation I would see these fearsome inner conversations starting up and think 'oh there comes that meme again'. By seeing them as memes, out only for their own selfish replication, I could much more easily let them go. Indeed I could laugh happily at all these little bits of selfish information zooming around, hopping from brain to brain, brain to book, book to computer, and computer to phone. How can you take them so seriously when they are all just memes? I hope this understanding may help you in letting go too.

And who is doing that letting go? That question, too, yields to a memetic answer. Perhaps one day we might have another weekend and take the idea of memes a little further in exploring the nature of self and consciousness.

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For further information on memes go to www.memes.org.uk

Don't Destroy The Emotions Of People

Master Sheng-yen

After reading Sue's intriguing account of "meme weeding" let us look at a more traditional Buddhist approach to the same issue. Master Sheng-yen provides a careful survey of the relation between emotion, attachment and thought in the practice of Chan meditation. His careful account of the distinctions between confused mind, one-mind, and no-mind is of great significance for all practitioners.

The Song of Mind by Niu-T'ou Fa-Jung (594-657 CE) contains this couplet:

*Don't destroy the emotions of people;
Only teach the cessation of thoughts.*

The word which is translated as "emotions" in the first line of this verse actually refers to all ordinary mental activity, including thoughts, dreams, emotions, fantasies, and all other workings of the discriminating mind. Mental activity is part of the human condition. It follows us everywhere, whether we are awake or asleep, whether we are engaged in our everyday routines or practising diligently on a retreat.

One retreatant, who has been practising shikantaza for a couple of years, confessed that he was having difficulties with the method. He said that he thought that when doing shikantaza there should be no thoughts in the mind other than the method. I replied that regardless of what method one uses, there should not be any thoughts other than those directly related to the method. For example, when using the method of counting breaths, the only thoughts in your mind should be those of the breath and the number. As all of you who practice know, this level is not easy to attain.

If, through practice, you attain a state where there are no ordinary thoughts (emotions), then either you have entered a deep level of samadhi or you have reached a level of practice where thoughts continue to arise but do not create any desire or aversion in the mind.

The verses above, however, refer to the emotions of an ordinary person - those thoughts which arise from and lead to self-centered discrimination and attachment.

Reaching the deeper levels of samadhi or the condition where thought has no emotional correspondence to greed, anger, and ignorance requires hard work. To make matters more difficult, if you become attached to or overjoyed by the experience of samadhi itself, those feelings are a product of the ordinary mind. It often happens that people crave the return of samadhi after they initially experience it, thus creating a new obstacle to overcome. Sometimes, for a short span of time - perhaps a few seconds - they might think that they are not discriminating and that they have reached the level of no-mind. This thought may bring with it great satisfaction and joy. Again, this is ordinary emotion. This situation shows that what they believed to be the no-mind state was untrue; rather, it was either the mind of indifference or a mind so unclear that they could not even discern the feelings and thoughts that were filling it. The true state of no-mind, and therefore no discrimination, is to be clearly aware of all that is happening without giving rise to emotions or attachment.

On retreats in country settings, I sometimes allow participants to wander outside with instructions to use their eyes and ears but not their minds. I have yet to encounter someone on retreat who can do that successfully. Sometimes, a few people reach an intermediate stage, where what they see and hear is different from what they ordinarily see and hear. Though they cannot explain it, they say that the trees, the sky, and the other people look somehow different.

We meditate because we cannot automatically or easily reach the level where there are thoughts but no corresponding emotions. It is a gradual process, one that does not proceed linearly from confusion to clarity. You may be clear for one sitting and swamped by wandering thoughts the next. When wandering thoughts arise, you should not feel resentment toward them. That only compounds your vexations. When thoughts and vexations come, keep your mind on the method. The mind of vexation comes in many forms, so be aware. It may be, "Oh! My legs hurt!" or "I'm just wasting my time pretending that I can meditate. I should leave." Or "This feels wonderful, I could sit all day. Why didn't I start meditating years ago?"



On one retreat, a young man came to me and said, "Shih-fu, I have to leave. If I stay any longer I'll end up killing somebody. "

I asked him, "Who are you thinking of killing?"

"You! You're the person I will kill. "

The man was suffering from leg and back pain, and he was indulging in his misfortune. All he could think of was getting back at the person who had made it all possible: me. So I said, "Okay. This should be easy to fix. I'll give you a knife and you can kill me. "

"Well," he said, "I don't feel like killing you right now, and I dare not anyway. "

"In that case," I said, "go back to your cushion and continue sitting. "

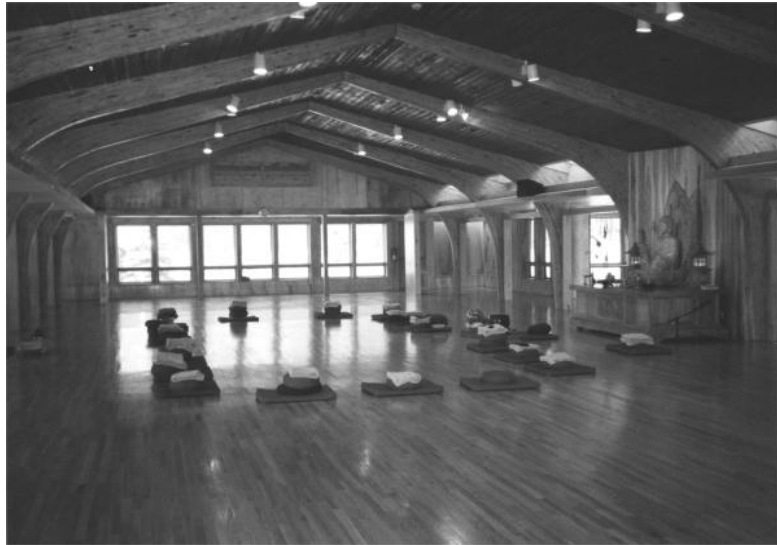
Allowing yourself to be overcome by thoughts and emotions just creates more obstructions. Let them wash through you. Do not attach to them or try to repel them. Learn from the lines of the Song of Mind. Do not try to destroy your emotions, because that is impossible. All you can do is learn to stop the thoughts that are triggered by such ordinary mental activity.

*When thoughts are gone, mind is abolished;
When mind is gone, action is terminated.*

These lines describe the relationship between thoughts and the mind. Thoughts are illusory. They come and go, triggered by emotions and the environment and triggering responses in turn - emotions, other thoughts, speech, and actions. It is the ordinary mind - the illusory mind - which interacts with such thoughts. This is the condition of ordinary sentient beings. There is also the undefiled mind, the mind of purity, which is not reliant on thoughts and

which is not illusory. The mind that is abolished when thoughts cease is the ordinary, defiled mind. The pure, undefiled mind cannot be abolished.

There is no point in trying to ponder intellectually the difference between the defiled mind and the undefiled mind. It is with thoughts that we try to discern the difference. We are embedded within the illusory nature of the defiled mind, and we take it to be real. It is with this defiled mind that we perceive the world, express ourselves, feel emotions, and act. We cannot try to act according to what we imagine to be the way of the undefiled mind. As long as we rely upon such thoughts, we must accept the existence of the defiled mind and have faith that there is an undefiled mind that can be realized.



On retreat, we are all keenly aware of our thought processes. We call them wandering thoughts, confused thoughts. In daily life, we may distinguish between clear thoughts and confused thoughts, but in fact, there is no distinction. Thoughts, by Buddhist definition, are confused. There is no such thing as an unconfused thought. If your thoughts were not confused, they would not be thoughts anymore. They would be wisdom, and wisdom is the functioning of the pure, undefiled mind. Emotions, like thoughts, are constantly moving by their very nature. They stir us to think and act, thereby creating vexations.

People participate in a retreat because they know they are deluded. That is a start. People who do not even recognize that they are confused and deluded have the more serious problem. Look at the world around you, the world we call normal and everyday. It is filled with people controlled by their cravings and aversions - their thoughts clouded and their emotions in disarray - running around creating problems for themselves and others. The environment right outside the Ch'an Center in New York City is a perfect place to observe the confusion and delusion of humanity. One retreatant told me that her friends were worried about her mental health because she was participating in a seven-day intensive meditation retreat. They thought she needed to see a psychologist to help her straighten out her delusions. You may laugh, although we might disagree with her friends' solution, they were not wrong. We are all deeply deluded.

There is this difference between thought and the mind: thoughts are always scattered and confused, whereas the mind can be guided, directed, focused, and unified. We do this in progression from scattered mind to concentrated mind to one mind to no-mind. The line "When thoughts are gone, mind is abolished" seems to imply that we can arrive at the state of no-mind by getting rid of scattered thoughts, but it is not so simple. Thoughts are a function of consciousness, the discriminating mind. This discriminating mind can be

scattered, and it can be concentrated. To have a concentrated mind is already very good, and it is a prerequisite to moving on to one mind and no-mind. If you reach the level of one mind, however, it is not the end of discrimination. By ordinary standards, it would seem that there is no discrimination at the level of one mind, but one mind still has limits and boundaries. The mind must be united with something in order for there to be one mind. Furthermore, to perceive that the mind is united with something else indicates that there still exists a certain amount of discrimination. Therefore, one mind cannot be the ultimate state.

A fundamental tenet of Oriental thought is that "one" comes from "two" and "two" comes from "one." Nothingness cannot give rise to something. This concept is clearly illustrated by the familiar yin-yang symbol. Western religions state that a god who existed before anything, created everything. In other words, "one" gives rise to everything else. If one were to ask where this god came from, the answer would be that god was, is, and ever shall be self-existent. Buddhadharma, however, says that something eternal and never changing cannot give rise to anything else or be created by something else. If one thing has the capacity to create something else, then it, too, must have been created. Both the cause and the consequence are produced through cause and conditions. One mind, therefore, is not absolute and cannot stand alone. It exists within a framework, just as yin exists within the context of yang and yang exists within the context of yin. Neither one can stand alone, and neither one is eternal or unchanging. In the evening liturgy we recite, "To know all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, perceive that dharmadhatu nature is all created by the mind." Here, mind refers to the mind of discrimination, and dharmadhatu nature refers to the countless dharmas, or phenomena, each of which has defining characteristics and boundaries. All phenomena are created by the discriminating mind.

The discriminating mind generates thoughts and ideas, which lead to more thoughts, speech, and action. These thoughts, words and actions are the causes that lead to the future consequences - good, bad, or neutral that we must accept and interact with. This is karma. It creates the ever-changing environment in which we act, and in acting we create more karma. Thus, the cycle continues, moment after moment, life after life, spinning the wheel of samsara.

"When mind is gone, action is terminated" means that when the discriminating mind stops, no further acts that create karma are committed, thereby liberating the individual from samsara.

A retreat is a time set aside to try to abolish the mind of discrimination. Perhaps that sounds a bit frightening, a bit too much for your liking. People think that their sense of identity, existence, and worth depends on this discriminating mind. If the mind is abolished, who will you be? Will you be the same? Will you remember your loved ones? Will you be able to return to your regular lives, your families, and your jobs? Do not worry. You will not turn into zombies with no thoughts or feelings. Ch'an retreats are not factories that produce insane people. From the discriminating mind come confused thoughts and deluded emotions. Enlightened people may be warm-hearted. They have feelings, but they have no attachments to their feelings, nor do they give rise to afflictions to themselves or others as a result of their feelings. From the no-mind state comes true wisdom. After Sakyamuni Buddha attained complete enlightenment, he still recognized his family and disciples. He was aware of everything around him. Otherwise, how could we call him wise, and why would anyone have listened to anything he said?

To abolish the mind means to let go of the mind of attachment. Through practice, you can begin to let go of attachments, and you will begin to experience liberation. You may not become completely enlightened, like the Buddha, but for every moment you can meditate without discrimination, you will be without vexation. The Song of Mind, as well as most Buddhist texts, speaks of high goals, but we must begin by taking the first step. You take those steps when you diligently apply yourself to the methods of practice.



Obituaries

Sadly we have two obituaries for inclusion in this issue. Yet our sadness at the passing of these old zen warriors should be tempered by gratitude. What strident personalities these two were, genuine "one offs", highly original in their life style, insights and practice. How valuable their time with us. How wonderful to have known them. Those who never met them may find encouragement from reading these accounts of their deeply Chan attitudes - old Samurai of the modern West of humble origins, classless, exemplars to us all. Eds.

Ann Hodgson: Shepherdess Extraordinary as remembered by James Crowden

I always think of Ann Hodgson at this time of year, when Spring is sprung and grass is riz and fleets of unruly lambs cavort around the fields.

Ann was by calling a shepherdess, though in her long and varied life she had done many other things. I first heard her shouting for her sheep dogs in the village of Fontmell Magna. One was called Turk and the other called Kyi, which was Tibetan for Dog. So she used to call out "Turkey" if they were both out and about. She herself kept a fine flock of pedigree Dorset Horn ewes, on a shoestring I might add, and she had the grazing on Fontmell Down and a few other off pieces of land scattered around the parish of Ashmore. Sometimes it was cricket pitches, sometimes the ends of airfields, sometimes just small clearings in the woods. She was a past master of the inscrutable 'Art of Impermanence', always on the move, always adapting, always changing with the seasons.

She introduced me to the art of keeping sheep in North Dorset. Here the hills are wonderful rounded, ancient sheep pastures. And there was plenty of work for shepherds. She herself had worked for Rolf Gardiner and then for John Eliot Gardiner, the energetic conductor of the Montiverdi Choir and orchestra. But then she would go off night lambing on the Crichel estate and other large flocks like Morrisons. A hard job for someone in her seventies. But she loved it, the solitude, the quiet, the communion with nature in the raw, the companionship of sheep at dawn. She lived the life of a Buddhist sage without quite realising it.

Often we would chat over a cup of tea in her old people's bungalow in Ashmore and then small fragments of her life would come out. Her mother had been born at sea off Cape Horn, so in her passport there was only longitude and latitude, a not uncommon occurrence in those days. Her father and grandfather and uncles all helped in the business of sailing ships from Valparasio round the Horn to Montevideo and New York. They carried nitrates which was a polite word for guano, sea bird shit of which there were whole islands off Chile, and in the days before artificial fertiliser, the prairies needed that guano, and the vessels carried back wheat, all under sail.

Ann was a mixture of Spanish, Chilean, English and a bit of Scots and Norwegian thrown in for good measure I think. Her mother left her father's family in the thirties and Ann was brought up by an uncle at Portishead near Bristol. Life in the Old Parsonage. Her mother ran an estanzia near what is now Torremolinos. She had very good Spanish and it was a large estate producing mainly oranges. The beaches of Torremolinos then were deserted and very beautiful. Then came the Spanish Civil war. Ann and her sister spent a year in the mountains behind Malaga with the communists. She never talked of that period but it was a time of great trouble and she learnt a lot about human nature. Eventually her sister and herself were taken off on a British destroyer.

Briefly she worked on the land in Gloucestershire and was then sent off with a friend to join the Stallion man which was an education in itself. In those days the stallion man would take the stallion around all the pubs and people would hear that he was in the area and bring their mares to be served in the back yard of the pubs.

When war came she enlisted as a WREN and stayed there for the duration. She trained on very early radar plots and was working in Kent during the Battle of Britain when they used tin foil to confuse the enemy. During this time she hit a petty officer, who was being particularly obstreperous, and who slipped in the showers and hit her head. The others cheered. Miss Hodgson spent two weeks in "clankers" with other Wrens who were "on the game" in Rochester. They completed her education. "Nicer, more compassionate girls you could never find" she said. "Hearts of gold. But they did find the uniform useful".

Ann should have had been there for 28 days but an officer on the plot wanted her back because she was short and he could look over her head. From tin foil she graduated to drifters in the Irish sea. The German and Irish spies in Eire were very good at listening in on convoy radio signals and so the British had to devise the system of sealed orders which were only opened on the Commodore's vessels after they had left harbour. There was no radio contact at all and the drifter was used to take the Captains back and forth with the orders and to pick up drunk Americans who had fallen over the side. Hauling in a body with a boat hook isn't all that easy. It was whilst on the drifters that Ann started to read Christmas Humphreys and Buddhism. The only book on Buddhism around at the time.

After the drifters she worked as a driver for an American embalmer, and she had to drive him to airfield after airfield. The Americans wanted their aircrew embalmed if possible and then sent home, the rest ended up in a cemetery near Cambridge. Life and death, live in the moment. Ann was engaged to a bomber pilot but he did not agree with bombing civilian cities night after night and had asked for a transfer. He was shot down by friendly fire over Southampton Water on his last mission.

After the war Ann worked on farms in Gloucestershire; one spring she went crop spraying. She did two spells on Exmoor as a shepherdess and then ended up in Fontmell Magna in the early sixties. I met her in autumn 1980. Since the war she had never met anyone interested in Buddhism and so talking Buddhism was a great eye opener for her and I persuaded her to come up to Maenllwyd, which she took to, like a duck to water. She answered koan after koan, as she had been pondering them all her life more or less. She once described her wandering thoughts as running dogs.

On retreat in the communication exercises she was fantastic and saw into the heart of things immediately. She gained many friends in her last ten years and was also part of a Buddhist group near Shaftesbury. Many sought her out for her wisdom over a cup of tea and a chat. She related very well to all ages and was welcoming to everyone. She loved her sheep dogs and lived more and more simply. She died in the spring three years ago and I had to scatter her ashes on Fontmell Down where she had kept her sheep.

She lived the life of a lay Zen Buddhist, a farm worker, a thinker, a meditator, a wise friend. Her life touched many people and she will be sorely missed. I often think of her reciting Hui Neng or simply counting sheep, leaning over a gate looking at the view.

The moon and the stars

Sheep grazing -

Quiet water reflected

Upon the downs,

Early light - Mist swirls

The flock before dawn

All alone you see the sun rise

The shape of things to come-

Skylarks.

David Brandon - Social work and Zen

Ken Jones

David Brandon, a founder of socially engaged Buddhism in the UK, died peacefully in a Scarborough hospice in the early hours of 26th November 2001. He was aged sixty.

David was a working class Geordie and his early life was a tough struggle. He was ordained, at Maezumi Roshi's invitation, when visiting the Los Angeles Zen Centre. I recall the zendo he built in his converted garage in Preston as one of the most conducive and elegant I have ever experienced. I believe that David would have made a fine Zen teacher - our homegrown Master Bankei, his compassionate and curmudgeonly exemplar.

David chose to dedicate his life to social service, and especially working with and for the homeless. After fifteen years as a social worker he became Head of Applied Social Studies at Preston Polytechnic, and subsequently professor at the other university of Cambridge (the former poly). Disillusioned with institutional politicking, not long before he died David moved to Scarborough and, with his wife Althea, set up a consultancy, Tao.

Zen and the Art of Helping was published in 1976 - perhaps the first British book on engaged Buddhism. It has become a classic, with successive reprints and still selling after a quarter of a century. In 1983 David helped found the UK Buddhist Peace Fellowship (forerunner of the Network of Engaged Buddhists), and was a frequent contributor to its sparky magazine 'Down by the Riverside' (now 'Indra's Network'). Together with other pioneers like Christopher Titmuss and David Arnott, David and I preached the gospel of engaged Buddhism in a variety of venues, as well as taking the banner on the great peace marches of that time. David played a valued part in establishing engaged Buddhism as a widely respected dharma today, at a time when it was treated with widespread suspicion and even hostility by many within the Buddhist community.

David was a fearless scourge of anyone who presumed to think that they knew what the needy needed better than did the needy themselves - especially overweening members of the caring professions, Directors of Social Services, and the like. He had a good nose for cant and skulduggery - including that in the Buddhist establishment -- and didn't suffer fools and rogues gladly. For the thousands in need whom he helped his was the tough, unsentimental love of an equal -- humble, and deeply compassionate. I recall the back door of David and Althea's Preston home always being left open at night, so that in the morning one never knew which of his homeless protégés might be sprawled on the couch.

In many ways David was a classic Zen eccentric - a rough diamond "man of no rank". Our meetings or phone conversations over the years usually began with a sparring match, to see who could be the most affectionately rude to the other. That way we grew uncommonly fond. Over the years I began to sense the remarkable depth of love there was in the man.

For me David's most memorable testimony is in this poem of his:

*If only
I could throw away
the urge
to trace my patterns
in your heart
I could really see you*

November has been a sad month for engaged Buddhist veterans. For earlier we lost Ray Wills, editor of the Buddhist Hospice Trust magazine Raft and facilitator of its Ananda Network. Like David, Ray wished to be remembered as a Buddhist with a small 'b', and he, also, had little time for institutional Buddhism, 'movements', charismatic leaders, and dharmic dogma. Both men belonged to a very British liberal and radical tradition, which

also has a strong mystical and nonconformist side (Ray's affection for William Blake was well known) of Buddhism which is worthy of nurture. And I believe that our Western Ch'an Fellowship has become an important part of that tradition. Thus we honour the passing of two great Dharma comrades.

Cwmrheidol, Wales; 30 November 2001

NB "The Unborn: Life & Teaching of Zen Master Bankei" trans & intr. Norman Waddell. San Francisco:North Point 1984 ISBN 0-86547-153-3. A good read

IN A DARK TIME

*Making the mistake of continuing
we wander now in a meadow of thistles
yet even here we may listen
to the songs of larks.*

*I am afraid of flooding the mind
too suddenly with images
letting these black rooks
flap in their myriads, cawing*

*to some festival
claws clutching at midnight twigs
half budded only, green tips
coming slowly to the sun.*

*What have we done that suddenly
these figurines take life gyrate, kaleidoscope and waltz
clashing their symbols, omens of bird flights
feathering under heaven.*

*Having strangled God he gets back at us
with whips and great canes
beating slowly our twisting
bodies on the bed*

*til we are crying
No No No
and enter this unending
inner scream.*

*In my cupboard I keep it,
only under the pressure of someone's kindness
do I let it out
cracking the glass in the windows.*

*My scream is as unending as a wheel
spinning in a monastery.
I am as trapped as monks
in their wheels of prayer.*

*My scream makes no sound
I don't disturb anyone
it just goes on and on
in silence.*

*I don't know what you will do when you hear it
Our hearts are so close it will kill you.*

John Crook

YES

*I simply want to say "Yes!"
wordlessly
tongueing the flute
where words could go on
endlessly
into the deep woods.*

*Such warm silences of the heart
this unison in joy
and the sea-bird's
weeping.*

*This tangible absence -
looking for the caress
of lips with pain blossoming.*

Let be to let be

John Crook

From an unpublished collection: Shamanic Verses- revised 2002

THE WORLD OF THE CHAKMAS

January 2001

Ian Finlay

The northeastern states of India are little known, they lie way beyond the tourist trails and few penetrate these remote areas. Many of the people of these hills are of independent spirit, Buddhists or animists with a love of nature and they have been much persecuted. Few contacts have been made with them in recent years. Ian's valuable account introduces them to us and describes their difficult lives. Ian was working there for the charity Amida. Eds

I've just got back from a journey through Tripura. I intended to travel on into Bangladesh to visit the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the ancestral home of the Chakma people and where many still live, but although I got as far as the border, I decided not to cross, mainly because my Chakma guide did not have documentation and chickened out at the last moment. I did not want to go alone so I chickened out as well. A shame really but I was having one of my bouts of insecurity and, by the time I had got over that, had gone down with a fever from which I have still not fully recovered.

So I spent several days in the Tripuran capital, Agartala. The journey down was quite something, about 420 miles, a solid 24 hours in a bus, the length of time due to the state of the roads, dirt track in places, the army checkpoints, and even elephants on the road. The scenery is spectacular, mountainous jungle, very unspoilt, but the area is notorious for terrorism, and we went through in convoy of about twenty trucks and buses escorted by heavily armed soldiers of the Assam Rifles toting machine guns. Terrorism is rife in this area. There are over a hundred tribes in the northeast and nearly all have their own liberation movements, which have usually disagreed amongst themselves and split into different factions. Add to this the inter-tribal wars, the various Assamese autonomous movements, and throw in the various fanatical Christian and Muslim groups and you begin to get the picture.

I met many more Chakma people down in Tripura, both in Agartala and in a village, although it was too dangerous for me to stay long in the countryside, much as I wanted to. But of course I did not want Amida to have to pay out a large ransom if I was kidnapped.

Throughout the country here I have been overwhelmed by kindness and generosity, not just from the Chakma but the other tribals, the Assamese and the Manipuris as well. Everywhere I have been taken in and fed, even the very poorest have insisted on giving everything they can. Such openness and generosity I have to say makes me deeply ashamed to be British. I think of the reception such a guest would get in our country. It is something we all might like to ponder. And some of the people are very poor indeed, in fact nearly all of them.

In Agartala I visited many Chakmas living in really terrible conditions, tiny bamboo huts with no facilities, bits of newspaper over the walls, plastic sheet or bits of thatch or corrugated tin to try to keep out the rain, hell in the monsoon. Surrounded by stagnant water with rubbish and sewage. Families of six or seven living in two rooms, and many of these were highly intelligent people, speaking five or six languages including good English. Some were professional, a retired schoolteacher unable to get a pension, a young advocate, students, an engineer. One man travelled seventy miles to see me. He was a poor farmer who tried to keep seven people, wife, parents and two children on two acres of rice paddy. I tried to offer him money, as tactfully as I could through my interpreter as he said he could no longer send his son to school, but he refused saying he just wanted an outsider to know, to tell his story.

For the Chakma are indeed a people ignored. Most of us are probably aware of the plight of the Tibetans, but things are in many ways worse for the Chakma, and the other tribals, the Marma, the Mogh and the others who fled the Muslim genocide in Bangladesh. And of course those who could not flee, their fellow Buddhist tribals as well as groups like the animist Mro tribe, now almost completely wiped out. "We want the land, we do not want the people" declared one army general, or "it is the duty of every Bengali to put a Muslim baby in the womb of every Buddhist woman" declared another. And this is a genocide that continued for fifty years, since the Chittagong Hill Tracts were so corruptly and unfairly ceded to Bangladesh at the time of partition in 1947, even though they were 90% Buddhist and only 1% Muslim.

Things got worse in 1964 when the Kaptai dam was built with international aid. Thousands of Chakma lost their land, homes and temples and were killed or driven out. Thousands fled to India, settling in the remotest areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram and the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. As the rape and killing continued refugees poured out from Bangladesh so that there are now over 150,000 Chakma and other tribals from Chittagong in the hill states. Most live in appalling conditions and meet with further violence, prejudice and intimidation from locals in these areas. They do not own the land and medical and education facilities are almost nonexistent. No foreign aid agencies operate here.

Although a peace deal was finally signed in Bangladesh in 1997 it was too late for most Chakmas there as their land had been stolen by Bengalis and the government of Bangladesh is not honouring the agreement. The army has not been withdrawn and only a token amount of land returned. Killing, torture and rape continue at a lower level and the peaceful Buddhist Chakma still live in fear.

I met three leaders of the Chakma resistance in Tripura, men who had in desperation taken up arms against the atrocities. They had helped form the Shanti Bahini, the 'peace force' that fought the army in the late seventies and eighties. All three talked of returning to the struggle and asked me what I thought. I had to say that I was not against it on moral grounds, feeling that defence is justified, but that I did not see how it could succeed against an army as powerful as Bangladesh's without any international aid.

It was an intense time, like so many others here, talking to men who had suffered so much, been through so much, and so desperately wanted to help their people. My heart goes out to the suffering of the Chakma people. May we all help to spread happiness to all beings.

RETREAT REPORT

Retreat reports are an integral aspect of our journal and one much approved of by Shi fu. 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.

Pain in Space, Space in Pain

Koan retreat 2001

People on retreat sometimes arrive with painful and difficult physical symptoms from a pre-existing medical condition. Often a retreat can help because the work alters the attitude the participant has to such a condition. Readers should however know that the condition reported in this account is exceptional and was the consequence of an earlier accident. Eds

I had seen a consultant rheumatologist last Friday. He thinks my physical problems are to do with the hypothalamus misperceiving ordinary messages as pain. There's lots of recent research into it ('Regional Pain Syndrome') and he re-assures me it's the 'brain' and not the 'mind'. He recommends Alexander Technique, Acupuncture and heavily hinted I should get some cannabis!

I chose the 'sanctuary' koan.

The World Honoured One was out walking with the Gods. He stopped and, pointing to the ground with his finger, said, " Here's a good place to build a sanctuary!" Indra - the king of the Gods-- took a blade of grass and stuck it in the ground saying, " The sanctuary is built!"

The World Honoured One smiled.

Straight away I dropped into a big space. Little pain and much stillness. Everything seemed to be of the same status as it went through this space, noises, feelings, thoughts, things outside and things inside, just moving through this massive space. Very nice it was too. At the same time I was aware that even though my head knew that there was a sanctuary, my heart felt unsafe. This sense gradually deepened over the first few days so that I was simultaneously in the big space and aware of underlying distress. I was trying to figure out how to live without a sense of safety.

After a few days, there were shaking fits during zazen. The tension in my spine and back of my head would shudder out and set me rocking. Then my right arm would jiggle about, my diaphragm go into rapid pulses like crying, and my eyes would twitch. They got longer and more intense. They seemed to come about when I was very relaxed in the big space and would last a minute or so. There would be two or three fits each half hour zazen period. It worried me that it would disturb people. In interview with John, he offered a description of there being three distinct areas in my make-up. The physical trauma part, the psychosomatic reaction to this and the self-aware part trying to 'see the source'. He didn't think that these fits were affecting anyone else. He said that he thought there was every reason to be optimistic as I was doing what I could about all these three areas. He offered a trick which was when I was really down to say to yourself 'Yes, I'm really depressed' and then go from there rather than struggle against it.

From this point, about half way through the retreat, I got increasingly irritated with the other retreatants. Critical and competitive thoughts got louder. Because of the big space, it was easier not to go along with these thoughts, they were just there. I could see that these elements of myself were built up out of my history with four older brothers. Because I could see this, I could refrain from beating myself up about it as has happened on other retreats. It was quite painful to see this policeman/tyrant part of myself.

Things got gradually more intense. I was fiercely 'investigating', being very aware of what my senses brought, the koan underpinning everything, and eventually the pain started. It got going between my shoulders and as a pressure inside my head, the shakes got more extreme. One lunchtime I went into a fit at the dinner table. It hadn't happened off the cushion before. It was embarrassing to lose control in public. The hot water was being passed from person to person. Eddy was about to pass it to me but I couldn't take it from him, it would've been dangerous. My whole body was vibrating and twitching. It was upsetting. He poured the water for me. It eventually subsided so that I could continue with the clean up after the meal.



I needed to talk to Hillary, who is a doctor, because I was worried that I was developing epilepsy or something. She reassured me and we talked over how fed up I was with carrying all this trauma stuff for so long - over ten years since the accident now. John told us about Hakuin who had a lot of tension as a young monk. He was advised to bring his chi into his feet with a breathing and visualisation exercise. I started to do the exercise instead of the koan as everything was too painful, tiring and useless. It was obvious that further thinking about the koan would be to no avail. Near despair I just gave up and asked my feet to take the koan for me!

Every time I thought of the koan, it underlined how much I didn't know what the sanctuary was, how distressed I was underneath. In a long interview with Hilary it all came to a head. I described my situation and in doing so had a kind of vision. I struggled through a desert in the valley of the shadow of death. A heavy yoke on my back. I get to the oasis but there is no water, only a palmful of salty tears. There are buildings nearby. With my last strength I go over to them in hope of rescue. It is a ghost town, the windows broken, a hot wind blows rags forlornly. Someone has written on a wall 'the sanctuary is built'. Even if I had any energy left, I'd not know the way to go.

This was all about following the Dharma path leading to the retreat and my not getting the answer. I couldn't help but want my pain to stop and trying all these things to find help for it had failed. I went for a big cry in the valley behind the Maenllwyd. Being away from others made it easier to really let it go and vocalise it.

Funny, but the sequence of events is now all mixed up in my mind. How the internal journey maps onto what happened in external events is now not clear. Anyway, on the last full day I went for the afternoon walk. I whizzed off up the hill feeling pretty good. It was windy and rainy with dark clouds whizzing by. On the tops, I jumped over a fence and went across a plain. Dark clouds lay below the plain, a sheep track lead back to the path down to the Maenllwyd. The clouds above thinned out and got very bright illuminating the grass. A strong, cold wind blew at my back. I pulled down my anorak hood and took off my woolly hat.

A voice inside said 'Isn't that cold on your head' and my whole self answered 'YES, and it's GREAT!'. Suddenly, the desert had bloomed, I knew perfectly well that 'the sanctuary is built'. Pain was a mystery that told me that I was alive. The very fact of experience emphatically swept all problems aside. I picked a blade of grass and skipped down the hill. As I got back, Hilary and I met, I gave her the blade of grass, she plucked one too, gave it to me and we hugged.

From that point the shakes lessened. The things that irritated me about the others turned in to the very things that I found endearing about them, the expression of their individuality. The very same things! Although it was very reassuring to know the sanctuary, there was still the knowledge that there were many more mountains to climb. There was a kind of distant sadness too, I knew that the path leads on -- a long, long way. I had not got enlightened. Still, it was an opening, an awakening of sorts. The deep tensions in my body and mind have to be expressed for me to go further - further in this not-going-anywhere game of ours.

Here's a poem that popped into my mind on the last morning:

*Corporate chair,
As specific,
As all the rest.*

Sometimes in and sometimes out

from Jo Horwood

*Our irrepressible Australian friend sends us this reminder about not being too serious.
Enjoy. Eds*

Cricket as explained to a foreign visitor:

You have two sides, one out in the field and one in.

Each man that's in the side that's in goes out and when he's out he comes in and the next man goes in until he's out.

When they are all out the side that's out comes in and the side that's been in goes out and tries to get those coming in, out.

Sometimes you get men still in and not out.

When both sides have been in and out including the not outs, that's the end of the game.

All is clear, I assume!

NEW BOOK
ILLUMINATING SILENCE
MASTER SHENG YEN

Introductions and commentaries by John Crook

This comprehensive work provides an introduction to the practice of Chinese Zen (Chan) by a great contemporary Chan master based on talks given during two intensive retreats at the Maenllwyd - the meditation centre of the Western Chan Fellowship in Wales. It provides a basic handbook for all concerned with an effective training in Zen for the West.

In his foreword Stephen Batchelor writes: "The discourses are lucid and direct, drawn widely on the sources of Chinese Buddhism, and speak in a refreshingly modern idiom. Perhaps because the setting was relatively small and intimate, the gentleness, warmth and humour of Master Sheng Yen radiate throughout the text."

Part One provides full details of the unfolding of a Chan retreat with details of schedule, liturgy and all talks by the Master thereby enabling the reader to sit in on the retreat as it developed.

Part Two contains a careful presentation of the meditation method of Silent Illumination (mo chao) which, taken later to Japan, there became the sitting style called "shikantaza". The talks here are based in the original presentations of Master Hongzhi Zhenjue (1090-1157).

Part Three comprises retreat reports written by the editor during his training with Master Sheng Yen and which thus provide the reader with an experience of what it is like to "sit" a training retreat with a Chan master.

John Crook, the Teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship and the first European Dharma Heir of the Master in the Linchi and Caodong traditions of Chinese Zen, has constructed the text from the taped English interpretations by Ming Yee Wang of the spoken mandarin. He writes: "I was engaging in an exercise in hermeneutics, an interpretation of the teaching in which my own subjectivity was highly engaged. I thus received the teachings many times over." John also provides combinatorial introductions to each part of the text and an edited autobiography of the master.

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- by clicking the link at www.WesternChanFellowship.org/books.html
- Price: £9.99. US\$ 14.95.

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

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

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