

NEW CHAN FORUM

禪

No. 28 Summer 2003

Dharma Adviser
*The Venerable
Chan Master
Dr. Sheng-Yen*

Teacher
*Dr. John Crook
(Chuan-deng Jing-di)*

Editors
*John Crook
Marian Partington
Simon Child*

Photographs
Simon Child

Price: £3. 50

WHY ARE WE HERE?

What is this journal for? In this issue we continue questioning our effectiveness in practice and understanding. Our journal is intended to support the teaching and sharing which we practice on our retreats and in our regional groups. How well does it fare? It depends ultimately on your contributions. We invite more news about how you take the Dharma into your daily lives. Please tell us.

We also have Shi fu's talk on terrorism and religion to a forum of the United Nations, experiences in Guestmastering, a visit to Japan and a review of Ken Jones splendid new volume of haibun among other thoughts, poems and teachings. Read, learn and inwardly digest. Our journal is an important aspect of our mutual endeavour.

The Flawed Pot	Jo Harwood	2
Editorial from the Chan hall: "Self at Ease"	Chuan-deng Jing-di	3
Violence and terrorism in religion	Master Sheng yen	7
Poem: City living	Nigel Jeffcoat	10
Putting legs on a snake	Ken Jones	11
Poem: Fulfilling true nature	Rebecca Li	14
Cherry Blossom Viewing in Japan	Sister Ruth	16
Poem: Bonfire night with Millie	Marian Partington	19
On the Ceasing of Notions	John Crook	20
Guestmastering a Mahamudra Retreat	Nigel Jeffcoat	26
Retreat Report		27
Book reviews	John Crook and Sally Masheder	32 34

The Flawed Pot

Jo Horwood

Jo has sent us this version of an old folk tale from India. Enjoy!

A Water Bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water.

At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the Water Bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologise to you. I have been able to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house.

Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house. "

Moral: Each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all cracked pots, but it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. You've just got to take each person for what they are, and look for the good in them. Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.

I'm grateful for all of my crackpot friends.

Editorial From The Chan Hall

'Self at Ease'

What is this journal for? Why do some of us work so hard to keep on issuing these copies of New Chan Forum? What is the policy of this publication? First of all, it is not a house journal retailing our meetings, events and personal experiences as if in a chat room. Rather, it has a serious teaching intent augmenting our programme of retreats and the work of our regional groups. It attempts to develop clearly the means by which we fulfil our charitable constitution.

There may be some who would prefer 'lighter' material, others might seek philosophy. Our intent is essentially existential: to further the experience of Chan, to deepen our understanding through sharing and to show what we have felt and thought while doing this. So we include serious but not 'academic' texts, poems, accounts of retreat experiences, comments on the times and Buddhist iniquities as we see them, as well as hopes for the future, sermons, stories and laughs. Certainly we invite contributions in all these modes. Perhaps especially it would be good to have more accounts of the experience of trying to practice Dharma in everyday life: at the shop counter; in the bank; building a house or a car; negotiating business or counselling the bereaved. What ever it is - how did your understanding of Dharma, such as whatever it may be, play a role in your work and thought?

At our recent AGM I tried to explain my understanding of what the WCF is endeavouring to teach through its retreats and other offerings. Based profoundly in the Dharma revelation of Master Sheng yen this is an attempt to make clear the Buddha's subtle message to our time within our own particular Sangha. It seems worthwhile providing some of what I said then, here, for a wider audience.

These are very difficult times in which the understanding of human spirituality is deeply confused, especially in the West, and in which the politics of contemporary consumerism create forms of self concern which the Dharma confronts with perspectives that may seem counter cultural in spite of their psychological depth. These are times when presentation matters, because unless ideas are perceived as relevant they will not be heeded. Hence I am emphasising certain aspects of the Dharma more strongly than others (see NCF 27: Passing down the Robe) in order to clarify the purpose of the Dharma to contemporaries more clearly.

Chan is an enlightenment project and the requirements for a deep understanding of such an endeavour are essentially self-confrontational. The root project of the Buddha is the setting aside of the self which is both the root of illusory attachment and the source of ignorance. The process is necessarily one of self-understanding - which means you, which means me. Yet we live in a time when self-concerned individualism, encouraged by every commercial means possible, is the basis of our capitalistic, competitive striving. As David Loy has been pointing out in recent writings, our strong sense of 'lack' is rooted in the despair that the illusory attachment to self ultimately generates. Today it is not so much alternative out-of-path religions that comprise a problem for Buddhism, but rather the unconscious cravings for wealth, status, self-esteem and aggressive acquisition necessary for capitalism to continue. And capitalism is a proven means of limiting the poverty for some while increasing it for others. How then can we confront the ego, not so much the rampant evil ego of a Saddam Hussein, which produces its own gross opposition, but the subtle ego of semi-conscious self-enhancement at the expense of others that manifests in everyday affairs and sustains our unease.

In modern Zen these issues are compounded by an almost competitive seeking for 'enlightenment' as a product of propaganda by some Zen institutions. An illusion about enlightenment is projected as the 'product' of training. Yet Chan/Zen teaching makes clear that an enlightenment experience, let alone a continuing enlightened state, cannot arise through any sort of self-based desire. Given the nature of our culture this is not only a difficult task to undertake but quite problematic for conventional understanding. Furthermore there may be a number of paths which individuals may take, paths that are relative to their karmic character.



To many westerners, Zen still seems to be solely about the attainment of a precise experience known from the Japanese as "*kensho*", by which is meant an event, commonly of very short duration, in which ego concern totally vanishes in the extraordinary clarity of an unfiltered perception revealing the universe just 'as it is'. This experience became emphasised for Westerners as the goal of zen in the influential writing of the great scholar Daisetz Suzuki whose personal training as a layman in Rinzai Zen followed that suitable for young monks who needed a quick qualification in order to inherit the temples of their fathers. High-pressure training induced experiences but many of them, according to Master Sheng yen, were probably shallow and arising while the young men were as yet hardly mature. Furthermore, Suzuki had failed to mention another focus of great importance in Japan, the Soto Zen approach brought there from China by the great monk Dogen. In this Cao-dong tradition all of us are considered basically enlightened from the start, it is only the complexity and depth of our 'vexations' that prevent us knowing this. In other words, enlightenment does not have to be sought for it is already there. We need to learn to 'lean back' into it - as Roshi Reb Anderson has expressed it, an outcome barely possible for those desperately searching for something that has never been lost; a search furthermore clearly driven by subtle egoism.

All this is not to suggest that a *kensho* experience is not extremely significant, merely that for some it becomes too exclusively the focus of Zen training as a desired outcome. The insight gained through such an experience is life changing in its realisation that the mind does not depend on the ego for its function and that the world just goes on in its impermanent flux anyway. It naturally leads to a falling away of suffering through an

increasing concern with the needs of others. Yet, since it happens to one as it were 'from its own side' and in its own time when the mind is ready, its occurrence cannot be premeditated or grasped by any sort of wanting. Indeed to want it is to preclude it.

People vary in the likelihood of having such an experience. In both the Chan and the Tibetan traditions three grades of individual are described. There are those for whom the insight arises spontaneously, maybe outside the realm of teaching altogether, and it only needs the refinement of a teaching from a master to set the individual on the path of a Bodhisattva. Master Huineng is a good example. For others, intensive long-term training in meditation methods is required (for example Dogen) but, even then, such training cannot without fail yield such a paradoxical experience. There are also some whose karmic obscurations are so heavy that it is unlikely their egoistic referencing can ever be laid aside. Master Sheng yen says that it is within a life dedicated to Dharma that *kensho* arises, not through any specific method or meditational training. It is also vital to realise that the egoistic self returns so that continued work is needed. One experience does not mean you are enlightened person - you have had no more than a glimpse of what that may mean.

It follows that our WCF training, particularly for newcomers, should start with a method and a focus that grants some success without the immediate need for the radical undermining of self that is ultimately demanded but which may seem unreachable in every day life. In our retreats over twenty years, the number of persons who have, or may have, experienced an enlightenment moment (*kensho*) is extremely small. Yet many have felt that extraordinary oneness and clarity that comes from an insight into the interdependence of self and universe - the 'one-mind experience'.

This valuable insight may arise through intensive training on retreat at a stage well before the letting go of self at a deeper level is likely. While teaching the dharma of enlightenment, it seems additionally important to encourage retreatants and Dharma practitioners in this less paradoxical direction. Such an insight I call 'self at ease'. There is a sense of oneness with all things, a profound experience of peace and a clarity of perception due to a marked reduction in the fog of ego concern, even though the practitioner may be quite self congratulatory in the bliss of attainment. 'Self at ease' is attainable directly through adequately focussed attention once the confusion of thought has died down. As Dogen puts it "When you do these things for some time the treasure house opens naturally". Self at ease can then become a basis for further practice, 'not meditation' as the Tibetans put it, a bare awareness without purpose that eventually allows the realisation of higher states (*jnanas*), 'manifesting from their side', and which, with insight into emptiness, become the revelation of our basic unselfed condition (*tathagata garbha*).

These points suggest our training must focus first on calming the mind. This requires a precise attentiveness to the mind's process that arises in the practice of Silent Illumination or Mahamudra. No glitzy, worried mainstreaming to fit contemporary culture is required here. What is needed is the entirely conventional application of the Buddha's methods as revealed in the Sutras, developed in the Abhidharma and emphasised in the Mahayana sutras that lie at the basis of Chan/Zen. Since these methods can produce a 'taste of chocolate' as Lama Thubten Yeshe used to say, they can encourage practitioners into a deeper understanding of the Dharma eventually leading to a heartfelt letting go of attachments of all kinds - including 'me'. Gradual training and sudden insight are thereby related.

The application of insight requires an everyday process of mindfulness. Our training must therefore also encourage a daily practice that is not so much a time spent in 'sitting' as a moment to moment cultivation of self-awareness: a knowing why I do this, within a gentle

critique that does not beat oneself over the head. Such mindfulness is actually the practice of the eightfold path. Any mechanical practice will not do the trick. Mindfulness is all in the everyday.

Finally a warning: if a practitioner settles down in 'self at ease' he/ she will be like someone who, as Shifu has put it, finds a level place upon a mountain full of ferns, fresh water and sunshine and behaves as if it were the summit itself. Not so. 'Self at ease' must itself be let go, otherwise it too will grow stale in a false contentment. The path never ends. The mystery beyond the signless signpost pointing out over the ocean has not yet been understood.

In the end one suspects all this is forgotten. At home in the universe the bodhisattva is not concerned with him/herself nor with discovering anything. There is simply the task of working for all in the knowledge that everything is a sharing in all.

One may thus say - this is all words. Hughie told us recently of a story in which a Japanese teacher with little English was asked for his view of practice in the UK. He said:

*"Books, books, books,
too much, too much, too much,
dustbin, dustbin, dustbin!"*

And, of course, this is spot on. If you find yourself at the top of a thousand foot pole all you have to do is to step off. One discovers:

*No top
No bottom
No gravity.
Everything as usual....*

But most of us have yet to reach the top of the thousand-foot pole - let alone attempt the stepping off it. Those who do need no words.

These remarks have been made to encourage those for whom the path may begin to seem too difficult or irrelevant to our times. The Dharma path is not only long and wide, it has many tracks. The root intention must be the development of *bodhicitta* - the spirit of the bodhisattva seeking enlightenment for all irrespective of him/herself. And, for this, those of humble attainment, as the world seems to know, may contribute much. Even those who seem to be in the third category, deeply troubled human beings such as the great monk Hakuin was for so long, may actually become greater practitioners than those with sharp Dharma intuition. Kindness, compassion and empathy are also the routes to great insights that may arise when time alone knows the moment. Let no one be proud.

Chuan-deng Jing-di

June 2003

Violence and Terrorism in Religion

Chan Master Sheng Yen, Litt. D.

United Nations Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium, New York, May 21 2003

Shifu was invited recently to a UN conference called "Global conference on the use of religion to incite violence (terrorism): Crime Against Humanity"

The conference was held at United Nations Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium in the UN building in Manhattan. Representatives of all major world faiths were present and gave their views. Shifu's talk follows. Some may be surprised at his use of the word 'God' in this article. Shifu was seeking a way of speaking that would relate most easily to the thought of the representatives of the 'Abrahamic' religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam which predominated at the meeting. By avoiding ontological controversy, he was enabled to press his main principles for action without unnecessary debate. We should not think he has suddenly become a theistic dualist!!¹ We have here an example of the practice of 'skillful means' as shown by the Buddha in his own time. Eds.

We believe that all religions of the world advocate that human beings should live together in harmony. We have to accept that all religions in the world believe that the 'God' they worship is the most righteous, the most loving, and possesses the greatest capacity to give humanity blessings of well-being and happiness.

So why has the world been rife with contradictions and conflicts, violence and terror throughout its history and why has this happened among social groups with the strongest religious fervour? Even among believers of the same religion in the same ethnic group, with shifts in times, environments, individual understanding, and emotional experiences, conflicts arose with people insisting that the God who accorded with their own knowledge, views, experiences and beliefs was the only correct, most peace-loving, most real, and the most perfect ultimate truth. In such a way opposition, ideological rivalry and violent confrontations came about. This is probably the basic reason for the intolerance among various forms of fundamentalism which brings about bloody conflicts.

This is neither the problem of 'God' nor of religion. Rather this situation arises because of human beings' ignorance, their lack of wisdom, and the inability to open up their minds in an attempt to understand oneself and others.

If one believes that one's God is omniscient, omnipotent, full of love and authority, one should also believe that this God will provide the most appropriate teachings relevant to the needs of the numerous different ethnic groups of different times and civilizations. Such various manifestations should be the result of God's all encompassing love for all humans. With such understanding, one will see that the Gods worshipped by all religions and their sects are all derivations of a supreme, monistic God, manifesting in different forms as the result of 'his' universal love for humanity. If God can manifest in many different forms, then followers of all religions are none other than the children of God. Therefore, are they not all brothers and sisters? Is there still need for opposition and conflict?

Unless this is seen to be so, the suspicion, denial, opposition and struggle among religions and sects will inevitably result in endless conflicts. Because of these conflicts, everyone loses his sense of security. In order to guarantee safety and protect survival, and in order to preach God's love and extend God's righteousness and power, there seems to be no choice

¹Text lightly edited by permission from Master Sheng yen

but to use violence as a means to suppress those deemed as the evil enemies. These evil enemies are to be terrorized, destroyed, and thoroughly annihilated from the face of the earth so that no lurking dangers remain for one's ethnic group and religious sect. In reality, one can never completely annihilate all those who disagree with one's thoughts and religious beliefs. In any case such enemies are all generated from misunderstandings within the mind to begin with; after one group is exterminated, another group will appear. This way of perceiving all parties that do not concur with oneself as evil demons brings about an endless cycle of retaliation. How terrible this is!

Therefore I believe that religious violence and its terrorism have their origin in human beings' insecurity. When confronted with phenomena that one does not yet know, suspicion gives rise to fear. Because of fear one resorts to violent means, striking out pre-emptively to embolden oneself and trigger terror in the enemies.

How can we solve this millennia-old problem that has remained unresolved? I suggest the following two main general approaches:

The most swiftly effective means is to pass a resolution under international law in the United Nations stipulating that in order to protect human beings' freedom to express pluralistic religious belief and security of human lives, any individuals, ethnic group or country who uses religious groups to incite violence and terrorism should be tried by international criminal court and subjected to sanctions by all of humanity. Because this is not my area of expertise, such a proposal should be discussed by the legal experts in this conference.

The most thoroughly effective means to end violence is:

Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches to constantly extend, whenever it is appropriate, our friendship towards every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. Let them know that they are not alone or helpless and let them feel the warmth of care, respect and acceptance. When they feel the sense of security, then they will no longer feel the need to engage in violent terrorist actions because of fear.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches to actively interact with, understand, and empathize with every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. Whenever it is appropriate, help them to correctly understand their own religious beliefs and let them know that if they want to receive God's love, they must emulate God's all-encompassing love for the world. Hence, no one should regard terrorists as evil demons.

Unless everyone ceases to characterise all those who do not concur with oneself as evil demons, then terrorist attacks will never be terminated. Only when we give the world our love can we resolve all forms of enmity. This is the utmost reliable action for security.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches unceasingly to introduce, when appropriate, to every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism knowledge of pluralistic ethnicities, cultures and religions.

Unless self-confining groups are helped to understand that to allow for peace the mutual existence and prosperity of pluralistic cultures is the inevitable trend of civilization and the common necessity of modern human society, change is unlikely. Only when we tolerate the differences among various ethnic groups within a pluralistic global society can we exchange virtues and strengths and learn from each other.

If people seek only to reject those who are different from themselves and attempt to use violent means of terrorism to intimidate and conquer those who are different, the result is that they will equally end up targets of terror and conquest themselves.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches unceasingly to encourage, whenever it is appropriate, teachers of all religions and their various sects and all intellectual and influential religious people to re-examine their sacred scriptures. If they discover points that contradict the inclusiveness of a pluralistic global culture, such points should be given a new interpretation. Those who pay no heed will either be isolated from or come into conflict with the common global community as a result of their conservatism and insistence.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches unceasingly to make use of every appropriate opportunity to advise all religious and spiritual leaders that while they should pay attention to politics they should not harbour ambitions in politics. Furthermore, they should warn their followers not to be provoked, manipulated and controlled by politicians and become their tools. They should advise their country's political leaders that while they may be devoted in their religious beliefs and spiritual cultivation, they should not exploit religious followers to arouse fanaticism, incite reprisals or declare "holy war" against peoples who do not concur with them, or use terrorist attacks for political gains.

In other words, we should help the ambitious religious and political leaders understand that in today's global world, religion and politics must function separately from each other. Otherwise, while God and religion do not in themselves present a problem, it is unavoidable that people with unwholesome ambitions will exploit the name of God and religious followers to incite ethnic conflicts and violence. While the powerful side will resort to war, the weaker side will resort to terrorist attacks. This will bring upon humanity unceasing calamities.

The above-mentioned statements are my recommendations for today's topic of discussion and do not constitute a representation of Buddhist beliefs. Buddhism does not reject the Gods worshipped by religions. More importantly, Buddhism suggests how to use compassion in the interaction with others and how to use wisdom in handling affairs. With compassion one will not see loathsome enemies. With wisdom, one will not give rise to the vexations of suspicion, fear and revenge.

Buddhists should not harbour attitudes that go against these principles whether or not a scriptural justification exists.

City Living

Nigel Jeffcoat

*Walking in the city
Which never palls
I have the thought
That cities are good places
For the ego to be kept small
And relative:*

*Because
All the time
Otherness impinges
Difference is king.*

*So why worry?
Let my worries and my self-concerns
Be swept up
With the thudding music,
As a smart smooth Asian lad
In his tasty showroom coupe
Sweeps a buffer of warm air, cologne scented
Against me on the pavement.*

*Let myself feel the guilty tension
When, for the hundredth time,
I hear the words:
"Big Issue, sir?"
"Have a nice day!"
"Can you spare some change, sir?"*

*Such invitations,
When heard daily,
Remove the comfortable feeling of munificence
Which the occasional city visitor
Can allow himself:
For me, they are part of the structure
Wherein inequalities
Must be lived with.*

*In Chinatown,
In Wing Yip Supermarket,
I become a foreigner for ten minutes;
My language suddenly redundant
My ears and nose caught up
With smells and sounds
The markers of a culture
Of which I merely scratch the surface.*

*Such moments stir up
The silt of complacency
Which so easily blocks
The arteries of awareness
The channels of compassion.*

Putting Legs on a Snake

Ken Jones

*Hazy moon
the rusty weathervane
clanks and groans*

A brief, broken sleep, spilling vivid dreams, and leaving a metallic taste beneath the tongue. The hour before dawn, lit by one large candle. One by one the black robed figures file in. They bow to a hall of shadows. They bow to their meditation cushions. They bow to one another. Their bows knit darkness and light. Clack! Clack! -- wooden clappers hasten the stragglers. On the walls we face our tall unsteady shadows.

Silence settles, and then a rustle at the door. The Master pads in; does his rounds; counts his flock. A board creaks as his heavy shadow passes by. Palms joined, our chant growls deep in the belly:

*All evil karma ever committed by me
On account of my beginningless greed, anger and ignorance
Born of my body, mouth and mind
Now I atone for it all*

The last line dies away mournfully. Minds turn inwards: the contemplation of Mind. Legs locked, I sit rooted on my cushion. At first, old films in the skull cinema -- the usual serials, docu-soaps, and trailers. Boring. The reel slows, the pictures fade.

Faint streaks of dawn across the sky. Pale light begins to fill the hall. Far away some small bird repeats its creaky one-note call.

*Window pane
a bluebottle crawls unsteadily
towards the morning star*

A choreographed breakfast. Three nested *oryoki* bowls, chopsticks, a spoon, a scraper, various cloths are liturgically manipulated to the sound of bells and clappers, interspersed with chants, tea and porridge. At first, tiresomely complicated; once mastered, elegant simplicity. Strong green tea, steaming shadows on the polished floor.

The servers alone can indulge in a little exhibitionism. Brenda, from Liverpool, comes flouncing in, her sash tied up behind in a great bow. Sure footed beneath the hem of her robe, she bears aloft a porringer, the head of John the Baptist. For me, her fellow Scowse, a coquettish bow, a sly wink.

*Prancing dakini
a string of grinning skulls
preserves her modesty*

Samu - work period. Round the back I scrape away at a wall that has already been scraped. Mindfully. Ignoring the rule of silence my fellow scraper introduces herself as the editor of an Australian fashion magazine. Inhaling deeply, we share a limp roll up and chat about Enlightenment.

The Zen day gets seriously under way. The liturgy: bare feet on black mats.

*That bald old monk
the way he offers incense
what else is there to know*

I know that man. Young German communist, tortured by the Gestapo. For us Buddhist Bolsheviks, old soldiers of past lives, the road is long, the gratitude is deep.

*Soapstone Buddha
an archaic smile
last of the incense*

Afterwards the Master delivers his morning teisho. My German friend and I sit flanking him like impassive China dogs. "To light your lamp in broad daylight and go rummaging around for what stands right before you is black comedy indeed!" Some of us knit our brows; others try to look Enlightened. Comedians with sore legs, sitting eight hours a day, locked in one kind of lotus or another. Only the Liverpool woman voices disagreement. She's fond of him.

A long sit.

*In the corridor
worn shoes lined up
each pair itself*

The jikijitsu prowls down the seated ranks. First the raised shadow of his kaisaku - the "wake up stick", then his pink feet. From time to time he stops to straighten backs, adjust hands. "Don't sniff!" he roars, "Just dribble!" "WAKE UP!" Thwack! Thwack! Then we hear the stick being placed back in front of the Buddha and a heavy body easing itself onto its cushion. We enjoy a bit of peace. A fly alights; tiptoes round my skull; is gone.

*At the end of the lane
that goes nowhere
dappled sunlight*

"Dokusan! Interviews! Move!" I am trampled in the youthful rush. Out in the corridor the interview line strains and sweats out the meaning of life. Inside the Master's room, incense and aftershave. Nothing to lose, I grow frisky and congratulate him on this seven day production of the Theatre of the Absurd. Each day waiting for Godot. He comes clean. "An idiot captain of a ship of fools".

Wandering about; kicking stones; seeking Enlightenment still.

*Torchlight --
in the White Rabbit's burrow
a stately mushroom*

Notes;

Hazy moon: symbolizes enlightenment.

Morning star: signalled the Buddha's great awakening.

Dakini: a Tantric goddess.

One kind of lotus or another: meditation posture; most can manage "a quarter lotus".

Jikijitsu: disciplinarian in the Rinzaï Zen tradition.

Fulfilling True Nature

Western Zen Retreat May 29th to June 3rd, 2003

*How is life fulfilled?
To make everyone happy and to help,
that's been how my life is viewed.
Parents, siblings, friends, co-workers,
husband and grandmother,
to whom heavy responsibilities I feel.
Regrets, guilt and discontent,
I thought I knew
how it is for life to be fulfilled.*

*But wait. How can fulfillment rely on others,
if, in perfection, everything lies right here?
Right now, how is life fulfilled?
Walking, eating, sitting and cleaning.
What more do I need to do
to feel I live in full?*

*In despair I became
unsure of who I was.
Split between childhood and adulthood,
I was in much confusion.
Then the question came,
"Can't both the past and the present be Rebecca?"
"Isn't it somewhere beyond the two
where I can find myself in full?"*

*How intriguing!
Where indeed this place?
To the new question I turn,
"What is my true nature?"
It is with me always,
no matter where I am.
I look and look in me,
that which is present right here.
I see worry and fear,
they arise but always disappear.*

*What is my true nature?
Awareness expands, into the hills, into the river.
Birds singing, wind blowing, sun shining, people talking,
The sense of joy arising.
Walking in the hills, "What is my true nature?"
Silence. Peace.
Step by step on the path.
Dried grass, green grass,
all being what they are.
Walking down a steep slope that I often fear,
one step after the other, sure and clear.
Sitting for afternoon tea,
I am right here, at ease.
How wonderful it is
when that endless self-doubt ceases!
Here, right now, life is fulfilled.
No anxiety, no guilt.
No more wondering if I am doing it right.*

*Thank you, John and Simon,
for leading me to this discovery.
It gives me strength and comfort
like a good friend or sister.
Gratitude to the sheep, the birds and the wind,
and all the Dharma friends wherein.
Maenllwyd your doors and walls,
speaking the Dharma to us all.*

Cherry Blossom Viewing Time In Japan

Sr. Ruth Furneaux (Avril)

May 2003

I was honoured and grateful to be invited to Japan for a month this spring to train with Terayama Tanchu Sensei, chief disciple and dharma heir of Omori Sogen Roshi, probably Japan's greatest recent Rinzai master. The visit was made possible by the financial generosity of several people which thus expressed the heart of the first koan worked with - Ima no shugyo. Sensei came to the U. K. in 2001 with an entourage of 30 people following five years of planning, to take part in the Great Japan exhibition and to meet my own teacher, known locally in Tokyo as Garrie Roshi with whom he felt a strong connection akin to that with Omori Sogen; Garrie Roshi pre-deceased the visit, but ceremonies were held at his grave by the Japanese.

When not at Sensei's dojo in Tokyo or Tsukuba in the mountains, I was accommodated and seriously well-looked after by the Doi Ichi Community, catholic Society of the Sacred Heart'. A bonus of this was being able to meet Fr. William Johnston SJ who has written extensively on Christianity and Zen for over thirty years.

Sensei chose or rather felt called to be a lay teacher, after inka was conferred on him at the age of 40 in 1970, in order to bring the 'Way of the Zen Brush' (Hitsuzendo) to as many people as possible. The practice is a rigorous training of body and mind through zazen and Id exercises expressing no-self (mushin) no-mind (mugen) and no posture (mugamae) through the brush and paper. 'Love the brush' is his constant advice, 'total energy' and mirroring the words of St. John of the Cross 'The marriage of heaven and earth'.

'To live fully in the present is to be like a spinning top whose rotational energy converges on a point of utter stillness This is the realm of mushin, of no-mind, of detachment from the passions and desires of the everyday world To reach and continue in the state of no-mind is the ultimate goal of zen. It is a state in which the consciously conscious fuses with the consciously unconscious. This state cannot be achieved without great effort and the devotion of one's entire being. To strive for enlightenment through the wielding of the brush is the meaning and purpose of hitsuzendo.'

The unstinting generosity of Sensei in the teachings he gave and his respect for the practice of the four English students was remarkable, and a fruit very evidently of his practice. Appreciation rather than the mind of criticism is very much to the fore in hitsuzendo. Sensei looks for the qualities in the calligraphy (sho), of use of space on the paper, the depth of the line, the mujibo (Buddhist line of infinity), coming from and returning to unconditional ki and burning into the paper, and the clear, spacious radiance of the enso (Buddhist circle of eternity). All these expressions of Bukki (spiritual qualities) and many more show in the work, and are apparent in the work of great masters centuries later, even in reproduction.

In each singular point, each moment the conditioned and unconditioned shows - and it's all o.k. just as it is. On the first evening, we 'bumped into' (Ima no shugyo) Sensei on the way to the dojo. He pointed to this Ruth being, pointed to a pine tree and pointed to the moon saying -'Look the moon and the pine'. Later his brush drew a beautiful calligraphy for me, of a pine tree which was translated as 'evergreen, strong in devotion and faith, elegant and the place where God resides'. A copy graces the next page.



千年
翠華

During the month, the koans worked on were 'Ima no shugyo (Catching the Lord - Dogen),' 'Where is the energy of Fukai now? (Rinzai on the death of his friend and co-monk), Seeing through Birth and Death,' 'Gyo jyu za ga (Be Settled (stay) in Zazen in all activities)' and 'Ever Empty'.

Sensei owns a valuable collection of ancient Zen calligraphies, some of the training includes the public appreciation of them. On the first evening with no experience whatsoever, I was asked to appreciate Sensei's own work - phew - Dharma combat. Later on it was public appreciation of the work of such luminaries as Hakuin zenji and Ryokan. This immediately shows the state of 'your' mind.

The visit and training were striking for the openness, respect, appreciation and willingness to engage with others, Sensei often pointed his students' attention to the copy of the 9th. Century Cross and Lotus I wear as an example of how kokoro (shin) needs to develop - war in Iraq had just broken out. He often said about it 'That's the way, it's hard but that's the way.'

I was also invited for two special meals by a shojin ryori (zen food for practice) practitioner, Toshio Tadushi, who trained with the 81-year-old abbess of Gesshinji monastery in Kyoto. The preparation and clearing of the space, attention to the altar, food preparation and saving are his full daily monastic practice in lay life. It starts at 5a.m. and finishes around 1a.m, six days per week. He has been invited to take the training to New York in June and was keen to discuss ways he could engage with those he would speak to regarding the transformation of the food by practice and its relevance to spiritual life, its transformative power - in Christian contexts. He had seen a depiction of the Last Supper which connected with him. The inestimable value of hitsuzendo and shojin ryori in bring the practice down to earth, in engaging with it in everyday life cannot be overstated. The Pure Land here and now or The Kingdom here and now is possible, and a responsibility that practitioners need to take.

Sei-ra-sensei, Sensei's English disciple, will be visiting the U.K. this August doing sessions at the V&A in London, and several other places including Bristol on August 18th. In 2004 Sensei himself comes to the U.K. exhibiting rare, valuable and important Zen calligraphies at the Toshiba Gallery, V&A, at Christchurch College, Oxford and Bristol Museum. He will be lecturing in the Dept. of Buddhist Studies at Bristol University and offering his training in a couple of places including Bristol. No conventional artistic or technical ability is necessary, this is not what Zen training is about, nor is any knowledge of Zen calligraphy. I do recommend it for practitioners of zazen, the sitting and the practical expression are two sides of one coin. It is expressed in the open-heartedness of Sensei and Toshio Tadushi. A kindness also apparent in the meeting and cup of tea (Have a cup of tea!) with Soen Ozenld, Abbot of Daisen-in temple.

Finally in the last week of the visit, the Sakura - cherry trees blossomed just for a few days, symbol of impermanence, here today, gone tomorrow. There was also an invitation to Tea Ceremony said to have developed in the 16th century from watching the attention and respect of Jesuit priests prepare the sacraments. It starts with the cleansing of the mouth with a salty solution in which a cherry blossom floats and is 'swallowed'. 'When one flower blooms - it is spring everywhere.

*Spring flowers blossom
From each and every heart
moment-to-moment.*

Bonfire Night with Millie

Marian Partington

*squatting on my heels
splayed fingers of my right hand
sinking into mud
your throne my right thigh
you wave your 'glow stick'
your left hand holding mine, lightly,
in the Kennel Fields.*

*your wand flexible, like the stem
of a water lily, striped,
luminous you run your finger
over the arc: yellow, green
red, you stroke the fire
works into life, stir the air,
'I am making them!'*

*on the black screen they sear and soar:
Chinese chrysanthemums, Roman
candles, Catherine wheels, rockets,
Golden Rain- shoals of darting fish
phosphorescent, opalescent
a flock of silver birds skews
into darkness, their song of war*

*fare of fire the pyres of bone
fires roar: we saw the stiff sheep,
Catherine alive you were spun, torched
a hoop of fire, the sky hounds jumped
'the loud ones', closing my eyes:
cannons, grenades, mortars, and now
dirty bombs, human bombs, just thrown*

*(oh, tread carefully!) the shells.
I open to Millie's shore
her hand rests still, so lightly
in mine, leading me
we spell out fast blasts
focussing fluorescent words
we conjure storming angels.*

The Ceasing Of Notions¹

John Crook

This "teisho has been given at Sharpham College and at the Maenllwyd in variant forms. Stuart McLeod has kindly transcribed the disks for us which John has edited for presentation here.

This little poem by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was shown me by a student on the Buddhism course at a Sharpham College. Introducing a weekend of Chan there I thought it showed me a way to begin. The poem is called "Keeping Quiet".

*Now we will all count to twelve and we will all keep still.
For once on the face of the earth let's not speak in any language.
Let's stop for a second and not move our arms about so much.
It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines.
We would all be together in a sudden strangeness.
Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt would not look at his hurt hands.
Those who prepare wars, wars with gas, wars with fire,
victories with no survivors, would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers in the shade doing nothing.
What I want should not be confused with inactivity.
Life is what it's about.*

Neruda goes on to tell us that if we were not so single-minded about keeping our lives moving and for once could do nothing, perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves. He pondered whether perhaps then the earth could teach us that although everything seems dead in winter yet soon all is alive again.

"Now I'll count up to twelve and you keep quiet, I'll disappear. "

A powerful poem. Yet in Chan and Zen there is something more than simply keeping silence. To investigate what that 'more' is we have to look deeply. Let's try and have a look at the Great Matter straight away. We'll probably not comprehend it at once but the endeavour is worth doing. After all how can one introduce Zen except by Zen. Zen often side-steps what one thinks is the 'point', yet any such "point" is just a thought.

Recall the story of Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma was the Indian monk who brought the Chan tradition from India to China. This is the legend that has come down through the ages. Legends are not necessarily history yet legends are part of history. Bodhidharma probably came by sea by way of Indonesia. There seems to be no record of him having travelled to China by the Silk Route as many other great teachers did. You may remember that when he arrived in China he had a rather uncomfortable meeting with the Emperor, who misunderstood what he had to say. It was a very frank meeting yet the Emperor could not understand Bodhidharma. Perhaps this travelling monk was too direct. One might criticise Bodhidharma and say that perhaps he lacked the skill to get his message across to so

¹ This talk was first given at Sharpham College in October 2002. and extended in teaching at the Maenllwyd . The taped version has been generously and skilfully transcribed by Stuart McLeod to whom I am most grateful. The transcription has been lightly edited to make it a readable text.

materialistic a mind as the emperor's. In any case, after this miscommunication, Bodhidharma went off into the mountains by himself and sit in a cave for the proverbial, famous nine years of gazing at a wall.

A somewhat distraught monk came to find him. This monk was eventually to become the second Patriarch in China, but at that time he was puzzled, disturbed as are so many of us. If you think of a time when you've felt ill at ease, disturbed, you know what this monk felt like. He came to Bodhidharma, and Bodhidharma took absolutely not the blindest bit of notice of him. He just continued looking at the wall. But the monk kept saying "Bodhidharma, great teacher, please." Nothing happened, silence, staring at the wall. So he got desperate and the story says he chopped off his arm and held it out to Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma said "Hah, Really! You must need something seriously to chop your arm off." Of course it might not have been his arm, it might have been his finger, it might have been anything. If you chop your arm off, doctors would tell you that you wouldn't be in a very good position to ask any questions!

Whatever he did was sufficient for Bodhidharma to turn away from the wall and say, "Well, what do you want then?" One gets the impression that Bodhidharma was certainly a bit of a grumpy old codger. "What do you want then?" So the monk said, "Please, my mind is so disturbed. Please calm my mind." Bodhidharma said, "Well, the first thing is, you have to show it to me. Find your mind and let me see it." So the monk sat and looked for his mind - thought, thought, looked, thought, thought, looked, looked, thought, puzzled, paced up and down, maybe went away for a week, came back again and finally said, "I can't find my mind!" "Oh," said Bodhidharma, "Can't find it eh? Well therefore I have calmed it." And the monk realised something very important. He was suddenly in a state of not searching, he was somewhere else, and in that somewhere else was a great peace.

That story is picked up again in variant version in a Chinese text discovered in the last century in the Dung Huang caves of North China, a very interesting place where both ancient Tibetan and Chinese texts were discovered all mixed up. Some texts which scholars might have thought would be in Chinese have been found in Tibetan and vice versa. This particular text has been recently translated and is called 'The Treatise on the Ceasing of Notions,'² - the letting go of ideas. Let's just look at the first two pages. They clearly pick up on the story I've just told you.

It begins with a general statement.

The Great Way is without limit, fathomless, subtle, beyond comprehension, beyond words. Master Nuri and his disciple Emmon were discussing the truth. The master sat silent and was saying nothing. Emmon suddenly got up and said:

"What is it that we call the heart - mind? How is this heart - mind pacified?"

The master answered, "You should not assume the mind-heart, for then there's no need to pacify it. That is called pacifying the heart - mind."

Emmon said, "But if there is no heart-mind then how can we learn the Way?"

"The heart-mind cannot think of the Way, so why should the Way depend upon the heart-mind?"

Let's look at this. Here's Emmon, like our first monk, the man who was troubled and went to Bodhidharma. Emmon is not so anxious, not so disturbed but he is very concerned to

² See: Myoko-ni and M Bromley. 1988. *A Treatise On The Ceasing Of Notions. An early Zen text from Tun-huang* with commentary by Soko Morinaga Roshi. Zen Centre. London.

understand what the mind, sometimes translated as heart, is.³ "What is this thing?" he says, "what is this mind? The mind is so often disturbed you know, how can we pacify it?" The master says, "You shouldn't assume the mind. " Interesting, fascinating statement, which requires a great deal of penetration. If you assume something to be present or something to be there you're making an assumption, it's a thought. I think I have a mind. So assuming the existence of something that we call the mind, prejudices the whole thing. And if we make a prejudgement that we have got a worrying mind then of course it goes on worrying. But if we don't assume it, we can question it. What is this thing that I'm calling a mind or a heart, which is this worrying entity? If I drop it or I stop assuming that it's there, is this pacifying the heart, pacifying the mind?



Let's see if we can enter into a discussion with Master Nuri. "Master Nuri that's all very well, but I mean I am worried, I am concerned, I have a mind don't I? I spend my whole time fussing. " "Yes," says the teacher, "that's true, but look actually what you're doing. You're assuming there is a thing there called "you" - called your mind. You're making an assumption. Why don't you actually look at what experience is, the process of experience itself. What do you then find? Do you find a thing?"

Hmm okay, so let's sit and do that.

Now those of us who have sat and done a good deal of meditation will realise that you don't find a "thing". What you find is a kind of ongoing, flowing experience. Yet, when we come out of that and start talking, we speak about the mind, the entity, myself, me, ego. And what we then do is grab hold of that thought as if it were a thing. We also give it a name - John. So by my own attributing of a name, an entity, to this flowing experience, I generate an object, a reification which I then grab hold of. "That's me!" And this me, called John, should be peaceful, must be enlightened, must be clever, must be handsome, must be perennially young. And if you're perhaps a lady, you must be forever beautiful, forever desirable, forever lovable. Me, this idea, must have those qualities, and if I don't have any

³ In Chinese, the word which stands for mind is not very well translated by the English word mind. That's why sometimes it's called the heart, it's not just the intellectual capacity but the heartfelt mindfulness of being.

of those things or if they are threatened or if I have a doubt about them, then this apparent thing called John gets depressed.

We can see there's an assumption here, the assumption of the importance of being John, or being Simon, or being Jane, or any one of us. The Jane-ity of our existence, the Simon-ness of my being, the John-ness of who one is, becomes terribly important as an object which has to be tinkered with, corrected, improved, made more beautiful. We spend our whole time fussing about it. It's called self-concern.

But supposing instead of indulging in self-concern, I actually look at experience.

The best way of doing that is in meditation, because in meditation we may manage to drop all the words. You will find 90 per cent of the words in your head are about 'muggins'- me. I challenge you to look at your thoughts to check this. Of course if you're studying for an examination or playing a piece of music, you may not then be thinking of yourself, but, okay, you stop playing the piece of music and you think, "Ah, I did that well!" or "Oh, what a mess I'm making of this essay," or "Oh dear, my meditation is so appalling," or "I'm so sorry, I've not done meditation for a whole week. "

People sometimes come to me apologising as if they should be doing meditation the whole time, as if it concerned me! Self-concern. Check it out. I think you'll find maybe 85 per cent, but possibly even 95 per cent of the time that your mind is just spinning freely, it's about muggins. We' all are making an assumption as to how important this heart-mind, this "muggins" is.

The beauty of meditation is that, after a while, (and those of you who've done a fair amount meditation will know this to be true) somehow that self-concern gets put on the back-burner or may even be dropped. And, although one is aware one is still Jane sitting on a cushion, one is not preoccupied with that, one is not assuming the importance of it any longer. And what do you then find? Well, you find experience of awareness just flowing. Instead of saying, "What is the mind?" we could say, "What is a river? What is its true nature?" You might reply, "A river is water." In the same way as one would ask, "What am I? What is my true nature?" and you'd reply, "Well, I am a mind" Going further you might add, just as a river is water so a mind is experience.

Lets penetrate further. If I say to you, "Come, let's go down to the river today," It's not quite the same thing as saying, "Come, let's go to the water today," is it? The river is something bigger than just the water. The river is herons, otters, children splashing, willows, birds flying over, seagulls up from the estuary, fish, trout, salmon, and water. And the water that you looked at five minutes ago is not there. The water itself is not *the* water, it is water. It's a flowing ongoing movement.

If we take this metaphor for the river as being a metaphor for the mind, then we might ask, "Well what is this experience which sometimes churns up all these pains and agonies and worries?" I begin being concerned about this thing- this mind. Sometimes in Zen meditation I relax and go away from it, stop searching and it's peaceful, and I find something which could almost be called freedom. Freedom from being me, which is the most profound of all freedoms. And one knows that everything is part of the river. Maybe the freedom from being me is like seeing an otter. "Hey, there's an otter down there, beautiful, rare creature, an otter. " Maybe it's like that.

So what is this awful noise that goes on all the time, this negative side of our preoccupation? In Buddhism it's called karma, the stream of karma. Karma is very similar to what in our Western vocabulary we would call neurosis. Neurosis itself would be particularly obsessive karma. Yet karma is not merely obsessive, it is anything that comes

out of one's past and which is influencing one's present. In our psychotherapeutic mode, we talk about neurosis and conditioning and all the influence of the past which has come down to cause us distress. I dare say all of us here are neurotic in one way or another, well I'm quite certain we are, no doubt about it!

We know that when we're behaving neurotically, it is like an obsession. Something crops up and goes round and round. Yet karma is also the memories of joyous experiences which, when remembered, can become reborn in the present. Karma comprises the memories, complex, emotionally laden memories, which are constantly being reactivated by associations in the present time. They come up again and again and again, in various patterns. Karma, however, is also open to novelty arising in the now. It's quite wrong to think that one's present moment is totally determined by one's past.

Out of the past have come the moments which evoke distress in the present. One needs to allow that flow to occur. If one becomes fixated in certain attitudes towards that stream of the past which keeps cropping up in one's life, it's like "assuming the mind". One assumes that I'm a so and so, I'm a neurotic, I'm - whatever word it might be - I'm somebody who's been abused. I'm somebody who had a certain kind of mum, or a certain kind of dad. Karma is more than that. In karma, we also talk often about past life experiences. I'm not going to argue about what the nature of past life experiences might be, but certainly it is true that things that happened before our birth do affect us now. The karma of other people's lives comes down to us. For example, I know that that the life of my great grandmother affected my granny, which affected my mother, which affected me. Down through the generations comes the karma of the distant past, so far distant we can no longer trace it. It goes back through our culture. Most of us here are either English, or Welsh, or Chinese, we each have these cultural histories, sometimes of conflict, which goes down through the past, and crop up again in the present.

When we look at our experience in meditation, what we commonly see is the unrolling of some aspect of our karma. When we reach a point when we can drop that, no longer assuming the importance of the mind, we can see the mind's content is karma, all the unrolling karma is of the mind. This is what the mind is full of. When we identify with that content, making it "mine", we feel the distress and the worry. When we drop it, what do we find?

Well... we find something like silence, something like peace. We know of course that the content of the mind will come up again very quickly and very easily. A memory will trigger something that then emerges yet again. This silence provides a context for the content of the mind. If we put that content to one side, we then perceive the context within which that content operates. And the context is stillness, silence, motionless. As in this very room.... at this moment, the content of this room is the noise which my voice is making. Yet this voice, this noise that I'm making, appears in a certain context, this particular Chan Hall. And if I stop making that noise..... the hall is peaceful.

The Chan Hall furthermore also has a context. The context of this autumn day, the leaves falling off trees, the sun shining, and the brook running. The owl calling in the early morning before light. The experiential context of being in this room is never still. Like the universe itself, all is moving. If you want to grab hold of something and hold it still, permanently there, you're on the wrong track. That would also be making an assumption. You assume that you can get something. There is no "thing" standing in isolation by itself. The universe as a whole is continuously moving.

With training, we drop the content of our worries and discover the context within which those worries are occurring. Becoming context is freedom. The noise of the mind is its own

prison. Put the prison aside and you find the space within which it existed. It's like visiting the river, and not being preoccupied with the nature of water.

Our two stories point to an essential, central pivot on which the whole practice of Chan balances, this curious relationship between thought and experience without thought. Dogen, the great Soto Zen master, points out that there is thought (shiriyo) and there is no thought (mu-shiryō) which is the suppression of thought. Yet the really important thing is to be without thought (hi-shiriyo), not to bother about thought or no thought, just be without it. Being "without thought" is when the mind begins to be open to the spacious context in which we live, and which is the current aspect of the universe itself. We exclude ourselves from the universe by identifying with the "little me" of vexation. When I let the " little me" go there is a sense of merging with these progressive layers of context - the room, the garden, the sky, the universe.

This capacity to free oneself from the worrisome content of self-concern, and to let oneself drift or fall into the spaciousness of experience itself, a spaciousness which is always available, is the essence of Zen. It is going to the place before one's mother or father existed.

It's a bit like those games we play as children, when you write a letter to Mummy, and it's addressed to the street, the town, the country, the continent, the planet Earth, the galaxy, the sky, the universe, and then you run out of words altogether. I dare say most of you have written such a letter and pushed it in the post box. God knows what the postman thought of it! Perhaps he got enlightened.

There are many ways in which such an opening comes about. Karma determines the way. There are those of us who have very obsessive minds, heavily preoccupied within the karmic stream. They have to work very hard to break out of their obsessions. There are others who by dint of great discipline on the cushion, can find peace and quiet. There are others who just spot it as an insight straight away, "Yes of course, it's obvious. " Yet the first two types, the ones who are obsessively worried and the ones who sit in a silence of self-suppression, they also can have that insight at any moment. There's no way of predicting it.

What is the insight? Dropping the content and discovering the context. Context is the universe merging within us, and we will find as we go on talking, this word "merging" will come forward as a prime teaching. Merging with... what? Why can't we use a word for it? We have to go beyond words, because then we won't be caught up by them. Why review in words? Too long a journey. Don't assume the mind.

"Now I'll count up to twelve and you keep quiet, I'll disappear."

Guestmastering a Mahamudra Retreat

Nigel Jeffcoat

November 2002

Starting to write this retreat report feels very different from usual. It was my fifth visit to Maenllwyd since I first came to a WZR nearly four years ago: but this time, I was coming to my first Mahamudra retreat, and, more significantly, I had been invited to act as Guestmaster for the first time; John had asked if I would be interested in taking on the job during a Chan retreat at Gaia House last summer. I had said yes without hesitation, and felt delighted to have had such trust placed in me whilst still such a relative newcomer to regular practice in Wales.

I anticipated that I would enjoy the practical task of running the daily timetable of the retreat: I relish precision, clarity and order (in other words, I can be a bit of a control freak), and I looked forward to putting these qualities at the service of the retreat process. Whether I was hitting the morning or evening boards, or sounding the bell outside the hall for the start of a meditation session, I always tried to convey my own sense of mindfulness in relation to such simple tasks; and this gave me great pleasure. My overall task was greatly helped by the commitment and diligence which the group of retreatants gave to their process.

I had wondered how my main task of keeping everyone in mind throughout each day would affect my meditation practice. Normally, as a retreatant, one is wrapped up in one's individual process and awareness. I discovered that there was no discernible difference to the pattern of my own practice. For quite some time now - at least since the summer Chan retreat - my practice has, by and large, felt solid and grounded: dependable, containing, are a couple of words that come to mind - 'Nothing special', but something I have confidence in. I had some 'chatterbox' sits, but also more sustained periods of quiet still mind as well. On the last day of this retreat I had an experience which seemed to sum up what it is to reach the point where the chatterbox just evaporates away, and one is left with a strong, bright awareness which seems to sustain itself without strain or striving.

I was timekeeping on the final morning, and during a brief pause between sits I fixed a new candle in the holder on the low table in front of me, and lit it. The sit continued, and the new candle was there in my line of vision. My mind was already quite settled, but now something else took its course; it was as if I became locked onto the candle, like a programmed missile which cannot be diverted from its target once it has been launched. The candle became a mirror, or a metaphor, for the meditative state: the flame's steady unwavering brightness was an image for the mind's focus on the constantly vanishing moment of the present, forever gone. During a talk during the retreat John had reminded us of Dogen's phrase, 'Being time', as an attitude to cultivate in our practice and this was exactly what the candle in front of me was embodying. My sense of solidity and steadiness, of bright stillness, felt unshakeable and it was as if I had become one with the candle, identifying with it completely. Something of the conviction and still confidence this experience instilled in me has remained with me since my return home.

This was my first Mahamudra retreat. I had read Tipun's Notebook before coming to Wales, and although more refined and complex, the approach seemed to have a lot in common with the Silent Illumination of Chan, my main practice. My knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism was very sketchy, acquired mainly from John's stories and references to this culture during talks on other retreats. I had a feeling that it was complex and baroque in its expression, and that for this reason it was unlikely to appeal very strongly to me: (to give an example from

Western culture, I take much greater pleasure in the Pazzi Chapel in Florence, than in the grandiloquence of St. Peter's in Rome). As John presented the Sadana of Avalokiteshvara, I felt quite sceptical and it seemed like a bit of hocus-pocus initially, but I had a go at the visualization and waited to see what would happen. There was a shift in the quality of feeling at the end of the process, but I find it hard to characterise this. I will try to include the visualization as part of my practice for a while to see if it has any energy or impact for me.

The final aspect of the retreat that I must note is the opportunity I was given by John to observe some interviews. I felt this was a real privilege, and one for which I am very grateful. It was moving and rewarding to see people being so frank about their experiences. I look forward very much to seeing if I have what it takes to become a member of the interviewing team - and I am certainly looking forward to being Guestmaster again!

Retreat Reports

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

The Sitting is Wonderful

Maenllwyd November 2002

Clear skies, winding road, long view - no wind, sunset, starlight. Firelight, flickering oil lamps, candle flame, small chat, then silence - deep silence falling naturally on all of us.

"Why are you here?" "Why did you choose Mahamudra?" I answer, trying not to think about it or prepare my words - I need to retreat; I want a fresh view, something new, but in the Tibetan tradition, and this is not too far to travel. I am curious, intrigued by what I have heard, yes, but it was mostly an intuitive decision to come to Maenllwyd.

I start with seven cups of tea - to go with the sandwiches, which are supper.

Welly boots on; welly boots off; on - if I can find them, if JC hasn't used them to cross the yard. I soon learn to hide them. Lots of layers of warm clothes, off and on, according to where you end up, in a draught, by the stove, in the yard, up the hill, sitting or in bed. Thick socks, wooly hat, torch, pen and notebook, specs and hanky - everything to hand in massive pockets. I've done this before, I'm glad to say. It's like camping or walking - another kind of pilgrimage, when little things loom too large if you don't get them right.

First talk - very charismatic, very clear. It sounds like Dzogchen - four Naljors - watch the nature of Mind - AS IS.

And so to bed - soon after 9.0 pm. Well placed, close to the basin and loo, near a window, comfy mattress. No problems. Peaceful, relaxed. After one struggle out of the bag for a pee, and into it again (I'm glad I brought pyjams and not a nighty - which ends up round the neck in a bag), I sleep, eventually - from about 12.30 to 5.0 am.

Being woken by gentle claps from two pieces of wood is much less painful than by a bell. Buddhists say you should leap out of your bed at dawn as if it were a nest of snakes - which is what we have to do to get into the loo and clean the teeth and splash the face with cold

water, and get the clothes on, then the wellies and the hat, to be out in the star-lit yard for exercises within 10 minutes. Sometimes it is raining too. Considering how long it takes me to emerge each morning at home, I am amazed how I manage this. I suppose when someone else makes the decision for you, it is easier.

After this invigorating start, it is time for tea, which never tasted so good (except for the "bed tea" provided by Sherpas).

Then we sit for an hour, with a stretch break half way through. I need this, my back and knees ache a lot, although it gets easier when I find a better chair and use the "gomtag". I am full of admiration for the two silent rows of rocks who sit around me on their neat black cushions, straight as ramrods, never moving a muscle. The shrine room is warm and soothing. I am sleepy.

We emerge to a stupendous dawn - blue sky, red clouds, fields, farms, hedges and hills etched black and white with frost, and, rising from the valley, silvery wisps of mist shimmering in pale sunlight.

*I gulp the early air
and feel the silence rushing
through my veins*

Breakfast is warm and crunchy. We wash our dishes at the table with piping hot water from heavy kettles and dry them with paper. The tinkling sound this makes will stay with me forever.

Work comes next, for three quarters of an hour. I wish I could work like this at home - no hurry, no exhaustion, just the gentle concentration on one simple activity for a limited time - and then a rest. I rake wet leaves from the garden and the goddess, and replace gutted candles. Then I sleep for half an hour, and wake refreshed to the sound of those gentle clappers.

*bouncy Green Tara
paint stripped, dressed with dead leaves
best from behind*

John explains the Four Skandas of Mind - I have never heard Tibetan Buddhism explained so clearly, with such memorable illustrations. We sit for five hours. I walk up the hill to see the sun set, puffing, but there is no time to stand and stare. The vegetarian food is the best I have ever tasted - is it because we eat in silence - or the recipes, or the cook? I get used to silent eating, something I usually dislike because it reduces the feeling of celebration. Now the only difficulty is a neighbour who sniffs and snorts (although he is a totally silent sitter). Even this becomes bearable, with compassionate practice!

I want to sing my Padmasambhava chants, but the tunes are different. My sitting improves, I am less sleepy and feel less pain. Sometimes I open my eyes on a silent "PHAT!" and float on emptiness. The time passes more quickly, or ceases to exist.

I find myself rehearsing the impending 'interview', which I always dread. I ask myself what worries me about it, and decide it is the fear of letting my "self" down, so I try to "cut" that feeling with the Manjusri sword! Then, when I'm sitting there on the formal chair, trying to

put a lifetime into a few succinct sentences, I end up burbling like a strangled chicken! And I thought I was calm and centred and unafraid! So what? I can sit by a log fire and stare.

*among the flames
a lovely glowing land
disintegrates*

During the rest period I write my diary and read John's book - "The Yogins of Ladakh", which triggers overwhelming nostalgic memories of Himalayan adventures. I even consider returning once more - dreaming of Kailas! The chanting and the smell of burning juniper brings it all back so vividly I am re-inspired by everything Tibetan, making resolutions to do more singing and instrumental practise on my return home. This is odd, since during recent Sangnak retreats I had come to feel the cultural gap increasing and the amount of ethnic paraphernalia too "heavy" in a Celtic setting. I give John a set of the Tibetan Element tanka cards, which I am pleased he likes. He asks if I might do some illustrations for the magazine, but I'm not sure what I could do in black and white, being no calligrapher.

One wild, wet afternoon I climb the hill to try and ring home on my mobile. John kindly shows me the only spot where this is possible, but our batteries run out. Such elemental isolation is splendid!

*powerless
the silence is more meaningful
by firelight*

Tai Chi and Chi Gung exercises do my back so much good. I feel terrific. The healthy simplicity of this regime, with no electricity to over extend the day and the joys of wild weather, landscape and the wood fire, are excellent conditions for retreat. I feel more at home with it than with the increasingly modern comforts of Sangnak. But maybe it is the silence that really makes the difference - not having to interact with people so much.

*slow early light
uncovers every curve and corner
dark hills breathe again*

Behind the house, in the steep cleft in the hill, a swirling whirlpool bubbles up from the stream. This is a very special place, guarded by a single larch on the right and a green mound on the left. The word "omphalos" comes to mind. (When I look it up I am confirmed by the Greeks that that this is the symbolic centre of the cosmos "where intercommunication between the three worlds of man, the dead and the gods is effected" and "where we can descry the attempt to express the sexual principals of the cosmos"). O.K. I know something here is powerfully female! I spend a long time watching this water. The effect is that of the Chinese "pi", the hole in the centre of the jade disc - nothingness. Symbols are so satisfying and the ancients knew it, however we interpret them. I feel at home with Kuan Yin, or Bridgitt, or Yeshe Tsogyel, names do not matter.

*"The valley spirit never dies
...her gateway is the root of heaven and earth.
It is like a veil barely seen.
Use it; it will never fail".
(Tao to Ching)*

It is so good to be able to do things slowly, one at a time, with complete attention - so difficult in daily life. I shall learn from this steady regime - try to regulate my life better (after Christmas is over!) Perhaps I could eat more and sleep less and somehow find more time!

*crooked trees
scurry along the horizon
towards the rising sun*

By the third day, I no longer need Ibuprofen. John reads his beautiful rendering of "Journey Without Goal". The sitting is wonderful - time stops, or whizzes by, I am just here. I hardly need to stretch at half time. I am amazed how these teachings confirm and emphasize everything I have learned over the last twenty years, from teachers, teachings, books, practise and pilgrimage etc. I am so glad I came, grateful for John's explanations which shed light on all the experiential things I have received, often without realizing or fully understanding them, and to his old friend "Choggers" from whom I must have learned more than I thought. I hope the Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig, Kuan Yin) empowerment will help me to cut out judgement and increase the flow of kindness. I spend a morning trying to become aware of awareness and find I am overflowing with energy! I am surprised I can do prostrations so easily.

*after prostrations
sunshine shimmers in my eyes
through bare branches*

All you have to do is: "stop, turn the mind upon itself, draw your sense within, turn yourself inside out, and, gazing into the lake of awareness, let whatever is there emerge from its lair."

All the energy this retreat let loose in me was needed for a massive family Christmas, its preparation, its duration and its aftermath, picking up the scattered pieces. This massive change from solitary living to running a full family house-party for ten days, including six teenage grandchildren, is quite a challenge as a practise! Joy and sadness, laughter and exhaustion, too much of everything! Afterwards it takes several days of gazing into the lake of awareness to discover what happened to the energy, but now it is beginning to return. "already within is the complete solution", a new year and a new moon – and yet another new person!

*the old tree bends
towards a million stars
one falls*

Testing Time

Koan Retreat, October 2002

I came back to Maenllwyd with my head full of a Great Project I had just completed, needing to take a Big Decision about what to do with the next decade. The Project had consumed me and I had not been meditating, so my zazen was rusty. I was given a koan on the first morning but I knew I'd get nowhere with it until my zazen was soaring, so I put it to one side. The first two nights I dreamed my house was invaded, I was in a boat with lost oars, and that I was searching for my children in Russia.

On the third day, when the concentrated work on zazen was beginning to bear fruit, the Great Project and the Big Decision crumbled around my ears. What nonsense. What a fool I was. My interpretation of the koan as a metaphor for my Great Project also crashed. The source and meaning of the koan was to be found, of course, in clear zazen.

But there are no limits to my foolishness and I was soon developing ideas of zazen as the next Great Project. I wanted to take some zen Big Decision. So the zazen clarity faded again.

I fought back, thinking, I've learned all these lessons before, more than once. I found the source again, my meditation steadied, and I emerged to see the Welsh valley radiant with quiet animation, the world intense and delightful. 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.' It does. I realised that there is no obstruction to love nor to me loving, and expressing my love, except judgements and fears and excuses that the idiot in my head manufactures. I have not been taking full responsibility. I let my life go by as if it were happening to somebody else. The idiot distracts me with half-baked Grand Schemes, and the result is that I leave love to chance. I neglect my friends. But who are the Grand Schemes for? My father, who is dead. My sons, who would rather have my attention. My friends, who aren't going to be specially impressed by anything I do. And some part of me: the idiot, with a bee in his bonnet about proving something, to someone.

I returned home, resolved that I had no need to prove anything to anyone, that I would stop the nonsense and give my full loving attention to my friends.

I found that while I had been away my best friend had suddenly collapsed and died on the badminton court.

Book Reviews

Ken Jones, *Arrow Of Stones*

British Haiku Society. 2002 (ISBN: 0-95223974-4)

John Crook

Ken Jones has contributed much to engaged Buddhism in the UK through his noteworthy books and to the Western Chan Fellowship through his retreat and event offerings. Now he emerges as a prize-winning poet in a genre that is novel, difficult and highly imaginative. The haibun which Ken writes are a form of poetry that originated in Japan wherein short poems in the manner of haiku alternate with poetic prose poetry to create an image of unusual intensity and clarity. Such pieces are usually quite short, a page or two. The intensity of their impact could not be further sustained by a reader.

Haibun originated in the autobiographical account of his journey on foot to the north of Japan by the well known seventeenth century Zen master Matsuo Basho but has fallen more or less out of literary usage in Japan in modern times. The emergence of haibun in English owes much to the Japanese originals although the poems do not of course follow the strict rules for the Japanese language. A number of collections have appeared in Britain and North America in the last five years. Some of these are relatively homely accounts of excursions or home life with no great literary merit, a form of diary writing one might say. Yet even these are adventures in creativity that are certainly to be encouraged. Ken Jones, in his introduction to this collection, is concerned with the more literary forms and he discusses the criteria by which they may be judged.

In his rugged style Ken's judgements are characteristically forthright. "A large proportion of Western haibun are bald narratives rendered in colourless and banal prose, with a bland earnestness devoid of feeling, irony or any subtlety." He ponders whether North American haiku sometimes show a "deficiency in ironic statement, black comedy and tongue in cheek ambiguity." Yet he concludes that the distinction between what is "natural haibun" as distinct from the literary form does not run across any clear cultural lines. The key question for Ken is whether a putative haibun has any literary form, any poetry about it. Does it enlarge our imaginative sensibility? Does it call on iconic imagery from the past to illustrate a felt situation in the present? Given the Zen origin of this form one may also ask whether there is sensitivity to transience, mindful awareness, perhaps compassion. Ken's introductory essay is invaluable for he sets out clear criteria by which such questions may be answered. The essay must be one of the most important contributions to the understanding of this field.

Ken's contributions in "Arrow of Stones" are an impressive achievement. Each one creates a specific "atmosphere" around an ordinary event, watching seals off Worms Head, receiving the results of a biopsy, coming across a ruined cottage in remote Wales, a one-night stand sharply remembered, sorting out old papers before moving house. Not surprisingly they all illustrate Ken's criteria for the literary form which he is strongly promoting here.

Underlying these poems one feels the Celtic imagination at work for Ken is very much a child of his native land. Indeed the Welsh background sometime resonates vividly:

"Close knit, we're always passing in this dead-end lane. Here comes Olwen and her cross-eyed dog. Been baking a cake for the Christmas party. 'Ah yes, Mr Jones, Arranging the almonds like little soldiers upon the icing.' 'Very nice.' I say .We both pause for thought. Then she goes on about Jesus".

Some passages are downright eerie. Ken settles into his high backed chair having thrown away old postcards and letters:

"The silence settles. The lawn is in twilight. And then I hear them.

*Flying in low
over dusty fields
wild duck."*

In such passages one can feel the rhythms of Welsh speech with its magical lilt and covert immediacy of expression. Indeed I feel these poems would translate very well into Welsh and I hope someone tries it for they are particularly a contribution to contemporary Welsh writing in English .

Yet - it is into Japanese they have gone. And the book amazingly includes the introduction and all the poems in full translation into Japanese by Sakaguchi Akiko and Professor Nobuyuki Yuasa, all printed in Japanese calligraphy. This is because an earlier book of which Ken was part author (together with Jim Norton and Sean O'Connor of Ireland), won the coveted Sasakawa Prize for "original contributions in the field of haiku" in 2001; the criteria being the presence of the spirit of haiku, the very nature of the writer shining through the life lived, a spiritual journey undertaken.

On the strength of this award Ken has recently visited Japan on a tour presenting Western haiku to Japanese audiences and naturally many of these were his own work. One cannot help wondering how the Japanese respond to the Celtic atmosphere of these poems and the translation from the colloquial must have posed severe problems.

*"From lamp to lamp
a rakish fellow
striding forward, falling back"*

All lovers of poetry should have a copy of this remarkable work.

***Guns, Germs and Steel and The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* by Jared Diamond**

Sally Masheder

29th April 2003

These two books, either together or separately, offer a significant contribution to our understanding of ourselves as creatures on this planet, of our place in Nature and of how we have come to be as we are. In doing so, they give a valuable insight into 'The Way Things Are', (as Pooh might have said). They provide a framework in which we can gain a better forecast of what may be on store for Humankind (the 'Third Chimpanzee') and how we might work to maximise our chances in a distinctly uncertain future. They also have congruence with Buddhist insight which can be very helpful.



Jared Diamond is a Professor of Physiology at the University of California Medical School, but he has by no means confined his interests to the laboratory. Or, to be more precise, he has viewed the whole world as his laboratory, while undertaking to study everything he can by any means available to him. He has studied in the fields of ecology, evolutionary biology, botany, anthropology and zoology, and he is conversant with archaeology, linguistics, history and genetics - and probably more besides. He has a gift for weaving all these interests together so that he can tackle the big questions - the subtitle for 'Guns, Germs and Steel' is 'A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years'.

In this first book, he examines the way in which, after hundreds of thousands of years in which Homo Sapiens changed very little, the last few thousand years have seen an explosion of cultural change which had been far more marked in some areas of the world than in others. He asks why this should be so, and why some cultures have come to dominate others in the last few hundred years. He comes up with some intriguing answers. He highlights the role of serendipity in favouring those in some areas of the world over those who were born in other areas, easily exploding any notions that may have been held about cultural or racial superiority. Doubtless they do not represent the whole truth, and

there is probably much debate in learned circles, but it is a courageous attempt to tackle an enormous question, and it has got people thinking and talking.

In 'The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee', he traces our evolutionary background and examines why Humankind has developed art and language on the positive side, and genocide and environmental destruction on the negative side, and has pushed these developments to the extremes that we see today.

Everything is grist to his mill, from the sexual proclivities of the chimpanzee to the development of now obscure languages. Along the way he highlights how important all human knowledge and enquiry can be when it comes to synthesising a new understanding of the world and our place in it. It is a fascinating read.

His style makes for easy reading although these are not lightweight books. He has won the Rhone-Poulenc Science Book Prize, and I can see why. So what place to these books have in a publication devoted to Chan? The answer lies in his description of 'The Way Things Are' and the manner in which that insight relates to our practice. He has a different approach to the essential Zen practice of enquiry.

In tracing our evolutionary past, we can see our connectedness with all other creatures. 'The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee' particularly traces our development as a species unlike other species in some ways but very like them in others, and in examining this we can begin to relate to other creatures more powerfully. In the silence of a retreat we may have had experiences that highlight this sense of connectedness. However, our day to day experience of the rest of the world, and popular prejudice, both tend to reinforce the old boundaries which have always been so comforting because they fool us that we are, in some way, 'special'. We are not so special - and he shows us why. This food for thought can therefore strengthen the insight we have gained, an insight which can so easily slip away from us when the retreat is over.

Jared Diamond is not a Buddhist, and would probably be very amused to see his books reviewed in this way. But given that we are lay practitioners, it can be helpful to find a thoughtful exposition of the nature of things which is congruent with the understanding we may gain on the cushion, and the fact that it has come from an unexpected source is no detraction. When we read of the spiritual experiences of others, that is no substitute for the work we must do for ourselves. Reading these books is likewise no substitute for the insights we must experience for ourselves. But they can help us to maintain mindfulness as we try to follow the Eightfold Way. They can help to blow away the delusions that we all live with in the cosy fog of our ignorance.

Submissions to New Chan Forum - Editorial Policy

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

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

Contacts for New Chan Forum and the Western Chan Fellowship

WCF Secretary: (also NCF picture editor to whom you can submit photographs, artwork etc) is: Simon Child, 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, LANCS, BL9 7RU. Tel: 0161 761 1945, Fax: 0161 763 3221 (work).
Secretary@WesternChanFellowship.org

Membership Secretary, NCF Subscriptions (£10. 50 per three issues), Retreat Bookings
Peter Howard 22 Butts Road, Chiseldon, Wiltshire, SN4 0NW, Tel 01793 740659
Retreats@WesternChanFellowship.org

Chair of the WCF: Hilary Richards, 8 Park Terrace, The Park, Nottingham, NG1 5DN, Tel: 0115 9242075,
Chair@WesternChanFellowship.org

Teacher of the WCF: Dr John Crook, Winterhead Hill Farm, Shipham, N. Somerset, BS25 1RS.
Teacher@WesternChanFellowship.org

NCF Editor: Marian Partington, Ty Lottyn, Llawr y glyn, Caersws, Powys SY17 5RJ
Editor@WesternChanFellowship.org

WCF Treasurer Jake Lyne, 13 Belle Vue Terrace, YORK, YO10 5AZ
Treasurer@WesternChanFellowship.org

Subscriptions: WCF Fellows receive NCF as a benefit of Fellowship. Others may subscribe at a price of £10.50 per three issues (we aim for two - three issues per year) by writing with payment enclosed (cheques payable to Western Chan Fellowship), stating the issue from which you want your subscription to start, to Peter Howard, 22 Butts Road, Chiseldon, Wiltshire, SN4 0NW. **Back Issues**, (except issue 15), are available at £4 per issue from WCF Treasurer as above, otherwise please refer to the website WesternChanFellowship.org where most back issues are freely available online.

Local Groups Contacts

Affiliated Groups:

Bristol Sally Masheder 0117 924 8819
Gillingham Stuart McLeod 01634 571659
Glastonbury Ned Reiter 01458 833663
London Will Turner 020 8340 7278
Manchester Simon Child 0161 761 1945
Swindon Hughie Carroll 01793 343447
York James McCarthy 01904 330977
or Jannie Mead 01904 628536

Associated Groups:

Aberystwyth Ken Jones 01970 880603
Cardiff Eddy Street 029 2069 1146
Guildford Roger Taylor 01483 202422
Newbury Dave/Aurie McKay 01635 46139

*New Chan Forum is published and distributed
by the Western Chan Fellowship, WesternChanFellowship.org
Registered charity number 1068637,
Correspondence address 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, Lancs, BL9 7RU.
Printed on recycled paper.*