



Sheng-Yen

禪

# NEW CHAN FORUM

BUDDHIST JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP

SUMMER 2013 NO.47 £4.00

## *Editor's Introduction*

THE MIDDLE WAY <i>Simon Child</i>	1
A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR <i>Harry Miller</i>	6
NEW DEPARTURES IN DHARMA TEACHING & PRACTICE <i>Ken Jones</i>	10
AM I? <i>Sophie Muir</i>	14
BUMPING UP AGAINST OURSELVES <i>Eddy Street</i>	17
RETREAT REPORTS <i>Various</i>	23
HERE NOW <i>Ken Jones</i>	27
COOK'S MEDITATION <i>Pam Butler</i>	29

TEACHER: DR. SIMON CHILD • EDITOR: EDDY STREET

DESIGN [www.robbowden.com](http://www.robbowden.com)

ISSN 2047-9514 PRINT • ISSN 2047-9522 ONLINE

© 2013 WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP LARGE COVER CALLIGRAPHY: 'MERIT' BY MASTER SHENG-YEN

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BY EDDY STREET

# 禪

*The Flower Garland Sutra has given us the wonderful image of Indra's Net. This is a symbol of the infinitely repeating mutual relations existing in the universe – a symbol of the interconnectedness and interpenetration of all things. As an editor it sometimes seems that nothing is going to connect and an issue will be made up of an collection of unrelated articles. At first this current NCF seemed to be going that way. However as the pieces were put together it became very clear that they all reflect the interconnecting nature of our practice. They are expressions of what we do with openness and heartfelt giving as well as the problems we encounter and the mistakes that we can make.*

*Simon's article is based on his Teacher's Address to the WCF annual general meeting. In this he discusses the personal approach of each of us to our organisation and considers the Middle Way as it is applied to a daily practice. He outlines how we need to be aware of mistakes we may make because of our own unconsidered human limitations and in particular the problem of idealising our practice and idealising our expectations of the organisation to which we belong. When we do this it is to the detriment of fully engaging in the balancing of compassion and love within the burly-burly of our daily lives, our relationships with others and with our organisation. Harry Miller, a friend from the USA, offers a very Western slant on consulting the Buddha in which our confusions and expressions of the problems of our lives can be seen very much in terms of the original teaching of the Buddha. In several ways, these two articles pick up on the idea of being emotionally aware of where we are at any moment and this is the theme picked up by Ken Jones in his presentation on the format of his retreats. This focus is also present in the article from me which develops the topic of spiritual bypassing referred to by Simon in his article.*

*Our poetry offering comes from Sophie Muir, a poem that reflects herself and the themes in the complete way that it does. As always, the Retreat Reports pick up all the strands of the articles in their own manner and on this occasion are supplemented by a haibun of Ken's, written on a solitary retreat. Finally, the meal is complete with the cook's meditations from Pam. Each piece demonstrates our aliveness in our practice and I am sure that your reading will be an expression of your practice as well the reflection of the universe in you.*

## THE MIDDLE WAY

*Simon Child, Chuan-fa Jing-bong*

*This article is based on the Teacher's Address to the AGM of the Western Chan Fellowship on 23rd March 2013.*

### THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

As we all know, the Buddha was born as a prince and to encourage him to remain in the palace and become the next king his father ensured that he lived a life full of luxuries and indulgences. But he became very concerned about the issue of human suffering and he left the palace setting out on his spiritual journey. He visited many teachers and learned and practised many forms of meditation, but did not feel that he had penetrated to the root of suffering. He tried ascetic practices in quite an extreme way, including fasting to the extent of emaciation. He became very weak and at risk of dying. He did not sense that he was yet near reaching his goal, and he accepted some milk and rice and broke his fast, later sitting on a mat of soft grass under the Bo tree. It was here that he adjusted his meditation and where he broke through to Enlightenment.

### THE MIDDLE WAY

From this story, we take the concept of the 'Middle Way', of not falling for extremes. We can learn from the specific example presented that we should aim not to fall either for the extreme of self-indulgence or the other extreme of self-mortification. However, we should take this as just one example of a wider principle and develop this much further.

What is the problem with extremes? Usually they indicate a strong attachment to oneself, to one's self-concern. In this example, we easily can see the self-attachment in someone who emphasises self-indulgence. Perhaps egotism is a little harder to discern when looking at someone who emphasises self-mortification, but it is there in the form of strong belief that 'I' know the way, 'I' am confident in my path, 'I' am not open to other views. This is a lack of openness, a fixed and narrow view which is rooted in individual opinion and self-seeking goal-orientated behaviour.

One way of understanding the Middle Way is as above to find the mid-point between two extremes, a point of balance, to be moderate. But we can also look at it in a more sophisticated way and consider it in terms of encompassing opposites, of seeing the wholeness and unity of the situation. We can use an example such as looking at two of the *Paramitas* which could appear as opposites, vigour and patience. An extreme of patience might be inaction, *laissez-faire*, or even self-indulgent laziness and an extreme of vigour might be egotistic forcefulness. The first level of understanding of the Middle Way would be helpful in pointing us towards the importance of balance, of finding a way to apply appropriate energy without anxiety and undue self-concern. But the deeper understanding guides us towards seeing that self-concern is the issue, and that if we can drop this then there is no opposition between patience and vigour, we can be fully relaxed and non-attached to outcomes at the same time as applying full effort – we can find the perfection (*Paramita*) of full expression of both patience and vigour.

We are familiar with this as it applies to other pairs of apparent opposites. The Silence and the Illumination of the meditative practice of Silent Illumination are not opposites between which we seek a mid-point, nor are they even two – they are attributes of one state in which both attributes can be fully realised simultaneously, if we are free of self-concern. We may find it difficult to find the unity in form and emptiness, they appear as opposites, but from the perspective of no attachment to self, the mind of no-self, these two apparent ‘opposites’ are encompassed as one reality. Similarly, for wisdom and compassion, for arrogance and meekness, and more, we can apply this to any pair of apparent opposites

It is not that we take two opposites and unify or integrate them to make them one. It is that we drop self-concern and then we are able to see the unity that was there all along though it appeared divided due to self-attached mental processes.

Consider whether an extreme position is ever appropriate. Remember the phrase from Dogen: “When the opposites arise, the Buddha mind is lost”.

#### LIVING THE MIDDLE WAY

Understanding the Middle Way like this allows us to progress beyond merely doctrinal understanding to take this principle into our practice and our lives and our activities.

In our practice we can observe how we tend to lean one way or another, towards one extreme or another, for example towards quietism or towards intellectualism, or towards striving or passivity. In the mindfulness of our practice both on the cushion and in our daily lives we have the opportunity to notice ourselves doing this and to observe that the pull is one of self-concern. This approach should be applied to meditation methods and to our 24/7 daily life practice.

Failing to apply this understanding leads not only to poor meditation but may actually be harmful to the practitioner. Some extremes lead us to deviate a long way both from the Path and from normal life, and in misunderstanding the importance of the Middle Way we may even reinforce our errors by regarding them as good and dedicated practice. A specific example of this is what is known as ‘spiritual bypassing’, a term coined by John Welwood (Welwood 2011) whereby we idealise the practice and avoid full participation in our lives and what needs to be done in them.

This may be accidental but may even be done somewhat deliberately and consciously by those who use their ‘practice’ as a tool to avoid dealing with difficulties in their life. They excuse themselves from addressing any messiness in their lives by citing and prioritising a higher ideal – the realisation of their practice. They overlook that the fruit of practice should be realisation of human potential, not suppression of human life. They idealise, perhaps even idolise, some anticipated future Enlightenment as being the solution to their problems, overlooking that for practice to lead to Enlightenment we must take responsibility for the cleansing of our vexations. Avoidance or suppression of vexations is not the path to Buddhahood.



The opposite, denying the spiritual urge, is not the solution either, this would be to attach to 'my' life and concerns as primary and demote the task of paying attention to making ourselves good for others as well as for ourselves.

Either extreme involves dividing practice from life, and setting them in opposition, and thus is 'losing the Buddha mind'. A clue that we are falling for this trap is to notice whenever we have a tendency to turn a blind eye, to withdraw, to blank out, any kind of avoidant behaviour or attitude whether in relation to ourselves or to others. This act of avoidance, or one of preference, implies that we have created a split in the mind between opposing demands on our attention and we have sided with one of them. To progress in practice and in life we need to heal such splits, and the first step is to notice the fracture and our tendency to sustain it. We should adjust our practice and our way of living, so that practice informs our life and is grounded in it - the whole of it. If that is difficult, we should investigate the sense of attachment that binds us to one direction and challenge the associated self-concern.

## RELATIONSHIPS

We also should apply this analysis and practice to our relationships, to other people, to other beings, to the environment, and even to created things such as organisations.

How much of our concern in our relationships is for what we gain and how much for what we give? How much is a manifestation of self-concern and how much a matter of compassion and love? Crucially, how are these working together, are they in tension or in balance, are they divided or are they as one?

Too easily, we attach to protecting our own, our self, our family, and deny our responsibility to others. But also too easily we may fall the other way, denying ourselves and our loved ones in the name of outward action for others. Can we catch this tendency in ourselves and rebalance the extremes, both in the sense of finding a mid-point between extremes, but also of finding the unity of all which heals the split which created this tension between inner and outer.

As members of the WCF we can also consider our relationship to WCF as an organisation. WCF has the role of providing services to the public, of educating the public about Buddhism and offering retreats and so on. As members, do we contribute too much to this project, creating organisational attachment and perhaps risking burnout, or do we not contribute enough owing to feeling held back by the busy demands of family and work in our lives? A Middle Way is found not by a mathematical calculation and apportioning energy between competing demands but by realising the wholeness in our relating to the many demands on our attention.

The public are consumers of our offerings, but as WCF members we also have the role of 'consumers', for example in attending as participants in WCF retreats and other events. How do we balance our 'taking' from WCF, which might feel selfish, and our contribution to WCF, which might be compassionate but which might also be driven by egotistic attitudes such as seeking approval of others? We may be able to offer time, money, knowledge and skills, and support to fellow practitioners, but we also have other

demands on all of these resources. How do we check that we are in balance in this important area of our lives and what resistance do we feel to making adjustments – investigate that resistance, it reveals attachment. Find your way through to making use of WCF as an organisation to support both your own practice and the practice of others.

## ORGANISATIONS

We can take this analysis one step further and consider not only our own personal issues but those of organisations with which we are involved, for example the WCF. An organisational sense of ‘self’ can cause trouble in the same way as our own personal sense of self, by distorting activities and priorities due to self-concern. Organisations may behave in self-concerned and selfish ways, for example by losing connection with their original objectives as they diversify into activities which may be popular or profitable but which are unrelated or even contradictory to the founding principles of the organisation, or in being over-concerned about organisational details. This is over-institutionalisation, the organisation protecting its own existence at the cost of its own values. But the opposite extreme is also troublesome. When an organisation does not take care to make itself useful for its intended purpose, exhibiting institutional under-concern, e.g. by not making use of opportunities, or insufficient planning ahead, or ineffective organisational structures, leading to being less effective or failing.

As the members of WCF, we are the ‘managers’ of WCF – do we consider that WCF is on course between these extremes, or do we see adjustments being necessary for WCF to fulfil its objectives, and how do we see our role in enabling and supporting these adjustments?

## BODHISATTVA PATH

The Bodhisattva path is not an abandonment of personal practice, and neither is it a compromise, practising half for self and half for others. It is a Middle Way path practising both wholly for others and wholly for self – there is no opposition between these two. If when considering the Bodhisattva Path and helping others you feel a sense of tension, or imbalance, or sacrifice, then investigate and release the self-concerned attachment which is pulling you off-centre.

Apply this principle to all aspects of your life, to your practice, to your personal and work life, to public interactions and roles, and to any organisations with which you work including the WCF. In this way, your practice and your life will be most effective and most beneficial and fulfilling for yourself and for others.

## REFERENCES

Welwood, J. (2011) *Human Nature, Buddha Nature: On spiritual bypassing, relationship, and the dharma*. An interview by Tina Fossella. John Welwood: Integrating Western Psychology and Eastern Spiritual Wisdom <http://www.johnwelwood.com/articlesandinterviews.htm>



PHOTOS: Simon Child (from 2011 China trip)



## A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR

*Harry Miller*

Most people who are familiar with Buddhism know of the metaphor of the Buddha as a doctor for the world's ills. I'm going to update this metaphor to the 21st century to describe and explain the Three Characteristics of Impermanence, Dissatisfaction, and No Self.

Let's say the Buddha is a doctor and he has his office in any town or village for that matter. He has a nice expansive clean office. I sit in the waiting room and am called into see him. He has the rollaway bench covered with fresh white paper and he asks me to sit up on it. He asks, "What seems to be the problem?" I launch into a litany of issues – money problems, breakup with girlfriend, worries about health issues, aches and pains and depression. The Buddha examines me and says, "I can help you. You think there's something wrong with you but you're reacting to a false positive."

"A what?" I ask.

"A false positive – that's when some test tells you that you have a disease, but it's wrong – the instrument that gave you the information was inaccurate. The instrument in question is your mind, your views in their present state. You see signs that you think there's something wrong with you and you believe them. You have a totally upside down view of the world and I will help to set you straight."

"What am I missing," I ask.

The Buddha says, "You don't really understand how the world works. You are ignorant of the Three Marks or Characteristics of existence. "What are they?" I ask. The Buddha replies, "They are concepts or doctrines, teachings that point to the way things really are. You believe in just the opposite, that's why I say you have a false positive – you view things existing in a certain way that they are not. Also, each of these Three Characteristics, Impermanence, Dissatisfaction, and No Self are described in negative terms because we're trying to negate – that is remove – your false views."

"Here's the first: Impermanence." I look blankly. The Buddha tells me, "You think that things, including yourself are permanent and unchanging." I think for a moment and say, "sure, there is my job, my house, my name, all my friends. I had them yesterday and I have them today. I don't see any issue." The Buddha says, "has it always been so and will it always be so?" I'm not so sure.

The Buddha hooks me up to an X-ray machine. He says, "I'm going to do a scan of your five *skandhas* – that is everything that constitutes you, your mind and body." So I look up at the screen and I see some very detailed images of my body, sensations running through it, what I perceive, what my mind does with it – volition or mental formations, and finally my consciousness. The Buddha asks, "Do you see anything in all of this that remains the same, even for a moment?" "No," I say. "Everything that I've shown you, everything you experience with your mind in the confused state that it is in, is conditioned."

“What does conditioned mean?” I ask. “One thing is dependent or contingent on another. It goes like this,” the Buddha says. “When this is, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises; when this is not, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases; In other words, you can’t have a book without pages, and the pages cannot exist without paper, paper comes from tree, on and on – literally *ad infinitum*.”

“OK,” I say, “with everything changing and dependent on something else, I guess there is nothing permanent.” “Absolutely nothing in mind or body,” the Buddha adds.

“So that’s my problem?” The Buddha says, “You’re on the right track.”

“What’s next?” “Well, there’s another false positive – a piece of inaccurate information that you believe.” “What’s that?”

“You think that the world is reliable, definable, that it acts the way you want it to act. Look, up until a little while ago, you thought that everything was permanent, that gave you a false sense of a kind of certainty.” “What do you mean by certainty?” The Buddha says, “Well I have your records going back a very long time.” “How long?” I ask. “Time immemorial,” the Buddha replies. “There have been times when you thought that you were a king, the smartest person in the world. That everybody should bow down to you.” I remain silent. Then the Buddha says, “there were other times that you thought you were an insignificant worm, that you were of no consequence, and hardly had the right to the live.” “That’s true,” I say sheepishly. The Buddha continues, “other times when you sort of thought life is both good and bad, sometimes this, sometimes that.” I brighten a little, “Yes.” The Buddha said “all false, just philosophical ideas that you were caught up in, quite beside the point.”

So the Buddha continues, “From time immemorial, you have held onto to this idea of permanence”, and checking the results of some of the lab tests he gave me he says, “I see that your body and mind have accumulated some toxins.” “Toxins!” I say, “what do you mean?” “Well,” he’s trying to be a non-alarmist here, “You have these toxins – sometimes we call them the three poisons – of greed, hatred and ignorance, or passion, aversion and delusion.” “Sounds serious,” I say. “Depends on how you look at it,” he says. Now he hooks me up to a CAT scan and starts to look at the readings. “Look, you had this original toxin, we call it ignorance or delusion. It slowly and subtly crept into your mind and you started to not see what was right in front of you, you were always looking at things created by your mind. You believed in permanence and that caused you to try to attach to things – especially the ones that made you feel good – that’s the greed and desire. But then there are things that don’t make you feel very good – you want to get away from them at all cost – that’s the hatred and aversion.” “What’s wrong with wanting some things and getting rid of others?” I ask. The Buddha says, “nothing except for the fact that it doesn’t work and these feelings cause you all sorts of discomfort. And you end up with dissatisfaction, unease, imperfection – you suffer because of it.” I get a little depressed hearing this. The Buddha says, “ But hang on – you also have generosity, kindness and goodwill, and wisdom within you, and when you start to look at things correctly, you’ll see they’re made of the same stuff as greed, hatred and ignorance. Wait till I fill you in on the rest of the Four Noble Truths –

I've told you about suffering and its cause, those are the first two. These Four Noble Truths are an analysis of what's wrong and a prescription for what's right. I'll get to the cure soon."

"Can I go home now?" I ask.

"Not yet," says the Buddha. "There's one Characteristic to go. "What's that?" "It's the last false positive. An incorrect view of who you are. It's called No Self" "Huh?" I say. Now he puts me in for an MRI scan. I feel a little claustrophobic. "This is very subtle," the Buddha says, "and we need a deep investigation." I look at the screen and say, "where are we now?" He says, "this is the deep *prajnaparamita*?" I say, "Is that near the pineal gland or the cerebrum?" He says, "be quiet and pay attention."

The Buddha starts to look at the dials and the readings and he explains to me what is going on. "You had this sense, false and baseless as we have seen, that things were permanent and you started to operate as if they were. Well you yourself needed a sense of continuity in all this flux and change. You needed a base of operations." "OK, what would that be?" I ask. "That's a sense of self," the Buddha says. "That seems reasonable", I say. The Buddha, says "I know, but look closely at this scan, the most powerful in the universe, there is nothing that it doesn't detect. You show me where your self is in this scan." This is really disturbing. I look everywhere – through the five *skandhas*, conditioned arising, everywhere, and I can't find a self. "But I've had a self as long as I can remember," I protest. The Buddha said, "what you had was a set of reoccurring illusions that kept reinforcing themselves, pulling the wool over your eyes. Everything that was going on was real enough in its moment, but your understanding and conclusions about them were flat wrong. Look, if everything else is impermanent, why should there be a "self" that is permanent. It was an illusion. You were the victim of the false positive."

"You mean I don't exist?" The Buddha said, "I'm not talking about that at all. I'm just talking about some crazy ideas you had in your head."

"Hold on," I say, "isn't there something true and knowable that's not a fiction? There's got to be something there." "Sure," says the Buddha. "Well, what is it?" I ask. "It's your original face before you were born." I look over the x-rays, CAT scans, and MRI information. "I don't see it," I say. "That makes sense", says the Buddha, "because you can't find it there, or let's just say it might be hard for you to recognize at this point. All of these things, my teachings, the Three Characteristics are meant to remove illusion and misunderstanding."

"So do I have it now?" I ask "Am I cured?" "Well," the Buddha says, "you have some correct information to work with. But you really have to begin treatment. I explained to you about suffering and I've shown you its cause. That the first two Noble Truths. But you have to know the third and last Noble Truths. You have to know that there really is a cure and that there is path, a regimen, a course to treat your problems with."

"What's that", I ask. The Buddha said, "The Eightfold Path." So he gave me some pills. "These are for starting you on Wisdom, they will start you on the path – correctly seeing things as they are - Right View, and making effort to live the way things are – Right Intention. The pills aren't really going to do it for you. They're just a reminder."





I was more banged up than I thought I was, so the Buddha gave me some bandages and dressings – these are the precepts, guidelines for an ethical life. “They will keep you safe on the path and make sure you act, speak, and make a living according to Right principles.

Lastly, he gave me a syringe for my self-inoculation. “This is *samadhi* – you take it then you’re on your own – you develop your mind so that you are ever vigilant, mindful and finally stable and concentrated. This should get you on your way. Call me if you run into any problems.”

After I left, the Buddha turned to his assistant, Ananda, and said, “Nice fellow. You know there really wasn’t anything wrong with him in the first place.” “Yes”, Ananda said, “there’s seems to be an epidemic of self delusion.” Then he looked out into the waiting room, saw all the sentient beings lined up. “Next!” he shouted.

*Harry Miller studied with Master Sheng Yen for over 30 years. He was editor of the Chan Newsletter for over 10 years, and is a frequent contributor to Chan Magazine. He is a board member of Dharma Drum Retreat Center and a member of the Dharma Teachers in Training at Chan Meditation Center.*

## NEW DEPARTURES IN DHARMA TEACHING & PRACTICE

*Ken Jones*

This article introduces significant new departures in teaching and practice, originating mainly in the United States and reports my own experience in implementing them which originates from some forty years of Dharma practice and teaching. During that time, I have become increasingly aware of the misfit between the teaching methods of an ancient Asian religion, predominantly monastic in character, and the psychological culture of Western modernity. Specifically, I have noted the “gains” made by students in our periodic retreats (monastic miniatures, in effect) and their subsequent loss when returning to the hurly-burly of everyday life -- where the only practice was a relatively superficial “mindfulness”.

### EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

At the same time, I became aware of a growing output of books advocating a practice centred on an emotional (and cognitive) awareness-in-the-body related to the vicissitudes of everyday life. However, these in no way discount the value of meditation and retreat in sustaining the clarity essential to such a practice. These books are from highly regarded teachers across the spectrum of Buddhist traditions. Typical titles include ‘After the Ecstasy the Laundry’ (Kornfield 2000), ‘Bringing Meditation to Life’ (Bayda 2003), ‘Turning Suffering Inside Out’ (Cohen 2002), ‘Buddhism: Tools for Living Your Life’ (Vajragupta, 2011), ‘Ordinary Magic: Everyday Life as a Spiritual Path’ (Welwood 1992). The following quotation gives something of the flavour of this writing:

If you grab every opportunity to work with your mind – at home, at school, at work – you’ll end up with more chances to work with strong emotions than in one hour of sitting on your cushion with some vague idea of ‘meditation’. In fact, your practice of working directly with your mind moment to moment will be much more powerful, because it will really change your mainstream. When you recognise an emotion with mindfulness, and penetrate it with some recognition of the nature of mind, that process is self-transforming. There’s nothing more you need to do. When you can work with your mind in this way, you will clearly see its effect, not just in you, but in your environment – on your family and on your community” (p43 Pema Chodron, 2009).

Through a variety of practices each student directs his or her enquiry into her self and its life – its evolution and telltale characteristics. The Buddha did, of course, preach that belief in a separate self is the cause of *dukkha*, and for Zen Master Dogen “to study Buddhism is to study the self”. Personally, I find Hubert Benoit’s metaphor of the ‘lifelong and unwinnable lawsuit with reality’ as a helpful overview as it points to the ultimately unavailing struggle to consolidate and experience a sense of self that is sufficiently strong and enduring to deny the impermanence and insubstantiality of all phenomena – including ourselves.

### EXPLORATIONS

Several teachers have published “explorations”, devised to help students in the context of their own lives internalise the key ideas presented in Dharma talks. From being abstract concepts, these ideas translate into personal, everyday experience. “Emptiness”, for example, becomes the experience of a taste of “suchness”. Prominent here is A.H.Almaas, in his book ‘The Unfolding Now’ (Almaas 2008), which is the foundation

of his ‘Diamond Approach’ and the work of his Diamond Sangha. Here is an example -- an exploration of what it might be like to dwell in suchness.

Select some area of your life, such as a relationship, your job, your physical environment, your financial situation, your health, or your achievements. How would it feel to live that part of your life without any longer being needy about how you want it to be or not to be? How and why might you find that difficult?

In the same vein, the following is taken from Jack Kornfield’s ‘A Path with Heart’ (Kornfield 2002), on the theme of turning straw into gold:

Sit quietly, allowing yourself to become calm and receptive. Reflect on the difficulties and afflictions in your life as being your most valuable aid to cultivating fearlessness and peace of mind.

Then think of a difficulty, affliction or pain in your life. As you sense this affliction, how does it feel, and how does it affect your body? Holding the feeling carefully, begin to ask yourself these questions, listening inwardly for their answers. (Note that it is not necessary to reveal to others the origin of your affliction; we are concerned here only with what it feels like),

1. How have I emotionally responded to this affliction so far, and how have I suffered from my response and reaction to it?
2. What does this problem ask me to let go of?
3. What difficulties, if any, am I having with becoming deeply aware of my emotional response to this affliction?

Similar approaches, with specific exercises, can be found in Gregory Kramer’s ‘Insight Dialogue: The Interpersonal Path to Freedom’ (Kramer 2007). Also Vajragupta’s ‘Buddhism: Tools for Living your Life’ (Vajragupta 2007) is a rare British contribution, aimed at beginners, but with lots of DIY exercises that can be quarried by the resourceful. Almas and Kramer each present their exercises in the context of their own comprehensive systems of Dharma training, but for my part, I have taken whatever I needed to support my own approach to Dharma and how to teach it.

Some could object that all this may amount to no more than conceptual play but here I follow Dogen’s argument that ideas, whether written or spoken, are by no means mere “fingers pointing at the moon” — a misleading dualistic notion. No sharp and absolute distinction can be made between understandings and insights, and between thinking, feeling and bodily experience (which is why the Hsin Hsin Ming is sometimes translated as ‘Trust in the Heart-Mind’). It follows that, given sufficient meditative nurture, concepts like “suchness” can, over time, deepen into insight. This is the path of a gradual ripening of wisdom. This path passes through an initial stage of belief in the Dharma into something confirmed by the student’s own experience. My concern is to help belief ripen into faith — that liberating and empowering acceptance which brings profound ease of mind and makes us truly serviceable to others.

## INTERPERSONAL WORK

Some teachers are now moving beyond the conventional interpersonal activities of question-and-answer following a Dharma talk and the private interactions that take place in the interview room. A variety of more



potent “interpersonal meditations” can now be inserted into a retreat programme. Two active practices my students have found particularly helpful are working in pairs, informal or structured, and small group work. In the structured version of pairs work, each takes it in turn for seven minutes to ask the other a question. Thus, in a retreat introducing emotional awareness practice the question might be, “Tell me, Jane, how does it feel to be you?” The questioner may address nothing other than this to their partner, but is encouraged to use a wide range of non-verbal communication to elicit a fruitful response. Their role combines those of seducer, midwife and dancing partner. The partner can make any response or none at all. This is, of course, derived from the Western Zen Retreat, but it differs significantly both in practice and in its limited use as one of a variety of methods deployed on this type of retreat.

I also employ discussion in groups of between four to six people for the collective penetration of the “explorations” outlined above. These groups are stabilised, controlled and given a grave and meditative aspect by the use of a ‘speaking stone’. This symbolic stone rests in the middle of the group, and only someone who picks it up has the right to speak so long as they are holding it. Almaas, Kramer, and others, but above all the testimony of my own retreatants, have convinced me of the varied benefits of introducing this practice of interpersonal meditation as a daily feature of the retreats I lead. The first clear benefit is experiencing the heartfelt pain and discomfiture of others within a supportive group as it arouses strong feelings of compassion or, at least, the encouraging discovery that “we’re all in the same boat”. Secondly, insights and understandings about a topic can emerge from a group interaction which for some retreatants was not accessible when reflecting on their own. Gregory Kramer makes the crucial point that “many people find that the wakefulness, ease and even love they feel while in formal meditation does not integrate well into their lives. These formal practices can be quite pristine, and therefore distinct from our very busy everyday lives. There is no clear path for blending formal practice with everyday living” (p265 Kramer 2007). But because interpersonal dialogue “works with the moment-to moment experience of interacting with another, it brings the liberating dynamic of meditation into our everyday lives easily and naturally” (p4 Kramer 2007). Moreover, the experience of emotionally charged interaction with others can itself nurture insight and deepening understanding about the powerful but hidden process by which we all construct a self-image.

Perhaps the most eloquent argument for the foregoing type of interpersonal work, and indeed for the whole innovatory shift of which they are a part, is the following from Norman Fischer:

These days, as I continue to teach Zen outside the traditional context of monastic life, I am trying to see what will work to bring ordinary people in the ordinary world to the sort of deeper, fuller living that Zen promises. I have found that it is of crucial importance for people to be able to express themselves fully ...In recent years it’s become clear to me that students need to do more than absorb teachings and ask clarifying questions. They need to speak their hearts...Expression is healing. It opens us, propelling us forth into our lives. It’s not so much a matter of ideas or even of feelings, for expression is more than a cognitive or an emotional act. Yet somehow the simple act of speaking truly, out loud and to others, inspires us finally to point our prow out to sea as we set forth onward for the journey. (p43, Fischer 2008).

## MY RETREATS

I have endeavoured to embody these new departures into an appropriate retreat format. The retreat is a silent and disciplined event apart from the interpersonal episodes and other necessary communication. The practice periods on the programme are left open, to be filled depending on the current mood, aptitudes and energy levels of the retreatants. Although sitting meditation is the default position, there may be a talk, followed by or preceded by an exploratory exercise (as above) pursued interpersonally or alone. And when bodies begin to dangle from the ends of minds there is a repertoire of interactive physical activities, to relax and energise, to take care of each other, and to release a playfulness which I rate high in the spiritual perfections. What we do next may also depend on the weather, since I believe landscape can be a valuable resource in Buddhist training.

I currently offer some half dozen such retreats a year including two organised by the Western Chan Fellowship and these all draw students from a variety of different Sanghas. Teachers and senior members of other Sanghas are always warmly invited to attend as participant observers and make their own assessments. The available indicators suggest that these retreats are invariably very well received and all are welcome.

### *Further information*

- Before attending, retreatants are asked to click on [www.kenjoneszen.com](http://www.kenjoneszen.com) to read my paper “How to do Everyday Buddhism”. The site includes much other material relevant to the present article.
- Some years previously I had written a series of papers written to provide students with backup to my talks. These can be found on the Western Chan Fellowship website [www.westernchanfellowship.org/dharma-talks-ken-jones.html](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/dharma-talks-ken-jones.html)

## REFERENCES

- Almaas, A.H. (2008). *The Unfolding Now*. Shambhala. Boston.
- Bayda, E. (2003). *Being Zen: Bringing Meditation to Life*. Shambhala. Boston.
- Chodron, P. (2009). ‘The Natural Warmth of the Heart’. *Shambhala Sun* November 2009 pages 42-44.
- Cohen, D. (2002). *Turning Suffering Inside Out*. Shambhala. Boston.
- Fischer, N. (2008). *Sailing Home*. Free Press. New York.
- Kornfield, J. (2000). *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*. Rider. London
- Kramer, G. (2007). *Insight Dialogue: The Interpersonal Path to Freedom*, Shambhala. Boston.
- Vajragupta. (2011). *Buddhism: Tools for Living Your Life*. Windhorse Cambridge. UK.
- Welwood, J. (1992). *Ordinary Magic: Everyday Life as a Spiritual Path* Shambhala. Boston.

## AM I?

*Sophie Muir*

Am I who I  
am or who I'm  
meant to be?

Hidden  
in the womb  
nine months,  
alone in another  
land, removed  
from family  
history and ancestral  
line – link  
lost yet gestating  
in the Mediterranean  
Baie des Anges.

Secret kept  
for decades till  
your dying days.

In the marrow  
of your bone, where  
cancer grew  
and buried words  
struggled  
to be free?

Identity a carapace  
while inside sea-waves  
washed and sun  
warmed and shone.

Since Candlemas  
and spring  
you spread your  
solitude  
all summer long  
till autumn  
– and Samhain.

Alcohol perhaps?  
Trickling into  
amniotic waters,  
mingling –  
who knows?

Tender osmosis  
of lunar tides  
and timeless lap  
of the broad  
Golfe du Lion,  
Of wide Marseillaise  
horizon, blending  
with sky, stars even  
light years ...  
Dimensions deeper  
than bone.

Your  
organism graceful  
co-ordinated  
loving and birthing.

You & he  
collaborating around  
concealed seed –  
fruit of grief, as you  
pool your sorrow.

Flowing  
with loss –  
your mutual friend  
her death  
in child-birth.

Now one night's  
shadowed conception brings  
new generations of bright days  
to be borne.

Love  
blessed pathway  
for maverick souls,  
ticketless.  
Offering,  
pulse and limb.  
Life  
to stowaways  
on the Mother-ship.



Supreme sacrifice –  
 rare chance upon one Earth.  
 Open space a pure gift –  
 your precious gift slipped through  
 in gratitude  
 arriving.

Delivering  
 invisible thread  
 to a planet  
 perpetually weaving.

Playing part  
 inside the wild  
 rough and tumble of a magic  
 Biosphere –  
 O precious! Delicate  
 turning world.

Mistral,  
 Tramontaine,  
 through the seasons  
 waiting, swelling.

Birthing  
 in isolation.

Your voice,  
 swallowing truth.  
 So soft when I met you, that  
 one time – I  
 could hardly  
 hear.

Silence follows us  
 like a wind  
 – a friend.  
 Endless quiet rejoices.  
 Revolving - rolling round galaxies,  
 daisies, death and birth –  
 traffic, heart-beat,  
 across seams of rock  
 densely layered  
 beneath our  
 searching feet.

Breathing,  
 I am apt to  
 hesitate at times  
 “ought I?”

Yet here  
 permission appears  
 and welcome  
 constantly surprises!  
 Smiles suffusing  
 the original  
 question.

( Upon trying to write an essay on Person-Centred  
 theory in connection to personal history 2010 )







## BUMPING UP AGAINST OURSELVES

*Eddy Street*

The spiritual path is seldom if ever straightforward. When we embark on our spiritual quest, we naturally engage the nature of the person that we are with the tasks that will present themselves to us along the way. The trials, tribulations and obstacles along the path are not an inherent element of the path itself but are the outcome of the way we personally interact with the requirements involved in following our path. In many respects, we define aspects of our own path by the way we view ourselves and the ways we are as individuals. From a Buddhist perspective, an essential element of our path is the confrontation that occurs with our ego and this is not just with the way in which it is structured within our general psychology but also with its unique and idiosyncratic nature and form. As the path clearly involves our temperament, character and personality then most definitely we will meet some problems as we bump up against ourselves as we try to develop our practice and respond to the universe. It is important to be clear about some of the problems that we will face and equally it is important that we understand these difficulties especially those that involve ‘me’.

### SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM

A convenient set of ideas on which to base our understanding is offered by the Tibetan Master Chogyam Trungpa in his now classic text written for Western practitioners ‘Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism’ (Trungpa 1973). He outlines a very useful way of considering the problems that present themselves to us. In his presentation he describes how the process of ‘spiritual materialism’ has a focus on short-term benefits of practice which seemingly bring some relief from our personal suffering but which ultimately only add to the long-term nature of the suffering that we experience. In this way, our grasping at short term benefits merely becomes ego serving and therefore only aids the processes from which our dissatisfactions arise. He outlines three types of materialism, the first being physical materialism which is based on the belief that possessions can bring us relief from suffering. We can see this type of materialism present in everyday life in our consumer society; we are continually asked to spend our money and buy certain goods that it is claimed will endow us with contentment and happiness – be it a new sofa or a can of energy drink. The release that we gain from such material goods is very short term and it soon inspires our continued sense of unsatisfactoriness which is designed to direct us to further purchases.

In Trungpa’s view, the next type of materialism is of a psychological nature in which we come to believe that a particular philosophy, belief system, religion or point of view will by its characteristics bring some release from the suffering we encounter. By strongly identifying with a particular religion or philosophy without a reflective approach, it can merely serve as a way to seek refuge and relief from the problems we face. As we collect the psychological brownie points of the system, such as the initiations, the number of retreats we have attended, the length of time that we have been sitting, we may end up just constructing a more solidified version of the problematic ego that we started with. Our identification with the beliefs that lead to such activities then masks personal ego issues by presenting a barrier that prevents us from

looking at those issues. Clearly making the statement “I am a Buddhist” is therefore something that in itself may be fraught with difficulty!

The final type of spiritual materialism rests on the belief that certain temporary states of mind are in themselves or can become a permanent refuge from suffering. In this situation, we undertake our meditation practice as it can create a peaceful state of mind, and we then set out to seek out those states as they imply to us that we are getting somewhere! Unfortunately constantly seeking out particular states of mind (whether we have had them or not!) and adding them to our list of spiritual accomplishments are merely the manoeuvres of the ego to justify its own continued unquestioned presence. Here the ego directs and dictates a process where in actuality it needs to be directly confronted by that process. As Jack Kornfield states:

Intensive mediation practice has its limitations. Meditation and spiritual practice can easily be used to suppress and avoid feeling or to escape from difficult areas of our lives. Our sorrows are hard to touch. Many people resist the personal and psychological roots of their suffering; there is so much pain in truly experiencing our bodies, our personal histories, our limitations. It can even be harder than facing the universal suffering that surfaces in sitting. We fear the personal and its sorrow because we have not learned how it can serve as our practice and open our hearts. (Kornfield 1998)

It is the personal and psychological roots of our suffering that bring us to practice in the first place. Initially, whatever set of precipitating circumstances, we all seek out meditative practice as a way of relieving some felt suffering. Therefore, in some way, we begin our practice from the position of a psychological materialism as we assume that the practice itself will resolve personal issues and dilemmas for us. Often what happens then is that our first experiences on the cushion and/or on retreat feed into a spiritual materialism as our ego wishes us to understand that whatever has happened to us will lead to us resolving central elements of our own suffering. We all come to practice with what Barry Magid terms a ‘curative fantasy’ (Magid 2008). This is a personal myth that we use to explain what we think is wrong with us and our lives and what we imagine is going to make it all better. Somehow, we begin from the position of seeing meditative practice as being a way of curing ‘me’ of being ‘me’. Some people begin their spiritual path with a very clear explicit idea about what the problem is and where their destination is. For others the fantasies are hidden and unexpressed but nevertheless they will be energising the process of engaging in practice. It is in these fantasies that misconceptions become embedded about Buddhism and its experienced practitioners – ‘Buddhism is about loving everybody and not being angry’; ‘Zen masters are permanently grounded people’; ‘meditators are always calm and switched on’, etc. Our ideas of what constitutes a ‘cure’ for ourselves then becomes intertwined with our created myths about the benefits of being a Buddhist.

## SPIRITUAL BYPASSING

An important element of our curative myth is our explanation of the way in which we see ourselves either as damaged, lacking something, out-of-control or as unworthy, though it is quite likely that our view of our self will contain elements of all of these. We can get to a point where we think, ‘if I could get rid of the

bad parts of myself everything will be all right'. We may even think that 'if I could get rid of my 'self' completely then that is when I'm going to be okay'. What then can happen is that the bit we have identified as the 'cure' e.g. lots of meditation, comes into conflict with what we have identified as being the problem that we have with ourselves, as clearly meditation itself can never be the 'cure'. In this example meditation then becomes an activity which we use to beat ourselves up with, complaining that no matter how much we meditate we feel stuck and we are not making much progress etc.; but despite this we still hold onto our aspiration to be something better than what we are through the cure of meditation. It is here that we come to a notion developed by John Welwood over 30 years ago when he introduced the concept of 'spiritual bypassing'. He defined this as:

...a tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks." (Welwood 2011)

Welwood identifies an occupational hazard of the spiritual path that can face many people where a very positive experience early in practice is then used as the foundation of that practice in a premature way. In these circumstances, we then try

...to rise above the raw and messy side of our humanness before we have fully faced and made peace with it. And then we tend to use absolute truth to disparage or dismiss relative human needs, feelings, psychological problems, relational difficulties, and developmental deficits. (Welwood 2011)

This unfortunately sets up a split between our Buddha nature and our natural humanness and it identifies them as 'our/mine'. We emphasise one type of spirituality at the expense of the opposite, "Absolute truth is favoured over relative truth, the impersonal over the personal, emptiness over form, transcendence over embodiment, and detachment over feeling." Welwood's view is that it is in our interaction with others and in our relationships that our bypassed psychological issues tend to show up most intensely. This is because the origins of the psychological wounds we carry are in themselves relational as they are constructed in our early relationships and then on into our intimate interactions with others. As our practice develops, we then can allow our personal suffering and the problems of being human that we face to be put to one side as we focus on our practice skills:

Meditation is also frequently used to avoid uncomfortable feelings and unresolved life situations. For those in denial about their personal feelings or wounds, meditation practice can reinforce a tendency toward coldness, disengagement, or interpersonal distance. [These individuals] are at a loss when it comes to relating directly to their feelings or to expressing themselves personally in a transparent way. It can be quite threatening when those of us on a spiritual path have to face our woundedness, or emotional dependency, or primal need for love. (Welwood 2011).

From the perspective of psychological and spiritual materialism, we are framing and then directing our identity around our practice and failing to recognise who we truly are. Hence, what occurs is an ongoing lack of integration of ourselves, our practice and the way we live our life.

How does this bypassing display itself? Welwood again:

It's not uncommon to speak beautifully about the basic goodness or innate perfection of our true nature, but then have difficulty trusting it when one's psychological wounds are triggered. Often dharma students who have developed some kindness and compassion for others are hard on themselves for falling short of their spiritual ideals, and, as a result, their spiritual practice becomes dry and solemn...Others may unconsciously use their spiritual brilliance to feed their narcissistic inflation and devalue others or treat them in manipulative ways. (Welwood 2011)

## BEING HONEST WITH OURSELVES

In the WCFs Western Zen Retreat, a usual instruction about what is arising is 'let it through, let it be, let it go' and it is important to recognise that the 'let it be' involves allowing whatever arises to flow through our heart and not go straight out of our head. Emotional bypassing is identified when whatever arises is let go without experiencing the feelings and emotions that are connected to it.

So, for all practitioners we need to appreciate how we can avoid spiritual bypassing and how we can be alert to the efforts of our ego to move us away from our spiritual quest. We can begin this firstly by identifying the nature of our curative fantasies. We need to start by asking the questions, 'what do I consider what my problem is and what do I consider to be the cure to me overcoming these shortcomings and difficulties?' We need to have a good understanding of our own ideas about what practice is and what we think we are going to get out of it. We need to be honest with ourselves about what we think enlightenment is and how we imagine it transforms people. We also need to ask ourselves, 'is there any aspect of my practice that I use to hide something? What are the areas where I am fearful, anxious or afraid? What are the areas where I feel truly present?' It is in confronting such questions that we will truly engage in the practice of 'me'. At this point, it is worth remembering that spiritual practice proceeds in cycles; sometimes we appear to be working on the process of meditation itself – the art and totality of practice – and sometimes we may be working on personal issues that just arise. One takes over from the other naturally and indeed a spiralling process of working on ourselves and working on our practice develops. There are times when the practice of stillness and *Samadhi* are necessary and these may be followed by times when old uncomfortable psychological issues appear in new ways and then there are times when being active and living in the outside world is helpful. Each phase needs to be integrated into the other for in the process of realisation and actualisation there is no one phase that is more important than another - they all form an integrated whole. But certainly it is important to have personal commitment and courage as well as help and direction to face the totality of what arises.

In considering our practice we often quote the 'Hsin Hsin Ming: Affirming Faith in Mind' "The Great Way is not difficult for those who do not pick and choose". But as Barry Magid points out we often reduce the picking and choosing to something trivial as if it were avoiding the choice between coffee and tea by just accepting what we are given to drink:

But that's not the level of picking and choosing that we're really confronted with. It means that we're told that we have to take packages whole. We can't pick and choose the parts we like and the parts we don't like. (Magid 2010).



We have to deal with the package of ourselves as a whole thing. Practice will necessarily involve personal pains, doubts and uncomfortableness; that is what confrontation of the ego – our own ego – involves. Then life in itself will present us with problems and all sorts of complex issues can and will arise. Practice allows us to appreciate these things and in so doing move towards appreciating ourselves, appreciating others on our planet and appreciating the planet itself. If we are going to fully realise this we have to be realistic about what life is, who we are, and where our path is taking us. Obviously this involves taking risks in being open and honest to others and to ourselves; it involves dealing with our pleasures and our pains in an integrated way in which we engage ourselves in our lives and our practice with no gaining ideas. As John Welwood says “We are not just humans learning to become Buddhas, but also Buddhas waking up in human form, learning to become fully human.” What tasks! What practice!

## REFERENCES

- Kornfield, J. (1998) *Even the Best Meditators Have Old Wounds to Heal*. Buddhasasana. English Section.  
<http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebmed018.htm>
- Magid, B. (2008) *Ending the Pursuit of Happiness: A Zen Guide*. Wisdom. Boston
- Magid, B. (2010) *Teachings from the Past*. Ordinary Mind. Talks.  
<http://www.ordinarymind.com/html/untitled55.html#>>
- Trungpa, C. (1973) *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Shambhala. Boston.
- Welwood, J. (2011) *Human Nature, Buddha Nature: On spiritual bypassing, relationship, and the dharma*. An interview by Tina Fossella. John Welwood: Integrating Western Psychology and Eastern Spiritual Wisdom  
<http://www.johnwelwood.com/articlesandinterviews.htm>



## RETREAT REPORTS

*Retreat reports are an integral aspect of our journal and one much approved by our teachers. 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 after and they often provide pointers for our own understanding.*

### EXPERIENCE *Silent Illumination Retreat*

Similar to my last retreats I shifted pretty fast into the retreat modus, where thoughts are kept in the background and the focus stays for the most part in the present moment. Generally a very pleasant state.

During the interview Simon said that there is something I keep inside myself – something I do not really look at. We were then discussing that I have mentioned this in previous retreats, but despite my best efforts I could not really get a handle on it. Given my history, there were likely candidates (which I could intellectualize), but even so, they must have stayed somehow separated from the stored experience, not really connecting to the emotional experience. By telling Simon some key experiences and some more investigations by myself later, I was able to see how I believe(d) that I am truly alone in this world. If I do not help myself – no one can (and will). I reached this conclusion a long time ago, and many decisions in my life were impacted by that view. Also, Simon said that many decisions I made in my life were to avoid any situation where I would relive some of these experiences (i.e. losing a loved one, being sad etc.). Simon also said that the reason I felt alone was not because this is how the world necessarily is (or how people feel about me), but because I kept the people from coming close.

Later I had this vision where I could see myself in the train going to work and how I had this force field around me. This was very interesting to see. At the same time this and other insights connected to Simon's intuition brought a real lightness and joy. There was definitely some weight that was being lifted. I don't think it is entirely resolved yet, but at least I am more aware.

### REPHRASING AND ASKING *Silent Illumination Retreat*

I arrived to the retreat ill. Nothing really serious, just a sore throat and runny nose, but still I was a bit worried about waking up my roommates with a cough at night. Moreover before the retreat I had neglected my practice, and now expected the first days to be rather difficult. But surprisingly everything went fine: beautiful sunny weather cured me within two days and I got into the practice right from the beginning. Meditation was accompanied by singing birds and the countryside was very beautiful this late spring. The quality of my sleep was excellent. I was feeling as if I were on great vacation. This state lasted for a week or so. I was sure that I would return home very well-rested, like a newborn.

After that week we had a repentance ceremony, after which I didn't feel anything particular, but later on that day my mood worsened dramatically. I started to feel discomfort and anger, the source of which I knew perfectly. It had shown up also on previous retreats. I was angry with my father who had left me when I was a kid. Since then our contact had lessened dramatically and our meetings were rather difficult.



I was inspired with two motives from the talks: one about investigating the source of feelings within ourselves, and another about making vows. So, I was asking myself: "What is the source of this anger? Where is it?" I was feeling very upset and energetic and on that day I decided to sit at night until I solve the problem. Around midnight when asking about the source of anger I saw my own face, which meant to me that I am all anger, or all I am is anger and it is pointless to try to separate it from me. I felt sad and annoyed with meditation, so I went to bed, but couldn't fall asleep until morning.

As the result of a sleepless night the next day I was feeling tired and depressed. I think that it is a pretty common pattern that after excitation and anger comes depression and sadness, which in my case was strengthened with feeling of loneliness. I wouldn't like to be in my wife's shoes if I returned home in this condition. Fortunately it was an interview day, so I got a chance to tell the whole story to the teacher. I was even a bit surprised that he asked about the background of my feelings; before I thought that we would focus on the practice method only. It turned out to be a great relief – just to simply talk about my problem. On retreats people are all alone; they don't have friends or family around who could support them. This must have been the reason for my feeling of loneliness; after a talk I felt much better. If it were a one week retreat I would go back home in rather bad shape, like a patient who gets up in the middle of operation and goes home before surgeon finishes his job. Fortunately it was a ten days retreat and the recovery was about to come.

Being so tired I slept perfectly next night and woke up fresh on the next day. During the first round of sitting I had an experience, which I have never had before. The method I was applying was following the breath and body awareness; I usually was able to stay focused but never embraced the whole body with awareness. Either I was following breath or feeling some parts of the body, but never everything as a whole. This time I started to follow advice which I was given in the last interview; it was to investigate my anger in the body in details on the physical level. Suddenly I found myself in a state of extended awareness, I felt my body as a whole. And moreover external sensations like sounds of birds or creaking floor were not distracting this attention at all. I was able to 'follow' both sensations from the body and external ones without distinguishing and categorizing them. Usually when hearing a bird I was moving my attention from the body to the bird, I was recognizing a sound, thinking 'aha, a bird' and then going back to my breath/body practice. This time it was different. Everything was just coming to me as one stream of sensations. But in the same time I was very aware of my body and its boundaries, so I wouldn't describe this state as 'unification' with what is external to myself. I would say that I was feeling like a center point of the circle which sets range of my awareness. And a circle was reaching as far as my sense of hearing. The amazing thing about it was that the state was very effortless. I was able to think about it – "wow, what a feeling" - and not lose it, while thinking. It lasted until the end of the round.

My next interview was also a very important one. I was given a *koan* which was very accurate to my life situation, 'How do I drop anger?' Just after the interview – even before I started formal practice with that question – I realized that there is no possible way to deal with this huge anger at all. There is just too much

of it and there is no way I could go back in time and ease all these negative feelings accumulated over the years. So what I should do instead is focus on the present moment only and rephrase the koan to: "How do I drop anger in the present moment?" Immediately my following feeling was that I can't drop it, because there is no possible way I could be angry at all – in the present moment. This point between past and future is so tiny that nothing could fit in it, including anger. So, there is nothing to drop at all!

Although it seemed like an intellectual deduction (taken from one of the Dharma talks) in my case it was something more, a real feeling, not comprehension only. It was a relief and a comfort – there is no challenge of dropping, because there is nothing to drop at all and there is nothing to worry about.

But still – a strange thing – asking the question made sense. It didn't bring the answer, but it brought me to the still and peaceful place, where I was trying to get to before with the body awareness method. Surprisingly I got there when trying to do something else – investigate my anger in the body. At that time I wasn't thinking about returning home at all.

The last day of the retreat I was very excited with my experiences. My "center of the circle experience" seemed so effortless that I was sure that it would be easy to reproduce. However it didn't occur again. In fact my excitement rather distracted my attention and latter practice. Then returning home was OK as I was neither depressive, nor enthusiastic.

#### GREAT DOUBT *Koan Retreat*

Koan retreats with the Western Chan Fellowship have become a staple part of my dharma practice over the past few years since I have found a connection with this specific method. Coming to Wales for such retreats has become routine for me, and I had no expectations on booking it or on arrival.

One day into the retreat it became clear that my practice was very different to previous retreats. On previous retreats I have found feelings emerge, how they come and go due to memories of the past and thoughts of the future, all by just sitting on a cushion. I have previously walked into deep spaces of stillness and silence of the mind, and felt joy and peace from the liberation of numerous vexations.

Prior to coming on this retreat I had been feeling something building up inside my mind; an active enquiry into the nature of the mind. The long periods of stillness that I have felt in meditation have given me more focus in everyday life, but they have also raised this significant enquiry within me; a looking into thoughts as they come and go. All my life I have had the understanding that the mind is the root of all that we sense, all that we experience, and all that we do. It has been clear that it creates all our suffering and distress, all our joy, and happiness, but as yet I have never felt I have been able to know what this mind is.

On the first day of the retreat it was clear that there was nothing else on my mind other than this background enquiry that has been leading my current practice. There were no worries about personal problems, no interest in comparing or evaluating anything outside me. I had wasted so much time on

this in the past on retreats. Understanding thoughts and the mind felt like the only purpose of being on retreat, and every time I strayed from that place in my thoughts and intentions I didn't need to be pulled back to thinking of the koan from an aspect of "this is what I should be doing on a koan retreat", but from the aspect of the fact that this is the thing that I really need to know, and this time this was what I wanted the resolution to on coming on retreat (previously perhaps I had been very much focused on contemplating personal problems). If the mind is the way we experience the world, understanding it must be far more important than anything else. Thoughts set up physical feelings in my body, that would result in me acting them out in some way were I not on the meditation cushion, what are they? Where do they come from? How do they arise? Where do they go? How do they go? And this mind doing the looking, is it the same as the mind moving on distraction? These thoughts have been grabbing my attention from time to time in everyday life, and although I did not expect an answer from going on retreat, I felt that perhaps a partial resolution might present itself, a state of a little increased knowing perhaps. Except... as the mind stilled, it investigated, and still did not know, and thoughts, although less "loud" due to the quietness of the retreat and my mind, were even more elusive. I had to look further, the answer being all important.

On one occasion walking in the yard, I felt a horror rise in me, how can I not know what my mind is? There is so much I feel that I do know, but I don't, I base my actions and feelings on assumptions, my whole life hinges on things that I take for granted, but have never "known". I don't know, do I? I really haven't got a clue! Desperation due to feeling out of control was mitigated by sensing that in reality I was never in control previously. The discomfort of this situation I have felt before, but not for as long, and not as intensely, and this time I was also not scared of it. This was the reason I had come on retreat, and there it was, hitting home a little that I really did not know. I could immerse myself in work, distract myself in some way, but, what was the use. I had come because I wanted to know, it was important for me to know. I no longer wanted myself to be in ignorance, this is the fundamental thing in life. Interviews with Simon seemed to suggest that I was perhaps in "the great doubt". It had arrived of its own accord however, no setting it up with a specific koan, I felt like any of the koans would have taken me there. The Dharma talks were enlightening to say the least, describing emptiness intellectually I had heard many times before, but this time it meant more to me. The end result has been me coming out of the retreat more perplexed than before, more wanting to know than before, less able to ignore this not knowing than before. I feel that previously on retreat I have had glimpses of truth, mini "understandings" and resolutions to problems and uncertainties. I have felt great relief, tears of joy compassion and gratitude at Maenllwyd feelings of great space and clarity. But; I feel inside me that there is something that I do not know, something that is fundamental, something that is intangible but that removes this doubt. The answer as to the true nature of things, and the true nature of the mind, everything else is insignificant, as it is all encompassed by knowing what is at the root of everything. Within me there is an all consuming urge to get back on the cushion, to get back on retreat and to find it all out. Although my personal life is busy this energy propels me.



## HERE NOW

*Ken Jones*

*On this black robe  
the dust of incense  
silent thunder*

The darkness before dawn. Fumbling for the match box, the candle holder. Bare feet on a stone floor. Shivering in my thick Welsh flannel shirt. Fired up, the pot bellied stove roars up the flue pipe. In an hour the black kettle will sing. From its cupboard I drag the white wash bowl, splashing a jug of stream water on the emblazoned Prince of Wales' feathers.

Another candle and Guan Yin, the goddess of compassion, comes to life amid a waft of sandalwood incense. The dawn vows growl deep in the belly.

*Three strikes  
on the brass bowl  
echoing silence*

On the black cushion the body sits tall, the shoulders fall, the breathing slows. Only the murmur of the stream, the muttering of the stove. Time and place dissolve.

In harsh dawn light a new day. The snow has come. Porridge and black coffee, they never taste so good as this.

“ ‘What is Zen ?’ The Master replies: ‘Chopping wood and drawing water’ ”. So out to my wood stack and the clear spring nearby.

*In the snow  
fox and hare  
their mingled tracks*

Noon and the bliss of lentil soup into which I've chopped Carmarthen “sausages”.

And so it is, day following day, as the snow begins to thaw. Taking mind for walks in the forest, and stretching on the yoga mat to keep it at home in the body. Every night –

*My empty slippers  
each one  
freed to be itself*

The familiar surroundings in the cabin are vividly made new. Miraculously the protests and irritations of an eighty-three year old body go unnoticed. The fears of an old man nearing his end melt away into simply how it is.

*This dull damp day  
light reflected in a rain drop  
dangling from a briar*

February 2013



PHOTO: Doug Orton

## COOK'S MEDITATION

*Pam Butler*

### RICE

Every cook has their own method of cooking rice. This method was taught to me by a girl from Thailand in 1969 when I was a student and I have used it ever since. It works whether you are cooking rice for one person or 25 people.

Rice should be measured by volume, not weight. For every 3 people, fill an ordinary half-pint coffee mug with rice (approximately 100ml per person).

Put the rice into a heavy bottom saucepan and run it under the cold tap, swirling the rice around with your hand, allow the rice to settle a bit, then pour away the cloudy water. Repeat three or four times until the water is almost clear, then pour away as much of the water as possible. Now place the pan in the sink so the rice settles and gently turn on the tap until there is enough cold water in the pan to cover the rice *plus* as far as the first joint of your index finger (if you put your finger into the pan and gently rest it on top of the rice).

Put the pan onto a fierce heat and bring it to the boil. As soon as the water is really bubbling away, put a well fitting lid on top of the saucepan and turn the heat down as low as possible. Leave for about 20 minutes or so without disturbing the rice.

When the rice is cooked, all the water should have been absorbed. You can pick out a couple of grains to chew to see if they are soft and also gently poke a spoon down to the bottom of the pan to check that all the water has been absorbed.

### COURGETTES BAKED IN GARLIC SAUCE

This is adapted from a traditional Greek recipe. It's rich and tasty, and just needs a crisp Greek salad of tomatoes, lettuce and cucumber to make a family supper dish. For a more substantial meal, serve it with a bulgar wheat salad as well.

Serves 4 (as a main course)

1kg courgettes

4 cloves garlic

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon salt

6 tablespoons tahini

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

handful chopped parsley or coriander leaf



Preheat the oven to gas 6 / 400F / 200C

Wash the courgettes. Top and tail them and slice lengthways into two or three long strips (depending on their size). Heat the olive oil and fry the courgettes slices lightly. Lay the courgettes in an oven dish of a size to take them in two or three layers. (Sometimes I mix carrots with the courgettes, half and half. In that case, peel the carrots and cut them and the courgettes obliquely into thick slices.)

Crush the garlic with the salt and put in a mixing bowl. Add the tahini and vinegar. Mix and gradually add enough hot water to make the sauce the consistency of single cream. Pour the garlic sauce over the courgettes, sprinkle with the chopped parsley or coriander.

Bake for 15–20 minutes until the sauce is set.



PHOTO: Eddy Street



## WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP

### ABOUT US

Chan is the Chinese ancestor of Zen Buddhism. The Western Chan Fellowship is an association of lay Chan practitioners, a lay Sangha, based in the UK. We are registered as a charity in England and Wales, with contacts in Europe and the USA. Our Zen retreats and other activities are open equally to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

### VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Our website [www.westernchanfellowship.org](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org) includes:

- Introductory articles for newcomers to Chan, Zen, Buddhism and meditation.
- A digital library of Dharma Talks by Chan Masters and many other articles.
- Retreat reports of participants at our retreats which give a valuable insight into the retreat process.
- Details of our activities such as our retreat programme and other events.
- Back-issues of this journal New Chan Forum.
- Meditation group details and general contacts.

### CONTACT US

To contact any of the Officers of the WCF please go to:

[www.westernchanfellowship.org/contacts/committee-and-officers](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/contacts/committee-and-officers)

To contact any of our UK Groups and affiliates go to:

[www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups)

To contact our overseas Groups and overseas contacts go to:

[www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups/overseas-groups](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups/overseas-groups)

### CONTRIBUTING TO NEW CHAN FORUM

We are always happy to receive articles, artwork, photographs, poetry etc. For further information on submitting a contribution, please contact the editor, Eddy Street at [editor@westernchanfellowship.org](mailto:editor@westernchanfellowship.org)

### FORTHCOMING RETREATS

#### WESTERN ZEN RETREAT

*Saturday 27th July to Thursday 1st August 2013*

Leader: Fiona Nuttall, Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

#### SILENT ILLUMINATION RETREAT

*Saturday 27th July to Saturday 3rd August 2013*

Leader: Simon Child, Venue: Hourne Farm, E. Sussex

#### SHATTERING THE GREAT DOUBT

*Friday 13th September to Sunday 22nd September 2013*

Leader: Simon Child, Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

#### WESTERN ZEN RETREAT

*Saturday 2nd November to Thursday 7th November 2013*

Leader: Hilary Richards, Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

#### HOW TO MAKE AN ART OF YOUR LIFE

*Wednesday 6th November to Sunday 10th November 2013*

Leader: Ken Jones, Venue: Hourne Farm, E. Sussex

#### SILENT ILLUMINATION RETREAT

*Saturday 7th December to Saturday 14th December 2013*

Leader: Simon Child, Venue: Maenllwyd, Wales

### NEW CHAN FORUM

Published by the Western Chan Fellowship (Registered Charity Number 1068637) ISSN 2047-9514 PRINT ISSN 2047-9522 ONLINE

Correspondence address: New Chan Forum, 19 Velindre Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 2TE

# SHATTERING *the* GREAT DOUBT

A RETREAT WITH SIMON CHILD  
MAENLLWYD, WALES



SEPTEMBER 13<sup>TH</sup> – 22<sup>ND</sup> 2013

*The ancient Chinese Zen practices of investigating Huatou and Gongan (Koan) are best practised in a supportive environment such as this intensive 9-day silent retreat. As one becomes deeply absorbed in the practice, mental constructions drop away and one is confronted by a realisation that one does not know the nature of existence and one's fundamental assumptions of life are groundless. Staying with and cultivating this 'doubt', it can become all-consuming 'Great doubt' which may 'shatter', giving a direct insight into reality which may be what is known as an Enlightenment experience.*

*To progress in these methods requires a sustained focus and so this retreat is open only to those with previous experience of intensive retreat. Prior attendance at a Western Zen Retreat is recommended.*

WWW.WESTERNCHANFELLOWSHIP.ORG





My daily activities are not unusual.  
I'm just naturally in harmony with them.  
Grasping nothing, discarding nothing.

LAYMAN P'ANG YUN

禪