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Contributions for future issues (articles, poems, artwork) welcomed. Please send to editor@westernchanfellowship.org.
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PAT SIMMONS

Welcome to the spring/summer issue of *New Chan Forum*. This is an unusual issue, in that it has two articles by people no longer with us – John Crook and Hebe Welbourne. I think we are very fortunate that something at least of their insight remains for us. We can still learn from their hard-won wisdom; though they have died, they are ‘with us still’.

Eddy Street’s subtle and insightful article also considers the elasticity of time and memory, the presence, from his point of view as a Buddhist psychotherapist, of the past in the constantly changing present.

Meanwhile, Sian Thomas’s article and Anna Jedynak’s haiku keep us anchored in a very present present moment.

As editor, of course, I have to be constantly looking to the future, to the next issue. So I’d like to take this opportunity of urging readers to send me material for that issue – and the ones after it. Up till now I’ve had a nice comfortable back-up selection of articles and poems to draw on, but I’m coming to the end of it (though I still have a rich store of Anna’s haiku for next time). So, if you want further issues of *New Chan Forum* to plop onto your door mat, please send me something to put into them! I’m happy to edit or help with writing, and I’m more than happy to have short, pithy pieces relating to everyday Zen as well as more researched, footnoted, articles.

THE MEANING IN THE FLOWER

JOHN CROOK, NOVEMBER 2010 TEISHO

All of us probably know the story that founded Chan. Even so, let's retell it, briefly.

The Buddha was out walking with a bunch of monks. The monks were arguing about a number of questions such as Does the Universe have a beginning – yes or no? Does it have an end? Do Buddhas live for ever?

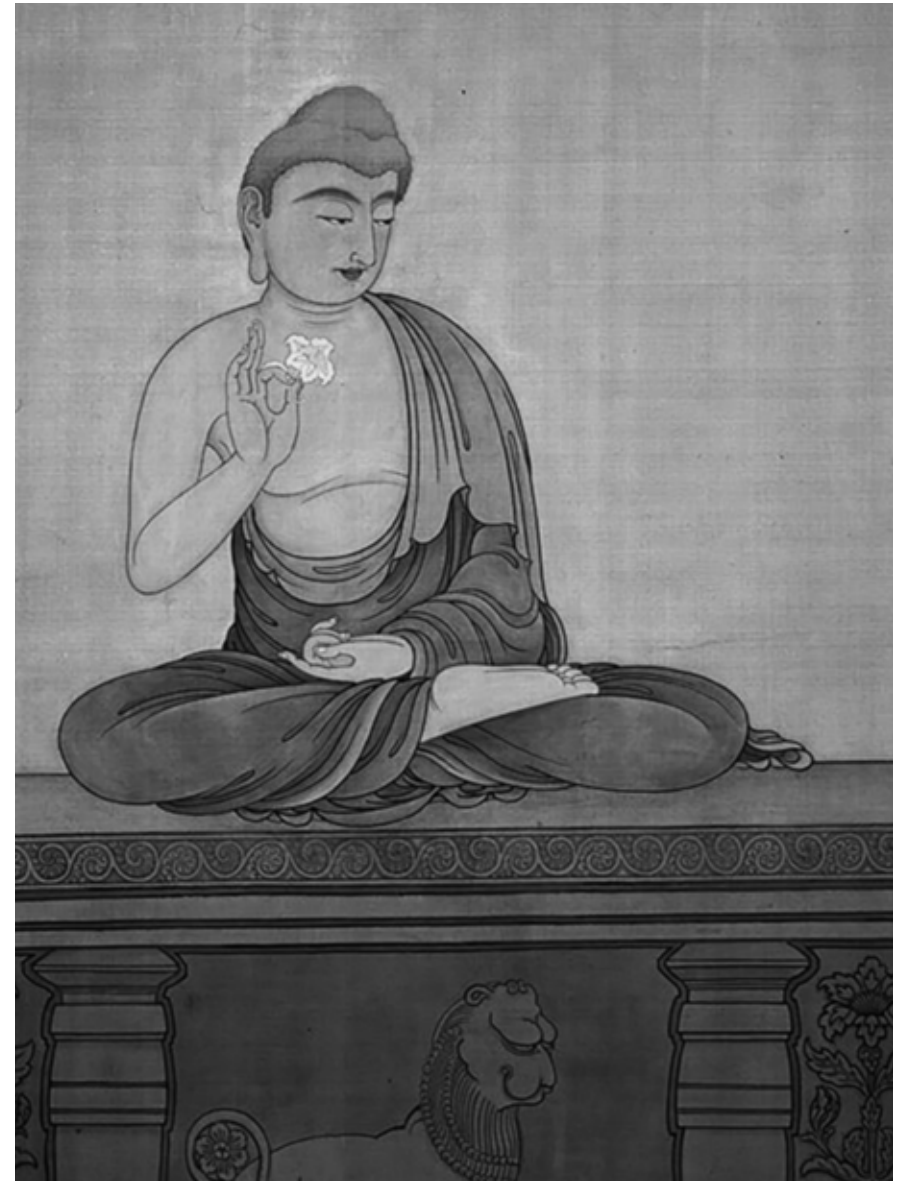
The Buddha took no part in the discussion. Noticing this, Ananda said to him, 'World Honoured One! Have you nothing to say about such important questions?'

The Buddha did not reply but instead bent down and, picking a flower, he held it up before the monks. They were bewildered – all except Mahakasayapa, who smiled.

The Buddha must have smiled too, for he gave Mahakasayapa the flower, saying something like, 'Here is the sign of your special transmission without dependence on words or letters and outside the scriptures'. And Zen was born.

What is going on here? Why did not the Buddha participate? What was it that Mahakasayapa understood? Well, we were not there and cannot question them, yet reading the subsequent teachings and the Mahayana philosophy on which they are based give us some clues.

There are two aspects to this. Mahakasayapa had a vivid experiential insight. It was a psychological event. Something happened. But Mahakasayapa also intuited the Buddha's meaning. His understanding



BUDDHA HOLDING UP A FLOWER, FROM A PAINTING BY HISHIDA SHUNSO, 1897

rested upon the Buddha's own talks that had introduced his insights to his first followers. These initial discoveries were the Law of Co-dependent Arising and the Four Noble Truths that followed from the Law. These indeed are the roots of Mahayana thought throughout Asia.

What's the story then? The Buddha saw that there could be no answer to these questions because there was simply no way of finding out what was the case in any of them. It was rather that some monks would have the opinion that 'Yes the Universe has a beginning' and others would say 'No it does not – it has always been'. Opinions without conclusive evidence go nowhere except into argument and quarrelling. Such muddles follow from this Yes-No dualism, which is a constant cause of trouble in the world. You can think up our own dilemmas: Is there a God? What kind of God? Whose God is right? Is there life after death? What happened before the Big Bang? And so on.

The Buddha knew that such questions arise from seeing the Universe, the World, God or Life and Death as 'things', with their own separate existence from one another. The apparent 'thingness' of nouns in language suggests this. For example, I exist and therefore must be a thing. If my body dies, do I continue? We can't know but often we invent solutions involving further abstractions – such as Soul or Heaven or the Absolute.

These abstractions are merely linguistic. We cannot actually find them, see them or examine them in any empirical sense. They are inferences from dualistic arguments. Since the Buddha understood this, he knew he could not say either Yes or No to any such questions. Is there a way through?

The Buddha saw every apparent thing in the Universe as co-dependent. Nothing had separate 'inherent' existence by itself. Nor was anything founded on nothing. There always was a context of conditions giving rise to some thing to which we give a name. This is Buddha's view of non-dualism – *advaita* in Sanskrit. Things certainly exist but not as independent 'things' with their own properties – rather they are representations within a process of interdependence.

Think of your 'self'. You depend on air, water, food. Without these and the organs that acquire them you could not exist. Likewise your idea of your 'self' comes from inferring that something must be the basis of you being here. This is what John, Simon, Jane, Peter, are. The idea emerges from our growth as beings from babyhood in a culture that names things and their actions. They are all expressions of a process. No thing in itself exists independently; yet it is there.

So he picks the flower. The flower represents soil, water, seed growth, colour that is attractive to bees, pollen and the fact that the Buddha happened to see it as response to the monks' confused dilemmas. So, hey, here it is. Here is something we call a flower. Here it is in its suchness (*tathata*), arisen from hosts of determining conditions, but not a thing in any way separate in itself as a 'thing' with private powers. It is empty (*sunya*) of all that.

Mahakasayapa must have heard the Buddha's discourses many times and he saw that the Buddha was presenting them in one momentary symbol. In experiencing that insight he had no need for words. He simply grasped the import of the Buddha's symbol. It answered the monk's questions at the level underlying them. The Buddha's flower

was expressing the nature of the universe as a process immediately present to the senses in each moment. Thus it is!

Such an experience can be ‘enlightening’, providing an instant clarity of how things are. It is the ‘being present in the presence of the present’; the flower as the universe – now. Yet time as we usually see it is likewise an illusion. The past no longer is, the future is only in the imagination and you cannot find now because it is always a goner. Yet, here we are – endlessly moving on together with everything else. How wonderful! And so he smiled. The Buddha, seeing his smile, told him yes – you’ve got it. Soon it will be your turn to convey this to others.

This story is the first of many koans and hua-tous. ‘What is the sound of one hand clapping?’ Without dependency no sound, no clap. ‘I am not it yet it is all of me.’ I am not the universe but I am totally in process with it. ‘What is this?’ This and only THIS is this now. ‘Where do these wonders exist?’ Where indeed? What ‘where’ are we talking about here?

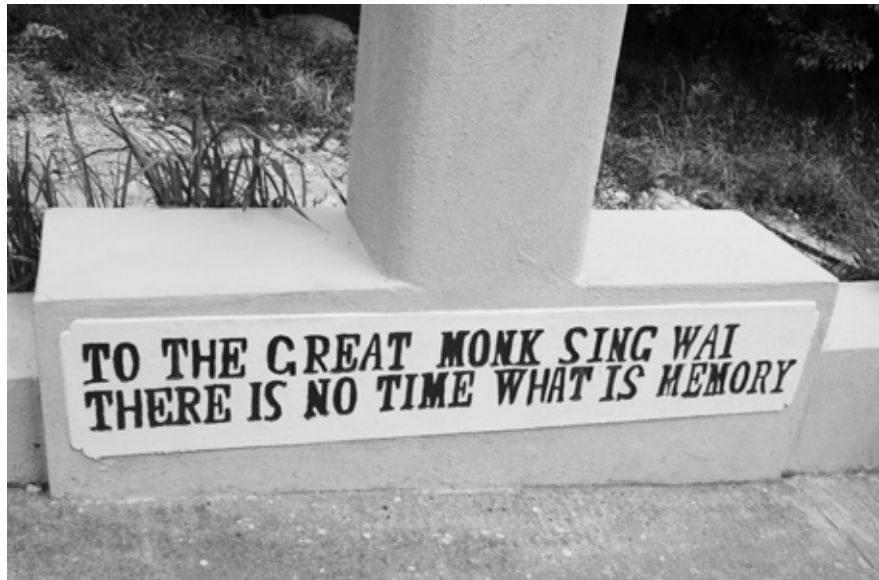
All the great Mahayana philosophers argued from these points. The insight is very simple yet the philosophers go into great subtlety not necessary for the beginning practitioner. The insight comes when the mind has been calmed and the attachment to this thing called me dissolves. In a flowing oneness of co-dependency the unity of all is apparent without words and for a long time the practitioner can do without them.

Yet if we stop here some may think: ‘That’s all very well but what’s the significance of this wordy account?’ The important message to practitioners is that Mahakasayapa saw the meaning in the flower instantaneously. He was not thinking about it. What was this insight?

Such moments occur when the mind drops both ego and the attachments of the ego: the hassling mind worrying about ‘things’, possessions, credentials, life and death, and becomes aware of the oneness of all momentary experience in the flowing presence of the Universe as a whole. There it is – a total intuited presence, a feeling of oneness and wonder. In our Western Chan, we call this clarity or tranquillity, Self at Ease. It is a moment when, as Honzhi puts it, ‘Silently and serenely one forgets all words. Clearly and vividly it appears before you. When one realises it, time has no limits. When experiencing it, your surroundings come to life.’

Here the ‘it’ remains mysterious, a word that stands in for an essentially wordless wonder. This is all the practitioner need know and the words of the philosophers merely thresh out the meanings within it. Yet that is not all. When one turns again to look at the world, one sees the huge amount of distress and suffering all self-related dualistic thought produces. The wonder turns to empathy for those who suffer, to compassion. And one begins to move towards helping others as best one can. As Master Sheng Yen puts it, the ego transforms into wisdom.

If you want to tell others about it all, then you need the skill of appropriate language. The Koans are the stories that undo the stories of our illusions. Where does this undoing happen?



PHOTOS: Rebecca Li

ON THE PATH OVER LANTAU ISLAND (HONG KONG)

THERE IS NO TIME. WHAT IS MEMORY?

EDDY STREET

This is a questioning koan that John Crook referred to many times in his talks. His story about his encounter with this was that when he was in Hong Kong doing his national service in 1954, he was taken to Po Lam Chan Monastery on Lantau Island and over an arch leading to the monastery there were inscribed some Chinese characters. Under the arch these were translated as “There is no time. What is memory?” (*see image opposite*). John told the story as part of his narrative about how he was introduced to Chan Buddhism and it clearly had an impact on him in those early years of his practice. I have not been able to find a reference to it in the Chan literature and it certainly is not included in any of the standard collections of koans. However, John used it in his koan retreats when he included it on the list that participants could choose to work with.¹ More frequently in talks and informally he would tell the story of when he was confronted with this saying and he would leave it hanging in the air with a sort of “here’s a koan for you to be going on with” attitude. As far as I am aware John never gave any formal teaching or commentary on the koan and it is not discussed in his writings. It is however evident in talking to people who were taught by him that it was a phrase that did indeed stick in the memory. So perhaps now is a time to see if we can unpick it.

Time

Let us begin with ‘time’. From the outset we have a problem in that it is very easy to assume that there is a separation between ourselves and time.

Indeed, one of the things we do is give time a distinct identity and we even put a capital letter on it, 'Time', which solidifies it as an object. An object that has some dynamic quality that has an impact on us, a being, as keeping us subject to its whims and movement. But we are not separate from time for, as Dogen has pointed out, being is a function of time and time is a function of being. They are indeed a unity, hence his conception of "being-time" or "the time being", which is of course the title of one of his best-known fascicles.²

Dogen's view is that our experience of time has the quality of a sequential passage, but time itself does not move in this way and this is because time and being are not separate, they are unified and identified with each other. Each moment of time as we experience it, being, reflects the past as well as the future. The passage of life is a process constantly changing in an unfixed, non-permanent way and every moment of that process contains a past and a future, a 'being time'. This becomes the full totality of living life where time and being are interpenetrating at that particular moment. Dogen's explanation of this in the Genjokoan concerns firewood and ash.

Firewood becomes ash. Ash cannot become firewood again. However, we should not view ash as after and firewood as before. We should know that firewood dwells in the dharma position of firewood and has its own before and after. Although before and after it exists, past and future are cut off. Ash stays in the position of ash with its own before and after.³

As it is difficult for our mind to appreciate and live within the nature of impermanence, it attempts to create a story with a beginning and middle and then we impose a fantasied future on it.⁴ It is this forcing

of a narrative onto each and every moment that is the nature of suffering. Each moment does not hold onto the past nor does it project our expectations of the future. There is no beginning of this moment nor is there any end, everything is continually being present.

According to Dogen, firewood, and ash are things that have existence and have their own time (being time) and each being has its own before and after. Firewood has its own before as a living tree and its own potential future as ash. The ash had a before as part of a fire and a potential as dust in the wind. The firewood and ash can only be experienced in the present moment and it is impossible to actually put a finger on the present moment.

The present moment is the only reality we experience because the past is already gone and the future has not yet come. Yet there is nothing, no actual unit of time, that we can say constitutes the present moment; the present moment does not exist and therefore *time itself* does not really exist. Still from this present moment which is empty and does not exist, the entire past and the entire future are reflected. This present moment, which has no length, is the only true reality of life as we experience it. And since everything is always changing, at each present moment everything arises and perishes over and over again; each moment everything is new and fresh.⁵

Returning to our query about 'There is no Time', we find that the present moment is the only true reality because the past has gone and the future is yet to arrive and here we find the link to memory because we only encounter the past in the present moment as memories. Therefore, the experience of the past and indeed the future is simply the way



DOGEN WATCHING THE MOON, CIRCA 1250

the mind is working at this present moment. The actual past does not exist any longer and the actual future as yet to come up.

Memory

When we consider ‘time’ as such, there seems to be something abstract about it but when it comes to memories it very quickly becomes personal because we immediately think of “my” memories. Memories are images, thoughts, feelings, snippets of stories, the recounting of events, etc., that pop into our mind at various times. Our memories are typically a montage of fragments that are isolated from their original context of the past.

Let us take the example of my memories about my daughter’s wedding several years ago. I remember that it was raining and I remember elements of the ceremony but I can’t remember what we had to eat at the reception and I certainly do not remember what I had for breakfast that day or breakfast the next day. Then when I consider this particular memory, I’m not sure how many bits I remember myself or whether it is me ‘remembering’ because I have looked at the photographs of us on that day under umbrellas. Then there is me forgetting some bits but my wife, unlike me, remembering exactly what was on the menu at the reception. When two people are at the same event there are more chances of them remembering and forgetting different aspects than being able to agree what occurred. Certainly, there is some selectivity in remembering and forgetting and memories themselves are impermanent, they can be lost, forgotten, altered, misremembered and then regained. Different memories come to us provoked by different stimuli and situations. My memory of my daughter’s wedding may evoke mem-

ories that you, the reader, have of weddings that you have attended. Similarly, someone may tell us about their childhood holidays and we remember the times we spent on holiday as children and again photographs may provoke such thoughts and remembrances. Indeed, anything in this present moment may suddenly remind us of something from our past.

Memories, however, are not straight forward pleasant stories or images as they can also be negative. These can be things that we don't want to be reminded of; things that have happened to us; things that we are ashamed of or regret; things that we suffered and times we made others suffer. We can all easily make a list of such memories of our own. Bad memories can even be triggered by positive memories as the process of remembering is not necessarily within our conscious control. For example, something might bring up a memory of a good occasion, such as a celebratory party and as the images flash into our mind we remember a certain person was there to whom we were dismissive, putting them down in front of others. So, from remembering a pleasant occasion the problematic path of memory can quickly lead us to the thought "I am a person who can be unkind and dismissive of others".

Memories therefore are composed of many bits and pieces. They are held together by the ways in which we have held onto the events and stories of our life. But this is not just of our own making as our narratives, our life stories, are often constructed by those around us particularly when we were children. The thought "I am an unkind person" can very easily be linked to and possibly be provoked by the messages in the memories of a parent saying to the child, "you are very unkind and you are particularly unkind to me". We also hold memories

of things that we have been told about our parents' childhood, about our parents' parents and about the way in which our family history has evolved.

So memories contain the stories that link us and contribute to the social sense of who we are and where we come from. However, it is not just our families that impact this social content, as memories and their messages are significantly influenced by the culture that we live in. There are, for example cultural expectations about how mothers and fathers are supposed to behave, with ideas of what is a 'good' and 'bad' mother and a 'good' and 'bad' father. There are cultural and familial ideas about how a 'good' son or a 'good' daughter behaves and at a basic gender level are memories involving 'boys are like this' and 'girls are like that'. These memories are typically evoked in an active behavioural way and they certainly also frame the rules of how we are to behave in certain situations. In many aspects of our social and gendered roles we can easily identify memories that carry the active messages about those roles. On the one side this can be seen positively as creating a sense of our place in the world but there is also a negative aspect for, whether it is in the creation of the 'we' or the 'I', there are always elements which are not helpful and which have a distinct negative, suffering, impact on us.

A key part of this process of our 'memory' is that we come to believe that there is a single thing called memory, some container with a capital 'M', that is a repository of what has happened to us and been told to us in the past. We can come to believe that it is something that has substance and it exists in a way beyond our own agency. We can view our Memory container as something we can dip into every now

and again or more likely that somehow our mind of its own accord just spills out from the container positive and negative bits and pieces. These bits and pieces will have a coherence for us, as we relate to them and the stories that develop in our mind, they create a unity about what has happened to ‘me’ and what has made ‘me’. We can tend to conceive of Memory as a single process that is somehow not quite in our control but is a part of us and a very important element that adds to the process of defining ‘me’.

This brings us to the other problem about considering ‘Memory’ as a thing for we come to believe that it is ‘True’. We come to believe that the things that are held in our container are more or less the things that actually happened at the time they happened. This certainly is not the case as the ‘truth’ of any event can only be perceived at the moment of its occurrence and this does not even consider the validity of our perception or our interpretation of it at that moment.

Memory is therefore a process of construction and reconstruction as we rerun stories and images of ourselves, thereby creating a sense of coherence. Memory is a process of self-communication, a self-writing and rewriting process. It is something that our mind engages with by communicating with itself; it is not something that emerges from elsewhere. Outside information can influence memory but the influence, (re)writing or (re)constructing, comes from within and memory, therefore, provides a potentially changing account of the past. It is not a neutral psychological process but one mediated by the image and concept that we have of ‘me as myself’. It is from this conceptualisation that we access the information we hold about our past and hence it is not possible to access the ‘past’ in any unmediated form. However, as

memory refers to past events and experiences, memory is neither pure experience nor pure event. It is a complex set of processes and at its core it involves the process of the construction of ‘me’ in the present, utilising a conception of me in the past and through this means our memory contributes to our way of being or experiencing who we are.

Each memory is inseparable from the moment that it is evoked, each memory is a part of the present. When we look at memories there is no container to dip into and pull out different deposits to reveal a ‘true’, perhaps acceptable, self at its bottom. Working with memories requires a constant re-looking at what arises in our mind and interrogating ourselves in what is an ongoing process of the changing ‘self’. In this way memory is always a representation viewed from the present. The only vantage point when considering the past is the present. There is no past insisting on its rightful place in the present. Memory is used to construct the self of the present, but memory itself is not the present; it is our experience of the moment that is the present.

In working with memories about the self, the feminist photographer Jo Spence spent time surveying her family photographs of herself as both a child and an adult and she describes the process of thoroughly questioned (the)? meanings and messages that her memories evoked. Then in a way similar to those with experience of mediation she found that “this reworking is initially painfully, confusing, extreme. As I become more aware of how I have been constructed ideologically, as the method becomes clearer, there is no peeling away of layers, to reveal a “real” self, just a constant reworking process. I realise I am a process.”⁶

Hence memory is a part of the process of the construction of self and our conception of memory fits in only with the dualistic notion of

time as a linear process. Our mind tries to tell us that we have a past that directs us and this results in ‘me’ being who I am at this moment and possibly who I dream to be in the future. But, as we have seen, time is not linear, there is only this moment and we are able to be in this moment and then this moment, and then this moment. In the experience of just this moment there is no past or future and as Ken Jones puts it in his haibun on our koan: “Our storyteller is gone, and the past with him. Our dreamer has disappeared, and the future with her.”⁷ So if there is just this moment and just this ‘self’ now, perhaps, we can look at “There is no time. What is memory?” and change it to “There is only this moment. What is self?” (and beware of capital ‘S’). Or, indeed, to place it in a context we might all be familiar with “Now! Tell me who you are?”

NOTES

1. Sue Blackmore provides a retreat report of working with this koan <https://www.westernchanfellowship.org/dharma/dharma-library/dharma-article/2009/ten-zen-questions/>
This is an extract from the book Blackmore, S., (2009) *Ten Zen Questions* Oneworld, Oxford.
2. Dogen, ‘The Time Being’ in Kazuaki Tanahashi (ed) (2012) *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye. Zen Master Dogen’s Shobo Genzo*. Shambala. Boston.
3. Dogen, ‘Genjojoan’ p2 in Shohaku Okumura, (2010) *Realizing Genjokoan. The Key to Dogen’s Shobogenzo*. Wisdom, Boston, MA.
4. Ruth Ozeki, a Zen Priest and writer has written a very interesting novel on these

themes in which its narrative poses questions about our experience of time. Ozeki, R., (2013) *A Tale for the Time Being*. Cannongate. Edinburgh.

5. *Op cit* Shohaku Okumura, (2010) p120
6. Spence, J., (1988). *Putting Myself in the Picture. A political, personal and photographic autobiography*. Camden Press. London. p97
7. Ken Jones wrote a haibun inspired by this koan, ‘There is no time. What is memory?’ which can be found at https://www.kenjoneszen.com/publications/out_of_print_publications/arrow_of_stones

TWELVE HAIKU

ANNA JEDYNAK

Silence...

What is there?

What IS there?

Chestnut bud in a vase

Feels pain in her green petals forcibly opened

By a greedy glance

Achoo!!!

The whole universe

Broke into pieces

This mouthful of tea

Never drunk before

Nor ever again

An old monk

Slowly walking step by step

Through a violent storm

Frost

Winter may come any day now

Where has the last one gone?



The stream
 Flowing all the time
 Never tired

Spring sun awakens life
 Turning shiny snow
 Into mud

Sitting down on the cushion
 Getting up from the cushion –
 The same person or another?

A yellow leaf
 Dancing in the autumn wind
 Above the trees

A squirrel sitting still in the tree
 Hop! A released branch is wobbling
 Nothing else

A big old mushroom
 Offers itself for worms
 With no objection

Autumn walk
 Leaves rustling under foot
 Resounds in the universe

The flower
 Turns to the sun with its whole body
 No concern, no hesitation

A scared hare hidden in the bushes
 His heart is beating so loudly that for sure
 Every sentient being can hear it

Infinite vast space
 Hills, woods, fields, clouds – yet everything fits
 In the blink of an eye

A little girl
 Hiding her face in the pillow
 Safe at last

Baaang!
 Then silence. Nothing will happen anymore.
 Ever.

Scorched earth.
 Rubble, dust. From under the rubble
 A spider slowly emerges.

CHRIST AT THE MAENLLWYD

HEBE WELBOURNE

Hebe Welbourne, who died a few months ago at the age of 100, was one of the first people to attend John Crook's retreats at the Maenllwyd and continued to sit with the Bristol Chan group until just before the Covid lockdown. Even then she went on meditating alone with the group in her room every Thursday evening until her death, and we always lit an extra candle to symbolise her 'presence' with us. She often described herself as 'an Anglican-Quaker-Buddhist' and we are reprinting this article, which she wrote for issue 5 of New Chan Forum, published in September 1992, as a memorial to a dearly loved seeker after wisdom and compassion.

A few years back, I was very busy and very tired. I was, in my odd moments dipping into an exciting book, *God in Creation*, by the German Theologian Jürgen Moltmann. I was working as a community child health doctor and nursing my husband who was completely disabled with Parkinson's/Alzheimer's diseases. I was crying out to God but there wasn't anyone out there, only my own projections. Then one day, as I was straightening my back after easing Fred into the bath, the world suddenly settled down. There wasn't anyone out there. There was me, the Environment, the Universe, Infinity, all interacting, dancing, resounding. All contained in God making himself. I don't have to worry about God any more, I just interact with whatever is there at each moment in me.

I'm still a Christian. It's what I have been born into and I have no desire to change. I find my law, wisdom, symbols, tradition etc. within a Christian world view. My active spiritual inspiration is based on meditating

the Bible in all its richness of myth, poetry and wonderful ambiguity. Not just memorizing like an instruction manual, but engaging, questioning, translating, visualizing, studying, ruminating. The image of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God incarnate in Creation. It is then infinitely restful to let go of all the images and, with Eckhart and other great Christian mystics, rest in the nothing – or in the unity of God, however you express it. You come back to needing the images. Like babies, we make “transitional objects” – a teddy bear or a comfort cloth – to represent the loved one for whom we yearn. Then we become disillusioned, and the search goes on, Christians and Buddhists together search for what is beyond all tradition. We make images of God/Buddha, Christ, the Church. We disagree about images, kill ourselves trying to get them “right” and finally become disillusioned. Yet the visible world of images is where we are. It is the body of Christ. As inseparable as my body is from my spirit. When I sit in silence, following my breath and repeating the name of Jesus (the Jesus prayer of Eastern Orthodox tradition) the spirit moves behind the stillness. I return to a transformed visible world with renewed power for compassion and creativity. Compassion and creativity are given and received by means of images, but the spirit moves behind them.

Another aspect of my experience in the bathroom was a realization of the solidarity with the environment. The environment where I am a unique species: if I am prevented from fulfilling my function, the whole environment suffers. On the other hand, my function is not individual, it is for the sake of the whole. Like a vine being pruned for the sake of the whole harvest - a meaning for the Christian image of sacrifice. The whole harvest is ultimately the fruition of the environment: God. The perfect community is utterly inclusive, non-competitive, shares everything, includ-

ing praise and blame. We have images of such a community but its actuality is impossible: it is God. Solidarity with the environment/community involves yearning for peace and justice – “hungering for righteousness” as the Bible says. Compassion for the poor might lead me into political action or involvement in violent revolution. The images are divisive, but the reality is God, the perfect community which is found by involvement in the images. Profound contemplation leads into activity which can be profoundly subversive.

Then there is the experience of time. When my husband was left with a healthy body which was paralysed in muscles and mind, I found I was forgetting what sort of person he really was. I asked all his friends and family to send me reminiscences. Who was he, then? The baby his mother had nursed? The bright schoolboy? The young man before he met me? The lover? The honorary member of a Ugandan tribe? Father to our children? Teacher of hundreds of students? You don't necessarily get better as you get older; one stage must die before another is born. The fruition of the whole person is somehow outside of time. The quality of a life is not necessarily dependent on how long it lasts and, as people involved in hospice work know, the last few days may be full of promise. It is the same with our terminally sick planet where so many good people and things seem to be coming to an end: its fulfilment lies outside time, in the heart of God. We lose our anxiety as we receive as a gift each moment of time as it comes. As the kindly Jesuit pastor, Jean-Pierre de Caussade puts it, “God... the author and object of our faith... is like the right side of a tapestry being worked stitch by stitch on the wrong side”.

In summer, 1991 I became “resident hermit” in a house of prayer. The house, situated next door to Westbury-on-Trym Parish Church, was be-

queathed by its previous owner to be used as an ecumenical house of prayer. The idea of living in a house of prayer had been with me since the time as a child, when I was taken to see the shrine of Julian of Norwich. My only obligation in this house is to be here, and to pray. I'm also responsible for making the peaceful atmosphere of the house available to groups or individuals who come to spend time there. It is available to all: Christians, all who seek the One True God, people of all ages. People come to meditate, pray, paint or participate in various “workshops”. They also come to help me with the work of the house. There have been magic moments with children, still and silent for the life span of a birthday cake candle. The house with its various rooms and garden is full of symbolism and very quiet. I feel a bit like the one who was chosen to be in the centre of a round game. To be contemplative is not just to be private: it is to be a centre around which things happen.

In the coldest week of January 1992, I was at a Western Zen Retreat at Maenllwyd. I don't think I've ever previously not taken my clothes off for a week. It was like being in a chrysalis. Mountains, sheep, buzzards and grouse, intense brightness alternating with mist, especially mist, are nature to me. I found my body accommodated itself unexpectedly well to everything and was at ease. At first I felt uncomfortable with the Buddhas. My Christian tradition forbids me from worshipping images. And, although John's images were all quite peaceful, they reminded me of others I had seen elsewhere which were really scary. I had some nightmares, which I needed to share with John. By the next day, I was prepared to be polite to the images out of respect to the tradition and to look for Christ in the Buddha. By “Looking for Christ”, I don't mean looking for a particular conceptual image because you don't know who/what you are look-

ing for. “Looking” implies the same “chicken and egg” koan, from whichever tradition you start. The Bible, particularly the Gospels, is rich in paradox and shadow imagery. This is not appreciated by ordinary Christians who retain a dualistic world view. It is refreshing to be with Buddhists who appreciate the potential depths of the Christian tradition. Helpful, also, to be involved with a discipline of meditation which is not often available within the Christian Church, certainly not in Bristol.

There was an encounter with Christ at Maenllwyd. Out there, by myself, singing in the mountains. And encountering others: sometimes just sitting and looking at each other peacefully, other times sharing a kind of death and resurrection experience. Hearing others murmur “Christ in me” or “Christ have mercy” or (to quote from an Alice Meynell poem) “He rose alone behind the stone”. I returned to my house with much that is still working within me, looking forward to returning for another retreat next year.



WILD SWIMMING

SIAN THOMAS

This morning I went for a swim in a local lake. It is early December, the weather has just turned colder, and the water at 8 degrees is so cold it stings my skin. As I approach the water and feel the first touch of the cold on my feet and ankles, I find myself remembering holidays in the Mediterranean years before, getting into much warmer pools while the sun beat down on the back of my head. It wasn't with a sense of longing that I remembered these times, but with a recollection of how difficult it had been to get into the relatively warm water then; I remembered squealing and fussing, resisting the urges and shouts of encouragement from my family, feeling how my body tried to escape the sensations of the cooler water, which might have been welcome while the air was so hot. Yet I resisted and avoided the splashes from my children as I inched into the water slowly, feeling as if each millimeter of skin was trying to crawl away upwards, away from the shock of the cooler water. As if my very bones wanted to escape the cold as it crept up my back and around my midriff, while my shoulders hunched and tensed.

This morning though, as I stepped into the chilly lake there was no fussing. No squealing. No avoiding and tensing, and yet the water and surrounding air were much, much colder. So what is different?

I have been wild swimming most of this year, throughout the hot, hot summer days when the cool water felt like a balm, and on into the autumn, when the water and air turned chillier. Each swim has been joyful, each time has been an adventure. In the summer I swam in the Dales below

waterfalls that sparkled in the summer sunlight, where I could lie on the warm golden rocks to dry out. In autumn I swam in hidden, magical lakes with water cool and clear to the bottom, while the mist hung fractionally above the surface and I came out shivering with a cold in my bones that lasted until I hiked back up the hill, hot and sweating again. The water has got colder week by week until now, at 8 degrees the water feels sharp on my skin. My fingers ache with cold. It seems to bite at my legs, at the bare skin on my arms, and dig into my sides through the material of my swimsuit. Today's lake was long, narrow and murky, full of water lilies that I swam around like I was in a Monet painting, while my toes slowly lost feeling and the skin on my face glowed and tingled with the cold air. But getting into this lake wasn't nearly as difficult as those earlier, warmer times years before, and I allowed the silky cold of the water to slide up my body as I sank into it. I was intrigued how it would be this time and revelled in the tingling, spiking sensations on the skin, fascinated by all that I could see, hear, smell and feel. Senses alive. No resistance. No fear of the sensations. Just a sense of curiosity. A wonder in the strangeness. A sense of questioning in the mind – how does it feel today?

Resisting things as they are is our normal tendency, and it seems to make sense as we do it – after all who would like to feel physical or emotional pain? – but when we resist things they cause more suffering. Sinking into the cold water and being curious about how it feels, but without labeling it as pain, gives the experience a different sense. It still bites, the skin still hurts and then goes numb. But the sensation isn't pain unless I call it pain. And calling it pain causes my body to respond by tensing and resisting, instead of sinking and softening into the sensations. Naming it as pain makes my shoulders tense and my breathing change as I resist and



try to avoid it. Being curious about it instead lets me experience it as it is. Without fear of the sensations, just knowing them exactly as they are, without the labels and narration in the mind.

The Buddha talks about the two arrows that a person feels when they experience pain. The first arrow of pain is real and cannot be avoided – my skin stings when I enter the cold water. But the second arrow is one in the mind – my resistance, the stories I add, the labels I put on it by calling it pain, the resistance caused by fear of the sensations of cold and fear of my body's reaction to that cold.

So wild swimming is a lot like practice, or perhaps practice is a lot like wild swimming. I need to bring the same sense of curiosity to my experiences in meditation and everyday practice as I do to my experiences of wild swimming. Today when I was putting things away before coming to write I felt my stomach tighten and my body lean forward in a sense of hurry. Pausing, I could notice this and open to a sense of curiosity about my experience at that moment. I slowed down and allowed the tingle of energy in my arms to speak, to tell me that I wanted to hurry up, to get this boring part over but that I also wanted to have a tidy room because I thought it showed something about the sort of person I am – I noticed how that thought came with a tightening in my jaw along with messages from the past and an attempt to impress someone. Opening in this way allowed the experience to change and my senses to slow down and open. The experience of that moment came into sharp focus – the texture of the corduroy in the skirt as I hung it on the hanger, the colours of the material overlapping in dark and light, the sensations of my feet on the carpet and my hands moving slowly to open the clips on the hanger. A perfect moment.

Some experiences feel so much more difficult to be with however, especially when I don't even realize what it is that I am resisting. This week I felt an emotional resistance to the discomfort caused by my daughter's distress. This is another sort of pain. This sort of pain comes with stories of who I am in relation to her – a good/bad mum, a supportive/selfish, kind/thoughtless person, a good/bad zen student – and this is a whole extra layer that is not always easy to see. There are thoughts in the mind and reactions in the body: tightening sensations and feelings that I can label as emotional pain. But the question still remains: can I soften and sink into the sensations – physical, emotional and in the mind – without resisting them?

When my daughter suffers I feel a thump in my chest, a tensing in my belly, an upwelling of tears and an urge to make it better as I add onto this the layers of what this means, thoughts of how I should be able to make it better, stories of how I need to behave to be a good mum, fears around what this current distress means about her future, and fears about my future experience of her future distress. I can try to resist this, try to hide or escape from it, try to squash or ignore the feelings or thoughts, wish that it was otherwise, but doing this makes the stories and fears in my mind proliferate and grow until my gut churns. It makes my shoulders ache as I tense upwards, trying to escape the sensations and fears that have become tangled into a ball of pain and distress. Alternatively, I can sink into all these thoughts and sensations with curiosity. Not to wallow in it or solve it. Not to make it go away, just to know it exactly as it is. I can let myself feel the pulse in my heart and ache in the throat in response to her pain, know the urge to make it better, see the thoughts arise. Not resisting it. Sinking, softening into it all with that same sense of questioning - how are things today? Things are as they are.

APPENDIX: EXCERPT FROM SALLATHA SUTTA

When an ordinary person experiences a painful bodily feeling they worry, agonize, and feel distraught... As they are touched by that painful feeling, they are resistant. Any resistance-obsession with regard to that painful feeling obsesses them... Then they feel two types of pain, one physical and one mental. It's as if this person were pierced by an arrow, and then immediately afterward by a second arrow, and they experience the pain of two arrows.

When a wise person experiences a painful bodily feeling, they don't worry, agonize, and feel distraught, and they feel physical pain but not mental pain. It's as if this person were pierced by an arrow, but a second arrow didn't follow it, so they only experience the pain of a single arrow... As this person is touched by that painful feeling, they are not resistant. No resistance-obsession with regard to that painful feeling obsesses them.

The full sutta is a surprising short one and can be found at:

<https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn36/sn36.006.than.html>

Sallatha Sutta: The Arrow, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

BOOK REVIEW: ALLOW JOY INTO OUR HEARTS:
CHAN PRACTICE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES BY REBECCA LI

HILARY RICHARDS



When faced with uncertainty that seems unbearable do you panic? Do you worry? Do you put things off? These are some of the all too human responses Rebecca Li discusses in her book *Allow Joy into Our Hearts: Chan Practice in Uncertain Times*.

This delightful book is a series of essays written from recordings of talks Rebecca gave to her Zoom Chan Group in New Jersey at the start of the Covid 19 Pandemic. Whilst the book focuses on problems arising for people during the pandemic, these are universal problems faced by everyone who has an unexpected and difficult change of circumstance. Rebecca encourages us all to allow joy into our hearts – it can be there for everyone, rich or poor, healthy or unwell, young or old. Whoever or whatever you are, joy is discoverable.

The chapter headings give an idea of the content. Allow Joy... Opening... Unconditional Kindness... Practicing... Using Chan... Learning... Letting Go... Restoring Meaning... Living Fully. Each section is full of wise words written in an easy, chatty style as if Rebecca is talking to you. The pandemic defines the period in which this book was written but the word “pandemic” could easily be swapped for climate change, war, conflict, illness, heart break or any of the challenges of uncertainty and change facing us in the 21st century. Rebecca shows us how we can

look at and be with our painful and difficult feelings – our suffering. In being with and accepting these feelings without denying them we can learn to open our hearts to other people, to empathise and to find resilience. We can cultivate clear awareness and compassion despite, or perhaps because of, changing and uncertain events.

The Buddha showed us how to be fully human by embracing everything clearly and with kindness. This is Rebecca’s meaning of Chan Practice.

Rebecca is a Dharma heir of Simon Child. Her other two teachers were Chan Masters Sheng Yen and John Crook. She has published this book through her Chan Dharma Community and Winterhead Publishing. John Crook, the founding Teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship, lived and died at Winterhead Hill Farm, his home on the English Mendip Hills. The book is available from all good bookshops and also from Amazon.



About Us

Chan is the Chinese ancestor of Zen Buddhism. The Western Chan Fellowship is an association of non-monastic practitioners – a lay sangha – based in the UK and with contacts elsewhere in Europe and in the USA. Our Zen retreats and other activities are open equally to Buddhists and non-Buddhists, and we welcome everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, class or disability. Our new retreat and meditation centre in central England includes accessible accommodation. (see below for new retreat programme)

Visit our Website

www.westernchanfellowship.org

This includes:

- introductory articles on Chan, Zen, Buddhism and meditation
- talks by Chan masters
- reports by participants at our retreats
- details of activities and events, including our retreat programme
- back-issues of this journal
- contacts for local meditation groups

Contacting Us

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Contributing to New Chan Forum

We are always delighted to receive articles, artwork, photographs, poetry etc. If possible please send as .doc documents, to the Editor, Pat Simmons, at editor@westernchanfellowship.doc. She will also be happy to discuss with you any ideas you may have for contributions. You do not need to be a Buddhist scholar: she would prefer something that springs from your own experience and insight.

Forthcoming Residential Retreats

ILLUMINATING THE MIND

5th to 12th August

Leader: Simon Child

A TASTE OF CHAN

9th to 13th September

Leader: Jake Lyne

FINDING FREEDOM

21st to 26th October

Leaders: Alysun Jones & Juliet Hackney

INVESTIGATING KOANS

11th to 18th November

Leader: Simon Child

All retreats will take place at Shawbottom Farm, in Staffordshire. Please see our website for up-to-date retreat information, and instructions on joining. We look forward to welcoming you on retreat.

NEW CHAN FORUM

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INVESTIGATING KOANS



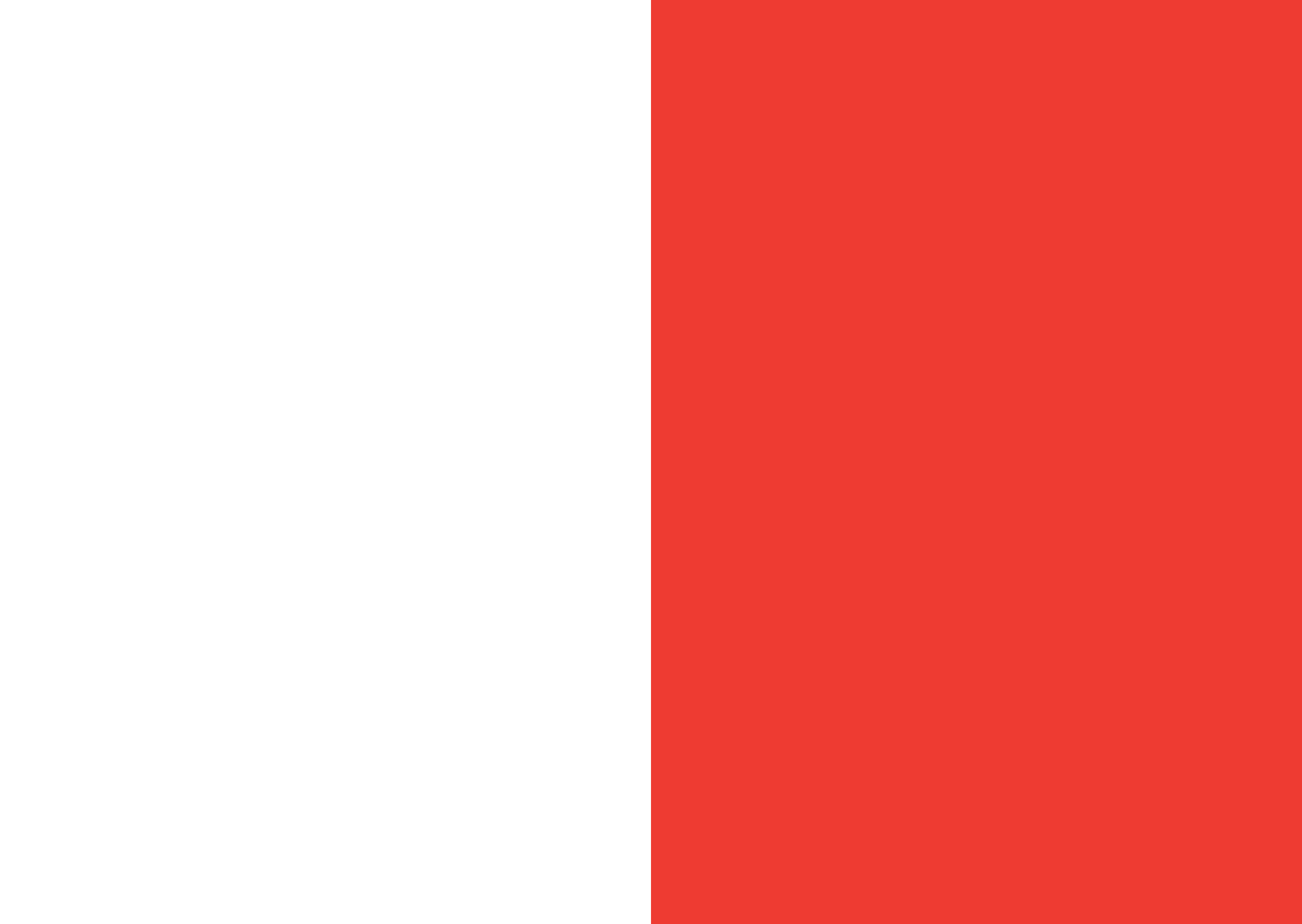
RESIDENTIAL RETREAT
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The ancient Chinese Zen practices of investigating Huatou and Gongan (Koan) are best practised in a supportive environment such as this intensive silent retreat. As one becomes deeply absorbed in the practice, mental constructions 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.

11TH – 18TH NOVEMBER 2023

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*Since there is nothing but just this moment,
the time-being is all the time there is.
Grass-being, form-being are both time.
Each moment is all being, is the entire world.
Reflect now whether any being or any world
is left out of the present moment.*

ZEN MASTER DOGEN

