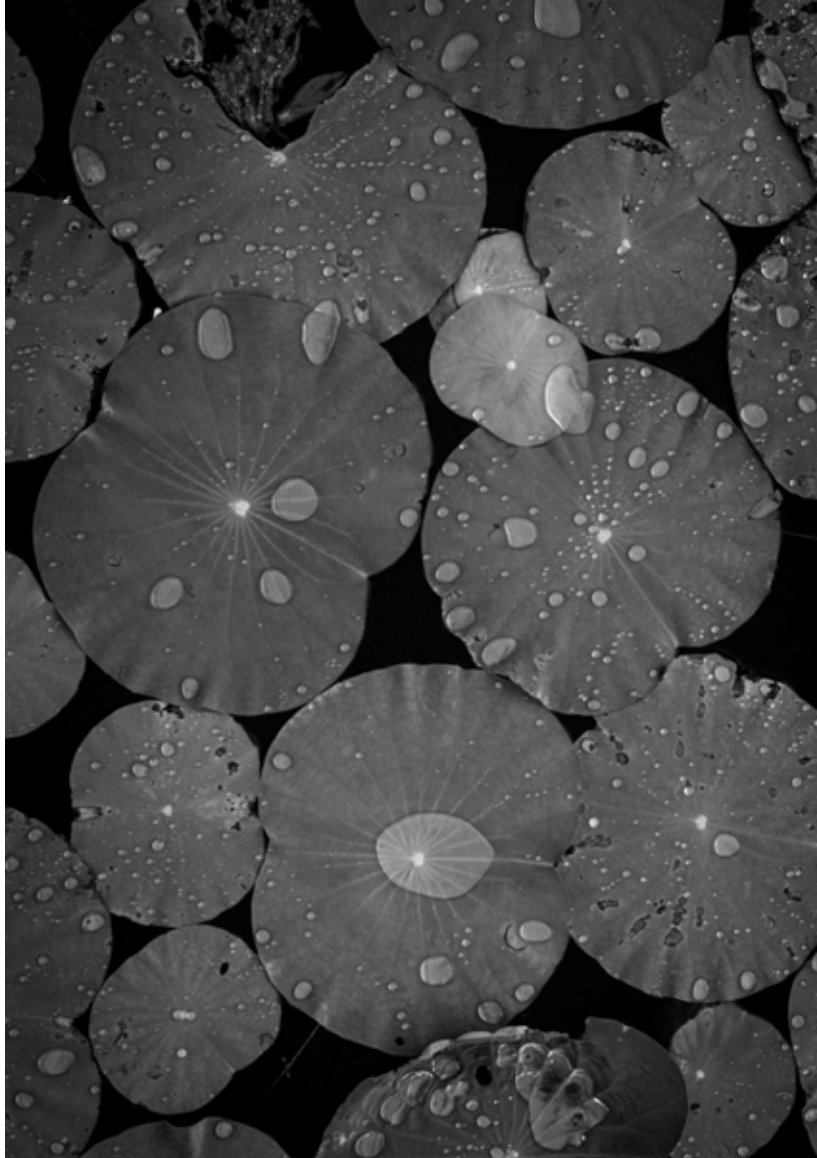


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Contributions for future issues (articles, poems, artwork) welcomed. Please send to editor@westernchanfellowship.org.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PAT SIMMONS

What I particularly enjoy about editing *New Chan Forum* is the rich variety of material that comes my way. And this issue is no exception.

I am delighted to be able to share Simon's analysis of the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra, included here by special request from the people who first heard it on retreat in February, and thought it was one of the best Dharma talks they had ever heard. Many thanks to Jeanine Woodward, who transcribed it faultlessly and at lightning speed.

George Marsh's article – an examination of Basho's poetry – is fascinating and very thoroughly researched. And Eddy Street's ever so slightly irreverent story about the Boat Monk seems to link in beautifully with the poetry of Jos Hadfield and David Valentine-Hagart.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this and the previous issues that I have edited. This is my last issue as editor, but Sarah Bird has agreed to take over from me and I know she will be brilliant. She's looking forward to receiving your contributions – it's easily the most fun part of the job. The address won't change.

THE PRAJNAPARAMITA HEART SUTRA

SIMON CHILD

We've been reciting the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra as part of the Morning Service. It's not an easy text to understand so we may end up reciting words blindly without really knowing what we're reciting. Sometimes – and I don't think I've done it for a while – I talk through the Heart Sutra to give you an idea of what's in there. We can begin with the title: what it's about, where it comes from.

Prajnaparamita

The Heart Sutra is part of a collection of texts going back to around the first century CE. The collection of texts goes under the title Prajnaparamita. You can't say any one person gathered them together, they were brought together by different people. For example, the traders between India and China on the Silk Route carried their favourite Buddhist texts with them. When they met others they might exchange texts, and in this way they might have a collection of texts that they find useful and interesting. Perhaps when they reached China they sold the texts and used the money to buy silk to take back to India. The texts were to some extent traded and this is partly how Buddhism came to China, because the traders had these interesting texts and the Chinese wanted more of them. Similarly, Buddhists within India might exchange texts with each other. There was a lot of interchange of texts. It was not co-ordinated by anybody, but similar texts, related texts, came together into collections.



ILLUSTRATION FROM A 100,000 LINE PRAJNAPARAMITA SUTRA MANUSCRIPT

The Prajnaparamita isn't a single text, but rather it is a collection of a lot of individual texts. There are different versions that have come down to us. This version [holding up a thick book] is the Prajnaparamita in 18,000 lines. There's also an 8,000 line version, also 25,000, 100,000 and 125,000 line versions. There's a lot of repetition, and it's a rather random collection of texts which is not very organised. One of the texts included is the Heart Sutra, and another is the Diamond Sutra. Various texts which point in the same direction, though by different means, were brought together.

What does Prajnaparamita mean? We think of *paramita*, for example, as 'perfection': hence, perfection of *prajna*, perfection of wisdom, insight. These are texts which point towards insight, *prajna*, in particular insight into 'Emptiness' which is a tricky concept that I'm going to say more about. The Prajnaparamita body of literature is pointing towards, and to a large extent asserting, the concept and universality of 'Emptiness'. It's not so much a philosophical discussion, it's more like similes, examples and metaphors to try to help you to understand and accept the idea of Emptiness. Subsequently, in the Madhyamaka, there was a more philosophical development of Emptiness which sought to prove Emptiness philosophically. The earlier Prajnaparamita was more like an assertion, "this is how it is"; "this is what the Buddha taught, what he meant", using various examples. This is the Prajnaparamita literature.

Heart Sutra

The word 'Heart' comes from it being the 'heart' of the Prajnaparamita literature. It's a condensation, it's the core, it's the essence – it's the 'heart'

in that sense. It's the heart of the 100,000 lines summed up in one page. A single page is more memorable. People learn it off by heart and recite it from memory. The Diamond Sutra is a fair bit longer but some people also learn that off by heart.

Let's have a look at what's in it. What we find is an extremely abbreviated text; a large part of it is pointing to other teachings which are not fully stated or even identified because it's assumed that you already know them. It's pointing towards those teachings largely to negate or otherwise reinterpret them, which will have no meaning for you if you don't recognise those teachings. For people who are reading the texts and trading the texts, they already knew the various teachings to which the Heart Sutra refers. Maybe we don't know them, or we don't recognise which teachings they're pointing at, therefore it's worth going through that. Let's have a look through it line by line, picking out things as we go through.

The opening of the Heart Sutra

The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara... I mentioned Avalokiteshvara yesterday. Avalokiteshvara is the Sanskrit name for the bodhisattva of compassion known in China as Guanyin, or in Japan as Kanzeon or Kannon, in Tibetan as Chenrezig. I think it's quite interesting that this key Wisdom text is featuring the bodhisattva of Compassion. I don't know whether that's accidental or whether it's bringing out the equivalence, if you like, of Compassion and Wisdom. You'd think it might be Manjusri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom, telling us about a Wisdom text, but it isn't – curious.

When the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita... That's a nice word, 'coursing', isn't it? How do we receive that

word? We can read it as, ‘in a state of deep meditation’. In the other version we were looking at it says:

At that time the Blessed One (i.e. the Buddha) entered the samadhi which examines the dharmas called Profound Illumination and at the same time Avalokiteshvara, looking at the profound practice of transcendent knowledge, saw the five skandhas and their natural emptiness...

Avalokiteshvara was looking at the profound practice of transcendent knowledge/coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita. These are meditative states examining the mind, examining what the mind gets up to: examining the mental phenomena arising and falling, being created and dissipating; in that state of observing the mind, such a state being an entrance to deep insight including insight into emptiness.

...coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita, he perceived that all five skandhas are empty... The word *skandha* is translated as ‘aggregates’ or ‘heaps’. The idea is that you could analyse the attributes of a human being into five different categories: aggregates; heaps; piles; *skandhas* – sheep pens, if you like, five sheep pens. There is ‘form’: the body, the physical body, the shape, the appearance, and this is the first *skandha*. Secondly, ‘sensation’: the fact that we have some contact with the environment. We can appreciate some sense of contact, we’re in touch with the environment, so we have the quality of sensing.

Thirdly, ‘perception’: we have the quality of perceiving, which is a stage beyond sensation – it’s interpreting the sensation and creating a sense of a situation out of it. We touch something, we have a contact, but we interpret it as ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ or ‘spiky’ or whatever it is; we go beyond just the mere fact there’s a touch into “This is a bit too sharp,” or

“This is a nice, cool drink”. We’re moving into some mental representation of an object beyond the mere sensation.

Then fourthly we have ‘volition’. Volition is the word used in this translation. It’s the word *samskara* in Sanskrit, translated here as ‘volition’ but sometimes as ‘impulse’, sometimes as ‘habitual tendencies’. I was speaking about how our minds are conditioned by our life experience and we store ways of responding to situations. Having perceived that we’re in one of those situations, the impulse arises to implement our usual habitual response to that type of situation.

There’s a contact with the environment, there’s an interpretation of it – a perception – and that perception matches something in our storehouse consciousness: “I know what to do in this situation – run! It’s a tiger! It might be a tiger, there’s a bit of light and dark, I’m not sure... but, just in case, run!”, and we run. This doesn’t relate only to innate instinctive survival impulses, but also to learned or conditioned responses such as our change of attitude on encountering certain individuals in our workplace. We have these habitual responses represented by the word ‘volition’ sometimes translated as ‘impulse’ or other words.

Finally, the fifth *skandha*, consciousness. Consciousness is the faculty which appreciates all this, the faculty which registers the sensations. It registers, maybe we could say also produces, the perceptions, and it retrieves the impulse and activates it. Consciousness is a faculty not precisely over all the others but receiving information from the others and processing and organising it and giving us some story of what is going on.

This is a model of the being, which could be divided into these five categories, five heaps, five aggregates, five *skandhas*. Our friend Aval-



okiteshvara, in deep meditation, perceived that all five *skandhas* are ‘empty’: form, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are empty.

This word, ‘empty’, is very tricky. When we read a word in a text we naturally tend to take the common English meaning of the word, but a lot of the words here are better understood as being technical jargon. They have a meaning behind the word; the English word is an approximation of the meaning, but we need to get to the intended technical meaning behind the word – and this particularly applies to the words ‘empty’ and ‘emptiness’.

Emptiness

Words are labels for some shared experience about the world – we use a word and we will both know what we mean by the word. However the word ‘emptiness’ as used here is pointing to something we don’t necessarily have a shared experience of. It reveals a difficulty in our way of sharing experience by using language, because the language can mislead us. The text is trying to break us out of an habitual way of thinking and perceiving. It’s very tricky because we haven’t got the words to do that. As I understand it, the corresponding Sanskrit word, *sunyata*, has the same problems as the English word, ‘emptiness’. It’s sometimes also translated as ‘void’, which is no better or perhaps even worse.

When we see this word ‘emptiness’, what we have to do is to mentally replace it with a phrase. The phrase itself needs unpacking, but the phrase is something along the lines of ‘empty of inherent existence’, or ‘empty of independent or intrinsic existence’. For example, a perception: it is ‘empty’ of being that perception all by itself. It has just arisen in re-

sponse to certain circumstances. It isn't that it was pre-created and already existing, or that it's come from somewhere else to arrive now; it's truly a product of the mind, a creation in the moment. The same for the others: the impulse, the sensations and the form. Yes, even the form, the body – now that might be trickier – we have to think about that one.

The idea is that the being, and also the various parts of the being, don't inherently or intrinsically exist; it's more just like a presentation in the moment. That probably sounds a bit weird – it's very tricky to get. There are different metaphors and similes which are used to try and illustrate this word 'empty'. I'll go for one of the common ones: a table.

A table

Imagine there's a small low table sitting there in the middle of the room: an ordinary table, four legs, a flat surface. We use the word 'table' as an object and in our mind there's a table and there's no problem about it – we refer to it as a table. What about if a table gets a bit wonky; some mice get in and chew one of the legs so one of the legs is shorter than the others. Maybe a leg is rotten and breaks off. Do we still have a table?

If you put a weight, put your mug of tea, on the opposite corner to the missing leg, it won't fall over and it will support your mug; you'll be all right, you might still be able to use it as a table. But put your mug of tea above where the missing leg is, then you've got a problem; it's no longer functioning properly as a table. It's in a sort of twilight zone between being a table and not being a table – depending on where your cup of tea is at the time. What about if it loses another leg? Then it gets really problematic! At this point we have to confess we no longer have a table.

The question arises: where did the table go? We were quite clear we had a table, there was no doubt about it when there were four legs. Taking half an inch off one of the legs didn't take the table away. Taking three inches off a leg, maybe even taking the whole leg off, may not completely take the table away. So the table wasn't in the leg. But when we took away the other leg, we could no longer continue calling it a table. Somehow, taking away two legs 'takes away' the table. Is the table in the legs? That way of thinking doesn't work, but it's in our assumptions.

If I see a coffee table, and someone comes in and stands on it to reach a high shelf, then suddenly, "Oh I see, it's a step, it's not a table; Er, it's both a step and a table". It's confusing. Perhaps someone uses it to prop the door open and now it is neither a step nor a table, it's a doorstep. I'm labouring it a bit – because you might say you wouldn't be thinking like that – but our way of thinking assumes that if there's an object, there's somehow something there behind or inside the object, making it what it is; that's our assumption. Asking, "Where did the table go?" reveals that sort of assumption.

It applies to other objects too. Any object that we look at, we look primarily at how it's useful to us, how we could or do use it, and label it accordingly. We can label that as a table and use it as a table. We could also use it as a step – but especially if that was a regular occurrence then we might refer to it as a step instead of as a table. Same object, just different labels.

There's something about the function, which is attributed by us, which gives the object its character and identity for us. It's empty of being a table; it isn't intrinsically a table, it isn't intrinsically a step, it isn't intrinsically either a doorstep or future firewood, but it could be used as



any of these things. That usage or that label is not intrinsic to what's there; in fact, there isn't intrinsically anything there. You might say there's some tree, some slices of a tree, but then, what's a tree? We could go into that one separately.

There isn't intrinsically a table there, even though we all see a table and use it as a table. Our mind has this way of assuming to be specific objects things which are not inherently what we use them as. Functionally, it's very useful to do that, very helpful – we know what we can put things on, we know where we can look for things, and if we don't want to bend down to the floor we've got something we can reach for easily and use as a table. We know the attributes of something we look for to be a table, for example to be level, more or less. We allow a bit of wobbliness and a bit of slope, we cope with it to a certain extent – we've all got wobbly tables in our houses, haven't we? But if a slope reaches to 45 degrees then it's no longer a table.

The table, or step or whatever, is empty of inherently being a table, or a step; the 'tableness' is an attribution by us, it isn't a quality in the object. That's pointing us towards the idea of emptiness in relation to an object like a table – the object is neither inherently nor intrinsically a table. One of the classic examples in the texts is of a chariot, and if a chariot loses a wheel, is it still a chariot? We can go through a similar sort of analysis with other objects, and the one I often use, because people seem to get the idea, is a cloud.

A cloud

There are plenty of clouds here today to look at. Look at a cloud. We know what we mean by 'cloud'. We manipulate them as mental objects,

referring to them in weather forecasts because they affect the sunshine and rain. We think we have a clear appreciation and understanding of the phenomenon called ‘cloud’, the object called ‘cloud’. Do we?

Scientifically we know that all we have up there are some water droplets, suspended in the air, swirling around a bit depending on the wind and thermals, but not (yet) falling to the ground. Where the droplets are well spread out we call it either a clear blue sky or a bit hazy, and where the droplets are close together we call it a cloud. There isn’t an actual individual object called a cloud, just there are varying densities of water droplets.

If I asked you to go up and find the edge of a cloud, perhaps the bottom edge, how would you know when you’d reached it? The first water drop? That might only be six inches above here. When you reach a certain minimum density of drops? That’s sounding a bit arbitrary, isn’t it. When you get a density of water drops sufficient to block the sight of the blue sky from down here? “Yeah, that’s the edge of the cloud” That’s also a bit arbitrary, isn’t it? What about if you were higher up a bit closer to the cloud – you might see through it a bit better, and you still wouldn’t see any definite edge.

There’s something about the way our mind appreciates a cloud as an object which influences weather, sunlight and rain, and we manipulate that in our minds, in conversation and in weather forecasts: it’s a very useful symbol but there’s no intrinsic object of a cloud, there’s just a certain density of water droplets in the sky. It’s ‘empty’ of being a cloud. ‘Cloud’ is a very useful concept and a term that we use, but there isn’t a cloud there in any meaningful sense as an independent object which is inherently and automatically a cloud.

Our self

People can follow along and ‘get it’ on some level. When it gets really tricky is when we start applying it to objects like this one [*points to self*] or these scattered round this room [*points to audience members*]: are you ready to consider yourself as empty? I usually meet more resistance at this point. Are you any different to the cloud? In what way are you different to the cloud? You are a temporary assembly of atoms and molecules in a particular shape, with particular movements inside: circulation-type movements of blood and movements of muscle fibres and things, digestion, movements of mood, feelings.

We have this idea there’s a self: we experience the phenomenon of a sense of self and a sense of presence of it, with an appearance of some degree of control: “I can make my arm move in and out”. We assume there’s something behind that sense, and something guiding those actions. There are a lot of assumptions going on. A very firm assumption of ours is of a self. Unlike a cloud or a table, we would argue there is definitely a self here because that’s what joins all this together, and because we sense it.

All five skandhas are empty

Avalokiteshvara perceived that all five *skandhas* are empty: form, the body, the shape, the visual impression is empty. He’s pointing to the same mistake as assuming there’s a cloud in the sky as an object. The appearance of form of a person, just as the appearance of cloud, does not mean there is some thing intrinsically there.

Sensation: our sense of sensation is empty. It’s a little bit more tricky to untangle that one, but it’s pointing again to the idea that well yes, there’s something going on there but to have it as an intrinsic definition,

an inherent identity, that's a mistake; it's merely something transient, arising and passing: sensation wasn't there, then is there, then it's not there – it's a phenomenon, it comes and goes.

Perception: as soon as we get onto the level of perception, we can see the way the mind is involved in creating it because the mind makes mistakes in perception. A slight stripy shadow in the bushes – it isn't necessarily a tiger, but still the mind may perceive, "Tiger!" The mind makes mistakes in perception. We sometimes get confused between hot and cold – if we've had our hand in ice then put it in cool water it feels like it's burning; perception can make mistakes like that. Perception is not properly reliable: it's useful, very useful, essential, but it's not properly reliable and there are no inherent truths in a perception – it's what we make. Perception is empty.

As I discussed, impulse, habits, maybe you can see how empty they are; they're simply arising out of causes and conditions – they're not even necessarily accurately representing or relevant to the present moment; they're just popping up unbidden, arising from the conditioning of past experiences.

Consciousness you might say, is giving a clear view of all of this stuff, but it's giving a clear view of potentially inappropriate impulses and misperceptions, and mistaking transient sensations as indicating that something is there. Then the idea of the self. Mind is responsible for creating this mistaken idea of self; it imputes a self as a co-ordinator, as the connector, as the experiencer of all these miscellaneous phenomena. But the teaching is saying it's not so, it's empty.

It's hard to grasp; it's counterintuitive; it's not even catered for in the structure of our language, in fact our language distorts such exploration.

As soon as we start trying to talk about this stuff, we find ourselves using the word 'I', which we're negating by saying there's no self. Our language is built on subject/object and therefore that's the language we have to use. But it doesn't work for this exploration because we're trying to use subject/object language to point out the lack of subject (and of object). Emptiness, emptiness of self, lack of subject in the subject/object. We can't find the words to do that because they're not in the language.

Transcending all sufferings

Nevertheless, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara perceived that all five skandhas are empty, *thereby transcending all sufferings*. That's quite a big claim, isn't it? You might not have been so interested in the emptiness stuff but *transcending all sufferings* – I've got your attention now: a bit of click-bait! Master Sheng yen's commentary on the Heart Sutra is titled, "*There is no suffering*". Yeah, 100,000 lines on Prajnaparamita, that's a bit heavy-going, but transcending all suffering, oh, maybe I'm interested in this; maybe I'll try that meditation stuff Avalokiteshvara was doing. I didn't mind about whether he was right about the emptiness bit, but he's transcended all sufferings – that's interesting!

Examining the dharmas

Avalokiteshvara is in the *samadhi* which examines the dharmas. That's dharmas with a small 'd', phenomena, not Dharma with a capital 'D' which means the Buddha's teachings or, in a wider Vedic sense, the law of the Universe. Dharma with a small 'd' is 'mental phenomenon', any phenomena that we experience. The early Buddhists categorised these minutely. They had a precise list of them (which varies slightly by tradition), the

dharmas, the mental phenomena, the arisings, they examine the dharmas.

We've been examining the dharmas in our own minds – we've been looking into the mind and seeing what we discover there. We discover various things and some of them we're indeed discovering to be empty. Our impulses to behave in certain ways, we realise that they're not grounded on anything solid, they're not grounded on 'truth', they're just arising as echoes from past experience. They pop up and we feel the urge, but they go away again, they dissolve.

Avalokiteshvara was doing this. In the process of doing this he discovered not only that the dharmas are empty but also that these five *skandhas* are empty, which in a sense is not surprising because they're mental constructions created from the dharmas. Our knowledge of the five skandhas is from our mental impressions of them.

The opening lines were a statement of the context as to how the Heart Sutra came to be spoken. The longer version we've also been reading has a preceding paragraph explaining the scene where the Buddha was assembled with his followers on Vulture Peak Mountain:

Thus have I heard: once the Blessed one was dwelling in the royal domain of Vulture Peak Mountain, together with a great gathering of monks and Bodhisattvas

It says that Buddha entered *samadhi* examining the dharmas, the *samadhi* called 'Profound Illumination', and at the same time Avalokiteshvara was looking at the profound practice of transcendent knowledge and saw the emptiness of the skandhas.

Through the inspiration of the Buddha, Sariputra asked a question of Avalokiteshvara. Avalokiteshvara was asked, "How should those noble ones learn, who wish to follow the profound practice of transcendent knowledge?"

Avalokiteshvara replied, and the rest of this text is Avalokiteshvara's response. Avalokiteshvara starts by saying *Sariputra, form is not other than emptiness and emptiness not other than form*. That's what I've been talking about: form is empty, all the *skandhas* are empty.

Nonduality of form and emptiness

There's a problem in this use of language because the noun 'emptiness' might be assumed to represent an object. The teaching on emptiness is removing the idea of an object, so again we're caught by language. Form is empty, form is not other than emptiness, it's just trying to get over the fact there's nothing behind our perception of form.

Sariputra, form is not other than emptiness and emptiness not other than form

And in case you haven't got it, he repeats it with emphasis:

Form is precisely emptiness and emptiness precisely form.

The repetitions say, 'you're not getting away with dismissing this, I really mean it'. Also the word 'is' in here is important, because so often people hear this as 'there's form and there's emptiness'. That's not what he's saying, is it? He's saying form *is* emptiness and emptiness *is* form. Form *is* precisely emptiness and emptiness *is* precisely form. He's not saying there's emptiness and there's form; he's saying form and emptiness are the same thing, at the same time.

This is a point which is commonly missed or is misunderstood – hearing it as suggesting there are alternate realities of emptiness and/or form. But no, form *is* emptiness, emptiness *is* form. It's pointing towards there being different ways of perceiving the same phenomena, different ways

of interpreting or understanding the same phenomena – but still there is this phenomenon that we’re experiencing, this moment.

To see it as form overlooks that it’s empty, but also to see it as empty could overlook its form. Therefore he expresses it both ways and emphasises it. But then, to ensure you understand, he explicitly applies it to the other four *skandhas* too: *so also are sensation, perception, volition and consciousness*. In other words, sensation is empty and emptiness is sensation. Same for perception, volition and consciousness. All five *skandhas* are being asserted to be empty. These five *skandhas* were a common philosophical understanding, analysis of a person, but the Heart Sutra is saying hold on, form is empty, sensation is empty, perception is empty – don’t go away with the idea of five skandhas and believe you’ve got it.

Emptiness of emptiness

It goes on. We have the word ‘void’ coming in now – ‘void’ is sometimes used as an alternative to ‘emptiness’ but ‘void’ is an even more tricky word. ‘Void’ presents a blankness to the mind – it does for me, anyway – but we find the word ‘void’ being used because of the lack of more suitable words. *Sariputra, this voidness of all dharmas* – we could hear that as ‘emptiness of all dharmas’ – *is not born, not destroyed, not impure, not pure, does not increase or decrease*. This is trying to relieve us of any misconceived idea of voidness or emptiness as being another category of thing. We had the wrong idea that there was a cloud thing in the cloud. Should we instead think that there is a thing called ‘emptiness’ in the cloud? No, that’s not it either.

In case you’re falling into that trap, some versions of the Heart Sutra specifically say emptiness is also empty, i.e. asserting the emptiness of



emptiness. As a noun ‘emptiness’ could be treated as a thing and in doing so we would fall into the same trap even while we’re hearing the teaching on emptiness. This version of the sutra is one such. In saying: *this voidness of all dharmas*: it’s saying the emptiness of dharmas is not born, not destroyed, i.e. the emptiness of dharmas is also empty. A beginning understanding of emptiness could lead us to think of emptiness as the one true thing; no, emptiness is also empty: this voidness of all dharmas is not born, it’s not destroyed, it’s not pure, it’s not impure, does not increase or decrease – you can’t apply these categories to it.

Emptiness in relation to other teachings

Let’s keep going: *there is no form, and no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness*. That sounds like another repetition, doesn’t it, and it is also a refutation of the idea that the five skandhas are the ultimate inherent objects; he’s giving us every opportunity to get it. Then it expands a bit – beyond that we get:

*no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;
no sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought;
and there is no realm of the eye all the way up to no realm of mental cognition.*

What’s going on there? The list I’ve read out to you is the list in the teaching on the eighteen realms.

- We have the six senses. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch are straight forward. We’re familiar with the five senses, and then in Buddhist literature we also have the sixth sense: thought, cognition – think of it in those terms.
- We have the six sense organs, one for each of those senses, which is

why the preceding line says *no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind*. They also are empty – the sense organs, as well as the senses themselves.

- Then we have the six sense-consciousnesses: *There is no realm of the eye all the way up to no realm of mental cognition*: the resulting sense impression on the mind is called a sense-consciousness. This is saying, there is no eye-consciousness, no ear-consciousness, no nose-consciousness – that sort of meaning.

When it says there is no realm of the eye ‘*all the way up to...*’, it shortens the list for you by omitting some items and saying, ‘all the way up to’. This is because the lists are getting a bit long. We’ll encounter similar devices as we continue through this (and other) texts.

The abbreviation makes it even harder for us to follow unless we know what’s being abbreviated. In this case, it’s started to lay out the eighteen realms but not listed them all. Here we have another potential linguistic trap. When it says no this and no that it isn’t denying the phenomena of sense organs, sensory experience and so on, but it is declaring them as empty. It’s not only saying that sensation is empty, it’s saying specifically that all eighteen of the realms – six sense organs, six senses, and six sense-consciousnesses – are all empty.

It continues:

*There is no ignorance and there is no ending of ignorance
through to no ageing and death and no ending of ageing and death*

Do you recognise what’s going on there, what’s being negated there? Not all of you will, because it’s pointing to a specific teaching that you may not know: the twelve links of dependent origination. Unless you know the teaching on the twelve links of dependent origination, you’ve

no idea that's where this is pointing. It's giving only the beginning and the end of the sequence of twelve links, ignorance and death, without the whole sequence in between.

If you know that teaching, then you're hearing the negation of that teaching when you see those lines; you're hearing the assertion of their emptiness. Maybe negation's not quite the right word: assertion of emptiness of the twelve links in that teaching.

Next: *There is no suffering* (there's that phrase you were waiting for, 'no suffering'), *no cause of suffering, no cessation of suffering, and no path*. Most of you will recognise the teaching that's being emptied out here. The Four Noble Truths, Buddha's early teaching: there is suffering, there is a cause of suffering, there is the possibility of cessation of suffering, and there is a path, i.e. the Eightfold Path, to the cessation of suffering. That's the conventional traditional teaching, but the Heart Sutra, the emptiness literature, is saying: there is no suffering, no cause of suffering, no cessation of suffering and no path. How can it say that? Well, with emptiness of self, who can there be to suffer? Without attachment to a sense of self, how could the word 'suffering' even have any meaning? But then, how can what I'm saying have any meaning to you given that you are so firmly attached to your sense of self. These teachings are very hard to receive.

Relying on Prajnaparamita

There is no wisdom, or any attainment.

With nothing to attain,

Bodhisattvas relying on Prajnaparamita

have no obstructions in their minds.

With no destination or attainment to be sought, how could there be obstructions? You haven't got anywhere to go, you haven't an idea of trying to get to somewhere; how could you be obstructed? Without any obstruction, how could there be fear of any failure, fear of missing out?

Bodhisattvas relying on Prajnaparamita, Prajnaparamita in this sense meaning the insight into emptiness: they have no obstructions in their minds, they have no fear.

departing far from confusion and imaginings

they reach Ultimate Nirvana

Not trapped in delusions, imaginings, confusions, because they're not attached to them, because they see the emptiness of them; they're merely passing phenomena, not to be attached to.

All past, present and future Buddhas

relying on Prajnaparamita,

attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi.

Unsurpassed, supreme enlightenment, through relying on Prajnaparamita, through gaining this insight of emptiness of all dharmas – emptiness of skandhas and of everything else. The emptiness of everything.

The Prajnaparamita mantra

And then we move on:

Therefore, know that Prajnaparamita

is the great mantra of power,

the great mantra of wisdom,

the supreme mantra,

*the unequalled mantra,
which is able to remove all sufferings.*

There's a shift of gear here: are we suddenly into mantra territory rather than philosophy? Are we into magical actions removing all sufferings? A shift of gear here, and an assertion: it's real and not false. On the other hand, taking *Prajnaparamita*, taking insight into emptiness as your mantra, as your constant companion, maybe that's not such a bad thing: whatever situation you find yourself in, bring up your mantra, remind yourself to examine the dharmas. Bring up your insight into *Prajnaparamita*, your insight into the perfection of wisdom of emptiness. That, in any situation, removes all sufferings. Yes, it's presented as a mantra, but it's also truly promoting ongoing cultivation of the wisdom of emptiness. It's quite interesting to look at it that way.

*It is real and not false – in case you were doubting by this point, yes it's real and not false.
Therefore recite the mantra of Prajnaparamita*

The mantra of *Prajnaparamita* you know: *Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha*, translated as either 'Gone' or 'Going' – a little bit more active in 'going', but 'Going, Going' or 'Gone, Gone, altogether Gone' and 'Gone totally beyond.'

Beyond what? One meaning of this is 'the other shore': you've gone beyond this shore of *Samsara*, which includes attachment to form and the other attributes of self, and you've gone to the other shore of Nirvana and release and enlightenment. But even that creates a duality, doesn't it? It's creating a duality between form and emptiness, between *Samsara* and Nirvana – regard that as simply an interpretation, a metaphor or presentation. But yes, 'Gone, gone be-

yond,' and then Bodhi meaning 'enlightened, 'awakened', *Svaha*, 'Hail, Celebrate'.

How to practise

That was a quick run through a rather complex text with a lot of short cuts and abbreviations, a lot of jargon. A lot of explanation, study, investigation and practice is needed to truly appreciate the depth of it. How does that relate to what we're doing?

Indeed, we are like Avalokiteshvara. We are indeed examining the dharmas in deep meditation – that's precisely what you've been doing; you've been noticing what arises in the mind, you've not been obstructing it or denying it, you've been letting it through, letting it arise, letting it be experienced. That experiencing of it is investigating it. We use the word 'investigation' here in the sense of an experiential investigation – it's tasting, knowing first-hand, feeling, investigating. It's not investigating by sitting back in an armchair and thinking about it with some textbooks at your elbow. You don't need the books, you don't need to be reading *Prajnaparamita*. You need to turn the gaze within, as instructed in *On Pursuing That Which Leaves No Tracks*.

*All you have to do
This minute
is to stop –
turn the mind upon itself.*

Then you won't need to read the Heart Sutra; instead you'll be in a position to write it, from your own experience.

Draw your sense within

Turn yourself inside out:

Gazing into the lake of awareness

Let what is there emerge from its lair.

I hope you've been doing that; it's what we've been doing, isn't it? We've been using a koan to seed the mind into an investigative mode, and turning that investigation on the mind: what is arising at this moment? Let it emerge from its lair.

'Lair' is a nice evocative word, isn't it? What might come out of a lair? Could be a bit scary. I found a big hole in the hillside over there, a year or two ago: What on earth is living in that? I put my trail camera on it and went back and had a look the next day, and the camera had been tipped over – ooh! Try again, so I kept on. It took me a few days to get the picture. A hole about this big – I thought perhaps badgers or foxes, they are around but I don't know where they're living. On the recording all I saw was a tiny vole going in and out of the big hole!

But 'lair' can conjure up a bit more – and some of you have had the experience, even during this retreat, of something larger than a vole emerging from its lair. You can get shocks when you allow yourself to see what's arising in the mind: 'Oh, I wasn't ready for that, but here it is!' *Let what is there emerge from its lair* is a very open and inclusive statement – it could be a little beetle, it could be a vole, it could be a rabbit, it could be a badger, or...

There's a rabbit hole here, which my leg went down once. I didn't know we had rabbits here. We see hares daily, but I've never seen a rabbit. I aimed a camera¹ at that hole and what did I see on my camera? A few



STATUE OF AVALOKITESVARA FROM SRI LANKA, CA. 750 CE

times I saw a badger come along and shove himself down into the hole, probably hoping for a rabbit supper. You wouldn't believe the badger would fit but yes, the badger went down headfirst, leaving only his back legs and knees outside the hole to haul himself out again. He would come along every two or three nights and recheck the hole. What emerges from holes is interesting.

Let what is there

Invalidate your breathing.

Let what is there pulsate in your heart.

Let it be directly sensed, is what it's saying – that's exactly what you're doing. When Avalokiteshvara directly sensed what he was perceiving in his meditation, he realised its emptiness. That possibility is directly open to you in this practice: stimulated by the koan, you bring a sharp attention to whatever's arising in the mind. If you're in the state of Great Doubt, you've got a desperation to solve it, and how can you solve it? Really, only by almost grasping anything that comes along, in case it's your solution – you can't risk it slipping by. Your practice may not be in that intense a situation, but still you've cultivated 'I don't get it; there's something I'm missing. If something arises, it might be the missing piece; I can't let it slip by unobserved.' You're open to it arising; you directly perceive it.

It might move around the mind and might take a few funny twists and turns; there might be some mental associations arise, things might come to mind – and all the while you're sharply attentive because the koan has got you to that state of mind. At some point you might see behind or see through these phenomena that are arising in your mind

and you will appreciate emptiness right there, in that moment. Give it a go.

From a talk by Simon at the Koan retreat in February 2024, transcribed by Jeanine Woodward

NOTES

1. <https://youtu.be/cixw68zMkzU>

BASHO'S "FORM" ON THE SUBJECT OF "EMPTINESS"

GEORGE MARSH

Matsuo Basho was the great innovator in haiku poetry in 17th century Japan. He was also a Zen Buddhist, though he seems to have been sometimes a Buddhist priest and at other times a travelling poet, sometimes in a black robe, sometimes not. He was also an innovator in writing prose travel journals: the *haibun* form, which was a prose journal with haiku poems.

The haiku aesthetic was already well developed. Haiku poems were Buddhist in spirit. They focused on Nature, not human affairs (a separate haiku-like genre called *senryu* developed for humorous and social poems). Haiku were self-consciously Selfless, Ego-free. Basho would have been excited at the opportunities the *haibun* form afforded him to use prose for one way of viewing life and culture, and poetry for another. In the contrasting registers of prose and haiku poetry was there a profound relationship to develop between the human world and the natural world? Or the social world and the individual world? The cumulative construction of an argument, a coherent narrative, the fruits of culture, in prose, and the flash of momentary insight in a haiku? Or, more fundamentally, the "form" and the "emptiness" of the *Heart Sutra*?

Form and Emptiness in haibun

One can approach understanding the "emptiness" of the *Heart Sutra* from any number of directions (through perceptions, impermanence, causation, interbeing, compassion, or Buddhist theorising – as the *Heart*

Sutra does), but for our purposes as writers using language I offer this working definition drawing on the perceptual process described by the Buddha in his account of the five skandhas: "emptiness" is the world that a new-born baby looks at - it is what the senses are faced with at the start of the process of perception - and "form" is all that we add: instant reactions, language, picking and choosing, education, science, culture, ethics, feelings, judgements, attachments, opinions, ego etc. etc. Whatever you perceive is inevitably a solution of emptiness in form. Sometimes it will be a strong solution, more closely approaching "suchness," and sometimes a weak solution almost entirely composed of imaginary projections of desire, abstractions, ideas and fancies.

Since one approaches haiku trying to focus on the natural world and to purge the haiku of ego, opinions, judgements, and explicit feelings one is tempted to think that a haibun might be understood as a genre which offers a rare opportunity to try to combine human *culture* as the "form," in prose, and *nature* as the "emptiness," in haiku. There is indeed a lot of mileage in this idea, but what Basho does in his haibun, *Narrow Road to the Interior* clearly has another element to it, taken from the Japanese aesthetic tradition.

Basho uses highly wrought poetic prose for what you might think would be the best haiku subjects (beautiful blossoms, mountain gorges and crags, famous beauty spots, ruins, historic landmarks) and also uses heightened poetic prose for his beautiful account of *shikantaza* meditation and its enlightening bliss, and his visits to spiritually moving sites with religious associations. He is clearly keeping his use of haiku for something else, not a frontal assault on "emptiness," or "awakening" or nature's beauty.

He builds upon the exalted courtly Japanese tradition of delicate and elusive elegance, evanescent beauty, and refinement of artistic taste (the tradition of *The Tale of Genji*, *The Pillow Book*, *Essays in Idleness*, originally based in an aristocratic aesthetic). He goes to the “high” status content in prose, but in his verse is aiming to “return it to the low” by moving amongst the ordinary people and choosing over-looked, obscure, low status subject-matter, almost no subject-matter, in haiku poetry.

In poetry he eschews grandeur and finds obscure negligible subjects that are hardly even there. He is aiming “to return to the market place with bliss-bestowing hands,” perhaps, by treating much less courtly subjects with the same degree of delicacy of classical literature, and seeing the nuggets of “gold” in poor people and their simple lived experiences.

He innovates by combining an aristocratic taste for subtlety, delicacy and elegance with the life of a wandering holy man, provided with just what he can carry in one bag, victim of the wind and the rain and the frosts, like everybody else, and mixing amongst the poor working people of the underprivileged classes.

His haiku subjects are not approached directly as emptiness, but they are certainly *fuga-no-michi*: Basho’s ‘Way of Elegance,’ and have *yugen*, *yuen*, and *karumi*, the classic Japanese artistic virtues. *Yugen* and *yuen* are artistic qualities of elegance, mysterious beauty, unfathomable and poetic. *Karumi* is a Japanese sense of impermanence, the spiritual lightness of ever-changing things, viewed with detachment.

We might well think his poetic subjects are “empty” - they are extreme examples of impermanence – but they are not bare. They have added sophisticated beauty, a delicate aftertaste, and a tug of emotion. “The first task for each artist is ... to become one with nature,” he writes, and he

knows that “the subject is the season,” a subject that is always changing, a combination of the departing season and the coming one, dying things and sprouting things, and full of changing feelings of loss and gain.

*This early spring
barely nine days old and all
those fields and mountains!*

*Withered winter grass –
waves of warm spring air
shimmering just above*

(from *The Knapsack Notebook*. I am choosing to use the Sam Hamill translations in *Narrow Road to the Interior*, Shambhala Classics, 1998)

Relishing down to earth subjects, returning to the low, not focused on delicious court costumes and gourmet tastes, or the glamour of the scene, Basho goes to famous holy places and praises them culturally in heightened prose, then eschews all that to find the haiku of unregarded things. These examples are all from Sam Hamill’s translation of *Narrow Road to the Interior* (Shambhala Classics 1998).

Basho’s high status subjects in heightened prose: zazen, and beauty spot

Shikantaza, deep-sitting concentration and insight, a way of enlightenment as transparent as moonlight, its light infinitely increasing, spreading from hermitage to mountaintop and back, reverence and compassion shining in everything it touches. Its blessing flows down from these mountains, enriching all our lives.

Small islands, tall islands pointing at the sky, islands on top of islands, islands like mothers with baby islands on their backs, islands cradling islands in the bay. All covered with deep green pines shaped by salty winds, trained into sea-wind bonsai. Here one is almost overcome by the sense of intense feminine beauty in a shining world. It must have been the mountain god Oyamazumi who made this place. And whose words or brush could adequately describe a world so divinely inspired?

Basho's low status subjects, the haiku of unregarded things Decked out like Shinto priests and following a monk, Basho and Sora tour the Three Holy Mountains and write poems. Basho gives us delicate images: a whole dark world, very faintly lit; an unusually mobile image of impermanence (amusing, too); and a vow of silence felt with unexplained deep feeling:

*Cool crescent moon
shining faintly high above
Feather Black Mountain*

*How many rising
clouds collapse and fall on
this moonlit mountain*

*Forbidden to speak
alone on Yudono Mountain
tears soak through my sleeves*

(Translations by Sam Hamill)

Basho's religious feeling in prose, and a haiku of fleeting yugen

The temple doors, built on rocks, were bolted. I crawled among boulders to make my bows at shrines. The silence was profound. I sat, feeling my heart begin to open.

*Lonely stillness –
a single cicada's cry
sinking into stone*

Dogen wrote, "To forget the Self is to forget even the attachment to the goal..." There is a great joke at the heart of *form* and *emptiness*: the attempt to do something ambitious with Nature, take a ride on it, polish it and display it, make it beautiful, is delusional. Best leave it alone. Stop striving. It's absurd. You can't do emptiness as a performance.

Basho appears to approach this problem from an oblique angle, saying something like this: Practising an art is not itself empty, but the haibun form can open a dialogue with emptiness, dramatising form and emptiness as the *Heart Sutra* does when denying the value of the Four Noble Truths, or denying old age and death. The Way of Elegance makes the most transitory trivia into delicate observations which become mysteriously lovely, and interesting. Impermanence is always the subject, observed through seasons, and never nailed down, but something artistic is our form of fascination, and a pleasure.

THE BOAT MONK AND THE 'ZENNY' TEACHER¹

EDDY STREET

There are many Zen stories that are important for us to know. These stories are often dialogues between Masters and their students with the most well-known of them found in the collections of koans such as *The Book of Serenity* and *The Blue Cliff Record*. These collections were assembled by the compilers, who then provided commentaries and to do this they took bits of interactions that were reported in written biographies and accounts of Chan Masters. Hence, the initial origin of these stories was in older biographies, not the koan collections which are the basis of formalised koan practice.

Sometimes particular stories do not appear in these koan collections but still the stories are well known and used by many teachers to illustrate points that they wish to make. Master Dogen used his own compiled collections of dialogues to inform his teachings and he did not provide commentaries as such but he made reference to these dialogues in his talks. One story that it is important for us is about Chan Master Chuanzi Dechang who was known as the ferryman or the boat monk.

This story was first presented in the classic history collection about Masters known as *The Five Lamps Merged in the Source*.² It was taken up by Dogen and is particularly mentioned in his 'Mountains and Water Sutra' (Sansui-kyo)³ and also in other places in his talks. It might be that this use of the story has given it its popularity amongst teachers. Whatever its source, elements of it are referred to by numerous teachers both ancient and modern: for example, Master Sheng Yen refers to it in his

book, *Attaining the Way: A Guide to Chan Practice*.⁴ The story of Dechang and his student Jiashan Shanhui provides us with numerous metaphors about practice; many teachers pick up themes related to the nature of the relationship between student and teacher and others on the way teaching can be considered. At a more straightforward level, we can focus on what the story may have to say about our own practice and how we consider it.

Chuanzi Dechang was a student of Yaoshan and he studied with him for about 30 years. After this time, he received Dharma transmission but shortly after his transmission, he told his Dharma brothers that he did not consider himself fit to lead a monastery or a group of monks. He thought that the nature of his mind and his behaviour was a bit too undisciplined for the formalities and regularities of monastic life and so in terms of the idiom of the day he 'broke the rice bowl' and left holy orders. To 'break the rice bowl' was a term used about ancient Chinese monks when they gave up monastic life not because they were fed up of it or disappointed with where they had got to (referred to as 'discarding the robes'), but as in Dechang's case because he clearly felt that his path was outside the formal rigours of the monastery.

So even with considerable attainment recognised by his teacher he took up rowing people across a river, working as a self-employed ferryman. Undoubtedly, in terms of the saying, he was 'going to the marketplace and beating the silent hammer'. However, before he left his Dharma brothers he told them that if they came across somebody who had the clear ability to realise and actualise the Dharma but who needed help, then they should send this person to him. Certainly, Dechang understood that even though he was no longer a monk in a formal way,

he, as a bodhisattva, could still impart the Dharma to those that required it. We can also imagine that as he rowed his boat across the river, Dechang would talk to his passengers about their daily life and introduce the Zen perspective and Buddhist ethics into the conversation. This is perhaps how he got his name the 'boat monk'.

Whilst he was a simple ferryman Dechang wrote a well-known poem 'Angling for the Great Function' which is full of beautiful symbolism about Zen practice. In fishing terms it refers to trying to catch the golden fish of enlightenment. Perhaps also this poem led to this story's frequent references by Zen teachers.

Angling for the Great Function⁵

*Thirty years on the river bank,
Angling for the great function,
If you don't catch the golden fish, it's all in vain.
You may as well reel in and go back home.*

*Letting down the line ten thousand feet,
A breaking wave makes ten thousand ripples.
At night in still water, the cold fish won't bite.
An empty boat filled with moonlight returns.*

*Sailing the sea for thirty years,
The fish seen in clear water won't take the hook.
Breaking the fishing pole, growing bamboo,
Abandoning all schemes, one finds repose.*

*There's a great fish that can't be measured.
It embraces the astonishing and wondrous!*

*In wind and thunder transformed,
How can it be caught?*

*Others only seek gathering lotus flowers,
Their scent pervading the wind.*

*But as long as there are two shores and a lone red boat,
There's no escape from pollution, nor any attainment of emptiness.*

*If you asked, "Is this lone boat all there is in life?"
I'd say, "Descendants will each see the results."*

Not depending on earth or heaven,

When the rain shawl is removed, nothing's left to pass on.

It is in these images that we find our first lessons; when we begin practice we are undoubtedly fishing for something. We have a clear idea what this fish looks like, it's big, golden, powerful, not angry, not depressed, gets on with its parents, has no problems with its partner, it is a wonderful, well liked being etc etc. It is indeed a sublime fish. Sometimes when we are fishing, something gets on our hook and when we reel it in, we find it is a big dragon that frightens us and wants to bite off our head and we stop fishing for a while. Sometimes we catch a tiddler, look at it quickly and discard it by throwing it back into the water - of course this may be a mistake as there -might be value in that tiddler. But basically, even though we think we can see a big sublime fish in the water, we don't catch it and the harder we try the further it dives below the surface. Dechang teaches us that perhaps we should break the fishing pole and abandon desires and wishes as it might be then that we find repose.

So here is Dechang rowing back and fore across the river, sometimes fishing, sometimes not, and after a period of time one of his Dharma

brothers comes across someone who may need help, Jiashan. It was obvious that Jiashan had a great intellectual understanding of the Dharma but he was clearly one of those Zen practitioners who when asked ‘what is Zen?’ would say something like “the nothing of everything and the everything of nothing”.

Now we have all met somebody like this, who just trots out platitudes and the things they read in books or heard in Dharma talks. “Oh yes I have a beginner’s mind” - whatever that means. Intellectualisation is a great problem amongst those who wish to follow Zen practice, particularly those who read a lot or like to listen to teachers. It is so easy to believe that you understand something from the written page or a talk but Zen practice is much more. Realisation, actualisation and one's own personal experience and practice of your own life are central to what we do, and you do not find these things in books or in pictures of fish!

So another important lesson in this story is the danger of intellectualisation. But our zenhead friend, Jiashan, had great determination and great commitment and when Dechang’s Dharma brother pointed out his problems to him Jiashan asked what he could do about this and how he could extend his true appreciation of the Dharma. Another lesson. Commitment and an awareness of one's faults and problems are companions that are constantly with us on our Zen path. The Dharma brother realised that this was a case ‘of different strokes for different folks’ and that he himself could not help this person but he knew a man who could. And so he sent him to Dechang, telling him not to go along in his teaching robes but just go along as an ordinary monk traveller.

So off goes Jiashan and meets Dechang and straight away Dechang asked him in which temple he lives. Jiashan considers this to be the be-

ginning of a Zen dialogue and so he wishes to answer in as clever a ‘Zen way’ as possible, so he says something like “I do not abide in a temple. Where I abide is not like...” Of course, Dechang instantly recognises the meaningless, almost rehearsed, answer and says the ancient Chinese equivalent of “don't give me that bullshit”. Jiashan tries to say something else and Dechang asks him where he acquired his understanding. Off into zennyness again, Jiashan says, “not in a place which the eyes or ears can perceive”. Dechang has had enough of this trite phraseology and tells him that these are just intellectual phrases which have resulted in him being like a donkey “tied to a post for 10,000 years”. Dealing with the Dharma from a purely intellectual foundation is the same as being tied up, with there being no development of practice from that position.

To counter the intellectual approach of Jiashan, Dechang uses some of the imagery from the poem that he had written “you've let down a 1000-foot 1,000 foot fishing line, you are fishing very deep, but your hook is still short by 3 inches”. Dechang has clearly recognised Jiashan's ability, but he lacked that move away from intellectualisation that would allow him to integrate all his understanding into actualised reality. Dechang shouted at him “Say something, say something”.

Then in usual Zen master fashion before Jiashan can say anything Dechang hits him into the river with the boat oar. Wet through, the great intellectual teacher scrambles back into the boat. “Say something, say something” Dechang shouts at him again. With water dripping all over his face Jiashan opens his mouth to speak but Dechang hits him with the oar again and again he falls into the river. Slightly unusual for these types of Zen stories this only happens twice rather than the typical three times as it is after the second hit that Jiashan attains great enlightenment.

Beyond words. Beyond intellectualisation. Beyond seeking. Just wet in a rocking old boat with a slightly crazy ferryman.

We are of course familiar with the ways that these stories impress on us the immediacy of enlightenment, being hit by a stick, kicking a pebble against the bamboo, breaking a bowl and now being pushed off a boat into a river. But all these things happen after that student has studied for many years with great persistence and great endeavour.

In this story Dechang and Jiashan continue their dialogue in terms of a fishing rod and line. In one way this is about how important it is to help people attain the way and it is also about how you have to use words and some intellectualisation to help people understand the Dharma. But then, Jiashan pulls us firmly back onto the experience path as when they are talking, he covers his ears as he wishes to hear no more words. So another lesson, we need some words but it is also beyond words. With this action, Dechang approves the way in which Jiashan now understands the Dharma and encourages him to go and establish his own teaching place away from the city. So Jiashan leaves Dechang but keeps looking back and Dechang sees this and wondered if he has any doubt for he then shouts to Jiashan “do you think there is anything else?” What else could there be? We need great doubt but, as we have found out, actualisation of the Dharma is beyond this. Is there anything else?

The story ends after Dechang shouts out his question, for he then goes to the middle of the river in his boat, rolls it over and disappears into the water forever. Just a metaphor for how an enlightened person can come and go as he or she wishes. It also signifies that in the histories it is the last we hear about Dechang. Jiashan went on to become a very well-known Chan master and he was considered to be the first that made

the close link between Zen and drinking tea; “Zen, tea, one taste”. After his death, he was given the name ‘Great Teacher Transmitting Clarity’. This story like many others in the Chan/Zen canon offers us instructions on important points about our own practice. For us today, if there is one lesson to take away, then it is the next time you have water on your face, experience the wetness not as wetness, but just as it is.

NOTES

1. Based on a talk given at the Scout Hut, Canton Cardiff May 2014
2. This book was initially published in 1253. There does not appear to be an accessible modern version.
3. *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo* translated by Gudo Nishijima & Chodro Cross (1994). Windbell. Woking
4. Master Sheng Yen (2006) *Attaining the Way: A Guide to Chan Practice*. Shambala. Boston.
5. Translated by Andy Ferguson (2000) in *Zen's Chinese Heritage*. Wisdom. Boston.

SIX HAIKUS

JOS HADFIELD

Standing in the yard,
my face turned up to the sky;
soft blessings of rain.

I look down to see
two old hands resting on my lap;
winter is coming.

Shimmering orange
of the tree's pyrotechnics;
the dark bracken rests.

I was thinking of
the purity of lotus blossoms,
and slipped in the mud.

Backlit by a flame
I see my projection,
watchfully waiting.

TWO POEMS

DAVID VALENTINE-HAGART

QUITE MIND

When the quiet mind comes
 I am moving up steadily
 Hold after hold
 Rock is under my hands
 Under my feet
 Sky above
 Earth below

When the quiet mind comes
 I am in the midst of music
 Note following note
 Hands, steel and timber
 All one
 As each song unfolds

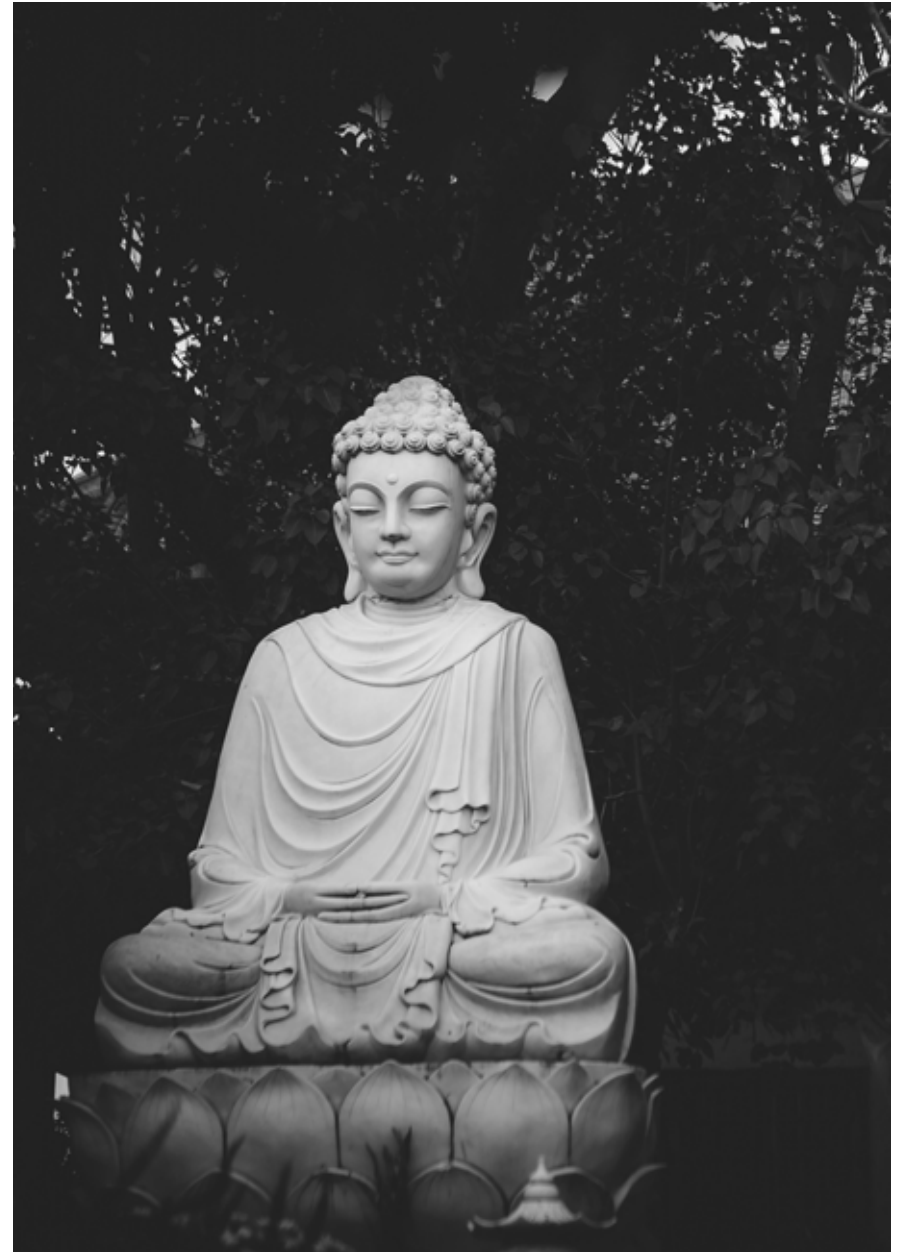
When the quiet mind comes
 I am ocean floating
 On a glassy board
 Waiting for the only wave
 That will carry me
 To shore

When the quiet mind comes
 I am often in my garden
 Tending to my friend
 Loving living growing things
 Creation
 Without end

When we seek this state
 We're pursuing that which leaves
 No tracks
 Looking for a dawn
 That never comes
 Instead
 Just do what's needing to be done
 And notice
 Simply notice
 When your quiet mind comes

DAY RETREAT IN YORK. MARCH 2015

Sitting in York
The sun breaks through
The clouds
Our shadows suddenly black
Against the warm
Wood floor
Then clouds come
Once more
The shadows fade
And are gone
In that moment
Oneness
Shows itself





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- contacts for local meditation groups

Contacting Us

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

www.westernchanfellowship.org/contacts/committee-and-officers

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

www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups

To contact our overseas Groups and overseas contacts go to:

www.westernchanfellowship.org/chan-meditation-groups/overseas-groups

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.org. 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

We will also be offering our programme of residential retreats at Shawbottom Farm, our beautiful new retreat centre near Leek in Derbyshire. Shawbottom is a simple and very comfortable centre, with such mod cons as underfloor heating and electric lights! It includes accommodation for a wheelchair user and helper, and is accessible by public transport.

WESTERN ZEN RETREAT

27 July to 1 August

Leader: Jake Lyne

ILLUMINATING THE MIND

17 to 24 August

Leader: Simon Child

FINDING FREEDOM

5 to 10 October

Leaders: Alysun Jones & Juliet Hackney

INVESTIGATING KOANS

2 to 9 November

Leader: Simon Child

WESTERN ZEN RETREAT

30 November to 5 December

Leader: Simon Child

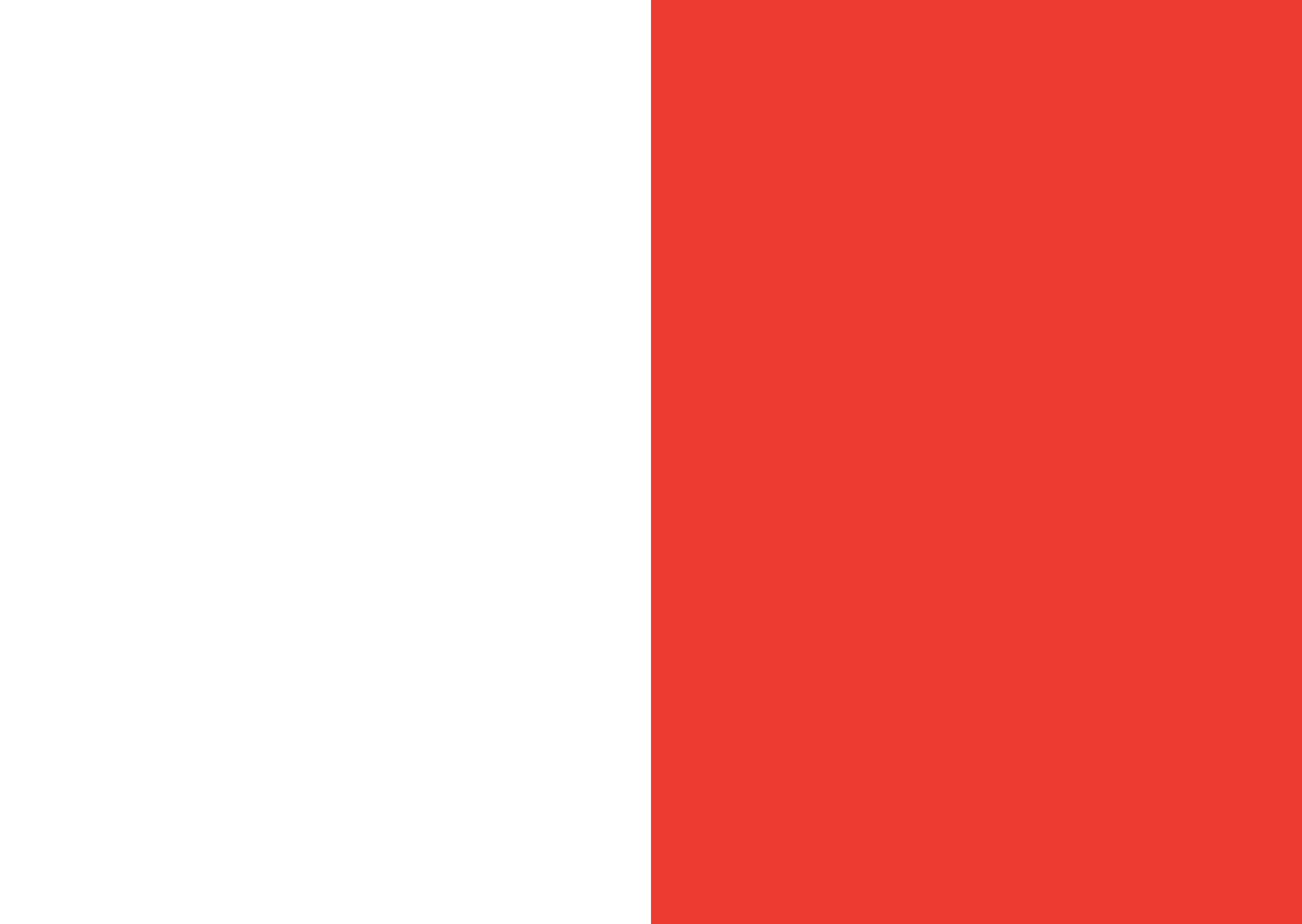
ILLUMINATING THE MIND

4 to 11 January 2025

Leader: Simon Child

NEW CHAN FORUM

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*Just look right here.
Don't seek transcendent enlightenment.
Just observe and observe: suddenly you'll laugh aloud.
Beyond this there's nothing that can be said.*

ZEN MASTER TA HUI

