

Punk Monk Enters State of Enchantment

By Willem Malten

Moving in those days -- -- was mainly a mental affair.

Now, of course that would be different considering all the property and things that Santa fe has gifted me over the years. But at that time --the fall of 1983-- there was not yet a noose of responsibilities and dead weight around my neck like that --I was free. Coming from the Zen Center in California I had just a couple of bags carrying all my belongings when I arrived in ABQ. In them were an odd mixture of Buddhist books, robes, an old brown leather vest (a little too small), some shirts from the goodwill at Tassajara (always good stuff because of the quality of the guests that visited that Zen Resort in the Carmel Mountains), a hat, and curiously, a pair of black leather pants that I must have carried around from an even earlier previous life --coming of age in Amsterdam. Remnant of urban angst.

I wasn't hauling that much stuff, and after 4 years of sitting Zazen I was relatively free from preconceived notions as to where I was going. Frankly I had no idea other than some vague expectations that came from of children's adventure books that dealt with Hopi children Yazze and Kiwani, and the Wild West. Carl May and stuff.

Some months previously things had hit the fan in Tassajara Zen Mountain Center between Richard Baker Roshi and Paul Hawkins and many others who played some role in this affair were affected. It has been written about elsewhere and it is not that important any longer to repeat the story here, other than to say that the whole tragedy had been a totally humbling experience for me personally.

In that situation I had to realize what Trungpa calls: "Cutting through Spiritual Materialism". In the process of Zen Center falling apart around me I realized that I had practiced Buddhism kind of as a carrier. Regardless of any of the deep yogic states of mind I may have been able to access sitting, day after day, on top of a black zafu --breathing in, breathing out hour after hour, the thing about it was that I had a certain pride in them. And in having no hair, self-righteously having no property to worry about and meanwhile being a monk --it was like an addiction. All of these fantasies came tumbling down like a rain of bricks, as I lay hours on my futon staring at the wood ceiling of a cabin --way away from anywhere, while a palace coup was unfolding elsewhere on the grounds of the monastery.

Coinciding with Baker's loss of status as the Roshi and CEO of the Zen Center somehow I had personally run into a wall. And I think that many monks and lay people alike felt like that, around that time. A sadness and desperation had taken hold of the sangha --much like we feel now about the war in Iraq.

The tensions were kind of brewing at a dangerous level in meeting after meeting within the closed monastery. It seemed that things could go wrong, very vague echoes of Jonestown had started to resonate. I felt most concerned about Baker Roshi himself--whether justified or not -- I thought that suicide was a real possibility and that would be the last thing that I wanted to see

happen –the master committing harakiri –imagine --another stain on one’s soul ! So I sought him out in nightly meetings during his time, and my time, of need.

Why ? In my case this was simple: Richard Baker and his Zen Center had provided a refuge for me, this intentional commune had welcomed me and reformed me from an Amsterdam Punk with suicidal romantic notions, into a disciplined yogic monk, with a will and commitment to live. It taught me how to bake bread. I have always felt grateful to him for that.

Anyhow it was during this time that Baker brought up the possibility of going to Santa Fe and live in the Chorten on Cerro Gordo Road—a Tibetan stupa and Zen meditation room, next to what is now Upaya. The idea to live in a desert some six thousand feet high sounded exotic. After all I was born some 12 feet below sea level.

Meanwhile during meditation I tried to visualize what I was going to do in Santa Fe. Finally, after years of anthropology study in Amsterdam, and then years of meditation in California I felt ready for the challenge of stepping into the ‘real world’ with no other protection than intent and energy. Practicing yes, but as an anonymous person in society. Yet it was totally unclear how or what things would manifest. This was a source of some anxiety and when that samsara was finally exhausted in meditation, suddenly an image came up in my mind. A Gate, and over that entrance way it said “Cloud Cliff”. This was the seed.

Ungan (Cloud Cliff) asks his master: “What are all the hands and eyes of Avalokiteshvara all about ?”

Tozan answers: “It is like groping for a pillow in the dark”

Ungan: “Oh.... I understand now....”

Tozan:”How do you understand it....?”

Ungan: “All over the body there are eyes and there are hands”

Tozan: “You are almost right“

Ungan: “ what would you say, master ?”

Tozan: “Throughout the body there are eyes and there are hands?”

I no longer wore my robe to the Zendo and I announced that I would leave the monastery after working as a baker during the summer guest season.

One day in early August I slipped out of the monastery and met Baker at the San Francisco Airport. This was going to be a reconnaissance trip into new territory.

After landing in ABQ, still morning, Richard Baker drove the rental car over the I 25 to Santa Fe. At that time –perhaps more so than now thanks to the recent years of more rain, the fragile

hills along the I25 looked like one step away from stone and sand desert. Really barren, punctuated by small pinons –like a giant kitty litter box.

Baker was thinking aloud about the possible health hazards that are associated with living in El Norte. He said to be careful with extra ultraviolet (now of course intensified by a thinning Ozone layer also) over a place like New Mexico, he wondered about food and water quality, And then, looking at the Jemez Mountains he said: “ and in those mountains is Los Alamos, birthplace of the bomb, that might carry some health risk as well”.

Like so many of us moving to New Mexico, at that time I had no idea that when living in adobe new age santa fe meant being neighbors of the laboratories that produced the deadly weapons that befell on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and claimed so many indigenous peoples and others all over the world. A very shocking awakening. Still sitting in the car I made a vow to resist, expose and speak out against the nuclear mission like I do now. It has been one of the few vows I have been able to keep in my life, and it has drawn me closer to native people, to the earth, and to the life of Jesus.

The nuclear weapons mission is really the epitome of injustice, perpetual inequality, torture, destruction, terror and fear and death all rolled into one little ball of plutonium and controlled by very few members of the human race. Places like Los Alamos call forth tiny elites, effectively dictatorships. Think about it: genocidal weapons hollow out the very possibility of true democracy.

Thus the sacrifice that we make to keep hosting this genocidal machine on our soil, goes much deeper than environmental or health abuse – it eats away at our souls. We become unable to take care of each other, unable to commit to a different future, slavishly believing that the federal money that comes with the labs is the only way to economically survive in New Mexico. Dead inside. Let’s wake up to the lie of New Mexico, throw those lying clowns out of office, unmask the hideous nature of Bechtel and Lockheed Martin, invest locally, become carbon neutral, become nuclear free and gain some self-respect in the process: It started here –let’s stop it here. Land of Enchantment can no longer mean State of Delusion.

What true Enchantment means is to endow everything with song and make it sacred.

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