

Willem Malten on Zen, Chorten and Padwa's death.

Brief context:

In Amsterdam I had very interesting and let's call it deep experiences doing yogic postures and Zen meditation, light and everything, early on, mid-seventies. I had been sitting by myself for 5 years or so. You see: Going really groovy, sometimes sitting straight for 5 or 6 hours at once. Dutch people around me felt there was something strange happening with me, and I became pretty isolated on the Wytttenbach straat in Amsterdam. At that time there was not much practice around in the Netherlands, let alone a Sangha. So there was nowhere to go with any questions about the practice itself. I wanted the 'real' thing, but that is all I knew.

To make a long story short, after a brief correspondence with Baker Roshi, I ended up in the Zen Center in San Francisco, confident that the Zennies could show me the way; after all they were a monastery and that is what they were doing all the time; Zen meditation. I was wrong; though there was a lot of meditation, there was very little interest or knowledge of kundalini experiences or any of that. Sangha was everything; so I let go of seeking any fanciful states of mind. Just sitting.

Eventually I ended up in Tassajara. Way out of civilization, a resort along a creek, California. I found it a relieve not having to talk with anyone, meanwhile getting really quiet inside as well. But then the big drama happened around Baker Roshi. He had slept with another woman, not his wife and the whole place went bananas around it. You can read about that elsewhere, I am not going to say anything more about that here. Just for me personally it was uncomfortable; so much so that I felt I had to leave Tassajara before a Jonestown massacre could develop in a Zen monastery. I had to admit: I did not understand America; I wanted out. And I mentioned that in one of the many meetings discussing the situation. Then I walked over to Baker Roshi's cabin and told him the same thing. Count me out, I am leaving.

Baker Roshi then mentioned the Chorten in Santa Fe for the first time to me. Why don't you go there? Practice there?

A few days later in complete secrecy we flew to New Mexico together, Baker Roshi and me in American Airways, to check the Chorten out and meet with Jonathan Altman who was the caretaker of the Chorten property at that time, and he had been a student of Suzuki Roshi early on. For the first time I heard Baker also mention the name of David Padwa then, who had had a hand in building the Chorten somehow. And Padwa apparently played a role in funding the emergence of Buddhism in America. I could understand that he had been a real long term friend of Baker.

David Padwa wanted the Chorten be non-denominational, even though a lot of lamas had helped to shape it, it was not Tibetan, not even Zen —it was all of them. He talked a lot about the rimpoches that had been involved in erecting the Stupa and I had always been always fascinated by Trungpa's teaching. Padwa said that he himself had recommended kind of a Trungpa type Vajrayana approach to Richard's Zen center problems. Radical clean up.....? But in a way Baker was too timid; he couldn't do it. Nevertheless Padwa had made peace with Baker's way and they remained friends regardless. Living in the Chorten certainly had its own adventures. Once over the phone, Padwa directed me to a secret spot in the Chorten and told me how to retrieve a 4 oz gold bar; if it was still there ? Thank God..... It was.

Padwa eventually moved back from Boulder to Santa Fe, he became a customer of Cloud Cliff, my bakery, and even later when Cloud Cliff had moved to a much larger building on second street...David asked me to organize a wedding celebration for him and Bettina, at Cloud Cliff which I did. Large dinner, wine and desert, music, entertainment, everything. Probably one of the largest festivities in the Cloud Cliff history which says a lot; Everybody came though Baker Roshi was somehow not there, but instead some British Royals were. At least that is what David told me afterwards.

After all that Padwa and me stayed friends though he may not like that word; He was a difficult customer so to speak, so bright and challenging almost all the time...somehow it was a kick for him.

We too had disagreements at times....also about Buddhism but mainly technical. Like: he invited me once, really not that long ago, in redesigning the Chorten's entrance. Thought we seemed to agree a long ways, in the

end he got really mad with me since I had misunderstood him somehow. I had wanted to take the whole Chorten wall out so that the Stupa would be visible and accessible from the park itself.....not a secret any longer —All wrong of course.

Doesn't matter. David and I kept meeting mostly by chance, on walks in the neighborhood, and out of the blue he would invite me for dinner with Bettina and he would discuss Buddhism coming to the West.

Just last week on my way back from an Upper Canyon walk with my Akita, a few blocks from Padwa's house I considered for a moment visiting him and somehow I decided against that, and drove home instead. That was the day David Padwa died...but of course I only realized that only a few days later.

Padwa's presence is everywhere now.