

cloud-hidden friends letter

A ZEN BUDDHIST PERIODICAL IN THE SPIRIT OF THE UNIVERSAL DHARMA

Fourth Issue of 1987

Issue #25



The Cloud-Hidden Friends are a religious shared-correspondence group. Some of us are inclined towards Zen, and most of us are Buddhists, but the Dharma spirit we aim for is a free-ranging and universal one.

Our "subscription fee" is not a monetary one. We would rather have your participation. This could be by writing a letter now and then for our pages, or by personally replying to a contributor to the CHFL.

Hopefully our letters will help us to open up more to each other. Perhaps more than a few good friendships in the Dharma might result.

Our phrase "Cloud-Hidden" is taken from the title of a book by Alan Watts. He in turn borrowed it from a ninth century Chinese poem by Chia Tao. Lin Yutang translates it as follows:

Searching For The Hermit, In Vain
I asked the boy beneath the pines.
He said, "The master's gone alone,
Herb-picking somewhere on the mount,
Cloud-hidden, whereabouts unknown."

CHFL, c/o The Floating Zendo, 753 44th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94121

NEWS & NOTES

We need more Sutras, Commentaries, and Gathas! Are we going to accept the notion that Buddhist Literature is frozen to the past? Since we all have the Buddha Nature, we are the ones who have to keep up the good work. That may seem pretty ambitious, but at least we might consider writing down a few fumbling experimental preliminary thoughts in such a direction, and this might then be shared with the CHF. Who knows, it might be something which will grow into some grander version in the future. And if you can't find a publisher, remember there is always the CHF, although I don't know what we would do if we suddenly started receiving 100 page magnum-opus Sutras. Come to think of it, maybe Gathas would be better, at least until our resources become somewhat larger.

The next issue of the CHF will hopefully be out in time to greet the Holy-Days of the year-end.

You all are no doubt aware of the recent Buddhist up-risings in Tibet. If you haven't written your congressman already, please consider doing so. Also I even am optimistic enough to think that an intelligent letter to the Chinese might be actually listened to.

The recent Ring of Bone Zendo Newsletter has a fine quote from Thoreau that I can't resist including here:

MATTER

I stand in awe of my body
This matter to which I am bound
has become so strange to me --
I fear not spirits, ghosts, (of which I am one)
But I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them.
What is this Titan that has possession of me?
Talk of mysteries
Think of our life in nature --
Daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it --
Rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks!
The SOLID earth! The ACTUAL world! the COMMON sense!

CONTACT! CONTACT! WHO are we! WHERE are we?

Namaste,

Ananda Claude Dalenberg
Clerk, CHF Letter

For the CHF

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From Marian Mountain

August 16, 1987

Dear Friends,

I woke up this morning to a cool, overcast day. After reviewing my options I felt it would be fitting to spend a couple of hours of the Harmonic Convergence writing a letter for the CHFL. It occurs to me that the Cloud Hidden Friends Letter provides a continuous expression of Harmonic Convergence, bringing the members closer together, year after year.

I've been moved by many inspiring and encouraging letters in the past four or five issues of the CHFL. I'd like to comment on one--Lynn Olson's letter on Buddha's First Noble Truth in issue twenty-four. The way Lynn fleshed out the bare bones of "Life is Suffering", using the simple examples drawn from personal experience, brought Buddha's First Noble Truth to life. As one who wasted years searching for psychological and spiritual ways to escape her personal lot of suffering, I can testify to the importance of Lynn's main point: until we allow ourselves to experience fully our particular karmic allotment of suffering we won't be able to accept or follow the rest of Buddha's program leading to the end of suffering. (The Sanskrit word "dukkha", which is usually translated as "suffering" or "ill" may come closer to the meanings of the English words "frustration", "disappointment" or "imperfection".)

Lest anyone be left with the mistaken impression, after reading Lynn's letter, that Buddhism advocates asceticism, I'd like to suggest adding two words to Lynn's postulation that "Buddhism becomes a 'skillful means' for increasing suffering until it becomes unbearably real and actual". A more faithful rendering might be: "Buddhism becomes a skillful means for increasing awareness of suffering until it becomes unbearably real and actual." Without full awareness of suffering we can't diagnose our spiritual illness accurately.

This spring Jack and I drove to California to attend a long-awaited family reunion with four of my five children and six of my seven grandchildren. The day before we reached the

Bay Area I came down suddenly with appendicitis. For twenty-four hours I didn't suspect what it was I had. At first I thought it was indigestion. As the pain increased and I began vomiting I thought it was food poisoning. In the emergency room of a small hospital in Garberville, the doctor who examined me had difficulty diagnosing the illness. He gave me medication to calm down my vomiting but nothing to deaden the pain. He explained that it was important for me to be able to report accurately on the exact location of the pain and whether it increased or decreased. The next morning the pain moved to the right side of my abdomen. The doctor and I both became convinced that I had appendicitis. The operation that evening confirmed our diagnosis.

The process of diagnosing and treating a spiritual illness is similar to the process of diagnosing and treating a physical illness. The program of zazen and everyday mindfulness, which I began under the guidance of Suzuki Roshi, helped me become more aware of the true nature of my suffering. In time I realized my suffering was due to the desire to escape from "what is". At that point I was able to accept Step Two of Buddha's Four Noble Truths: "The Cause of Suffering is Desire." Now I had my feet planted firmly on the ground of Buddha's path. Pursuing this path, year after year, it became easier and easier to accept the imperfections of life. I learned to stop frustrating myself. Disappointments no longer upset me as much as they had in the past.

The doctors and nurses who took care of me in the hospital in Garberville said I made a remarkably speedy recovery from my operation, considering my age. I believe this was due, in large part, to the ability I had acquired in zazen practice, of concentrating on the present moment. All my energy was centered on "what is" instead of being drained away by the disappointment of missing my reunion.

Buddha-willing, there will be a Harmonic Convergence of my family members next year.

With palms together,

Marian

ADDICTIONS

We know we are going to have to stop the arms race;
but it goes on and on.

We know we have to stop polluting our environment;
but we keep on producing
waste and dumping it.

We know we'll have to stop drinking and smoking,
but.....

Something is going wrong in spite of our desperate efforts
to change.

Is there reason to worry?

Most of us live pretty comfortable lives, compared to
those millions in other parts of the world where hunger
and oppression are facts of daily living.

What, then, is it?

Maybe we are feeling vaguely guilty for having our
affluence bought at other peoples' and creatures'
expense. Maybe we are aware that we will not be spared
in the coming wars about the distribution of riches.
Or is it that nagging feeling of moral and spiritual
emptiness that cannot be filled by adding more of the
same stuff?

While I am writing this, another animal species on this
planet has probably become extinct.

There is no reason why our own species should be
spared...

Sounds quite hopeless, doesn't it?

We might as well go down to the bar and get drunk;
hopelessly drunk.

Of course, that is how we exactly how we are going to speed
up our destruction.

Alcoholics cannot tolerate being sober for any extended
period of time. It makes them too nervous.

They also need to drink more than on their last binge
in order to get the same level of high. To feel safe.
Of course they always feel very guilty the day after.
And talk about really wanting to stop.

Our governments keep setting up more and more
missiles while talking about the need to get
rid of them.

continued

It might be that they are getting high on missiles. At any rate, they want us to believe that they'll make us more secure.

The truth is, of course, that weapons makes our lives less secure.

But we like our illusions. They ~~gxxxxxxx~~ save us from making some painful changes.

Addicts usually do not make any fundamental changes in their lives until they hit bottom.

We run our lives in the same manner that we run our economies, environments and our relations with foreign ~~xxxxxxx~~ nations.

In order to feel safe, we put more of the same dangerous stuff into our bodies and our environments, knowing very well that this behavior will ultimately end in disaster.

It's not easy to live with that knowledge. We feel our anxiety level rising again. We will need to have another drink...

Somewhere down the line, we must have realized that we cannot live without our drugs any more. They are now running ou lives. They are now built into our system, and we cannot just get rid of them without developing severe withdrawal symptoms.

That gets us even more scared. We are feeling trapped. Seems like every step we take to cure our disease will take us closer to self-destruction.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

So what is to be done? Is there anything to be done? What is it that needs to be changed?

I cannot give any advice for action.

But I know one thing: The last thing we need in this seemingly desperate situation is despair. Despair and hopelessness will only feed into our self-destructive behavior.

Instead, we will have to face reality.

The circle can be broken - if we have nthe courage to see the truth.

It is I, Ananda - your long-negligent correspondent of Taoist pretensions, writing from the wilderness of an unpredictable life. (Not that any life could be predictable, but that I deliberately avoid that element which many people seem to yearn for...or else feel entrapped by.) Each time your faithful CHF letter arrives I swear I will respond; and each time I am surprised at the swiftness with which it is followed by another. Such is the pace at which this life flows. But I grasp this moment, and hope to gain enough momentum in it to fulfill the desire and commitment.

I have just, in recent months, turned sixty and I have news for all who gaze apprehensively at these "heights" from anywhere near (or even far below) in the chrono-landscape: nothing deteriorates except a bit of one's physical dexterity. That is to say, everything interior connected with the freshness of youth - energy, vitality, new beginnings, radical change, and the excitement and stimulus therefrom - all these qualities either persist or can be regenerated. The physical constraints are a mere annoyance. Of course, this may be dependent, to some extent, on what has been put into the years prior.

Oh, I might add that one's memory behaves a bit differently, but this, too, is no more (or need be) than a mere annoyance. The point I make is that the last third of life - or such lesser fragment as it may be - can open with as much a sense of springtime as any other.

It's been barely two years since I was happily settled in what could be called an early retirement... a Berkeley garden cottage in the midst of a collective family environment, inexpensive in every way, almost all my time to myself and happily put into various projects and pastimes. Unaccountably, it began to feel like a life too stable - yes, too predictable - and that I was at risk of becoming "old" simply by default. I had practiced the art of simple living for years, and had refined my personal reality to the point where there was no struggle left...but also little challenge. This, at least, is my reflective assessment; at the time, the urge I felt was to go for "one last road-trip"... to put myself at the measure of a bottom-line test of my premise that Spirit will affirm Life regardless of apparent material circumstances. Providence, I felt sure, should support me as readily a thousand miles away and homeless, as in the securely nested comfort of my Berkeley world.

As I recall, I had about \$150 with me when I set out on the adventure, and hardly much more left in reserve. I travelled, that summer of '85, in the high yet humble spirit of a pilgrim, hitch-hiking my way around the country, testing this "free-floating" form of a faith in the Universe...as it was testing me. And it quite fulfilled my every need for transport and sustenance: I returned to California with just about as much money as I had begun the journey with.

Circumstance then drew me to the northwest, in what was envisioned as a visit, since California, even sans residence, remained "my home". Indeed, I had only two or three friends in the Seattle area, through whom this steady support of Providence could reasonably be expected to reach me. Only a fool would have essayed a northwest winter in such circumstances - "out on a limb," in every sense. A fool or one fully in trust of the Universe, and I was still an apprentice.

The years of my apprenticeship, however - and particularly in the Taoist perspective - had gradually freed me from our particular cultural insistence on "taking charge of one's life." In fact, I want to editorialize here, for a moment, Ananda, on a strange discontinuity that seems to have arisen among those who are striving spiritually, in these times.

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There is some sense, at large, that in creating our own reality we can or should create a material abundance in the process. It is largely overlooked that this is *precisely what American values have done* in the past century and more: created a reality of material affluence, and suffered what I will submit is the inevitable consequence: a reality also of spiritual poverty. For, despite the unity or wholeness of our cosmic origins, the manifest world in which we pass this construct of time and life is necessarily composed of dualisms - or else it couldn't exist! And one of the prime dualisms is matter vs. spirit; either one of these is enhanced only to the detriment of the other. To seek a balance is admirable, but nobody knows the point of actual balance; and the nature of the life lived is necessarily shadowed (or illumined, if you prefer) by the usually overbalanced leaning of our chosen course.

It has been said, in this regard, that one cannot at the same time serve God and Mammon. For those who would pursue a balance, it need be noted that balance is not a direction but a summarizing concept...we actually pursue, at any moment, either a material or spiritual realization, and hope that a balance will result. I am reminded of one of my earliest lessons, seated alongside an uncle in his model 'A' Ford, when he let me hold the steering wheel to try and follow a centered course. As firmly as I could grasp the wheel, we'd soon veer to the left or right, until he explained to me that steering a course is a process of continual corrections, from one side to the other. In that earlier instance, the midline of the roadway was a visible guide, but there is no such sure line-of-sight on this spiritual/material journey.

As to abundance, itself, one must realize that the idea - a perfectly fine one - has been sadly corrupted by American materialism. In its classic meaning, abundance is best illustrated by the cornucopia of plenty, which features an overflowing of edibles; an American cornucopia would be overflowing with automobiles, electronics and other symbols of our mania for affluence. An abundance of edibles must be shared, or at least stored, beyond the point of satiation; whereas there is no such thing as satiation, as regards American abundance. These are critical differences, with concomitant effects on spiritual realization.

The point of this diversion from my tale is to note the apparent wisdom of not "taking charge of one's life," but leaving to Nature, Spirit, or the Universe, the determination of what constitutes the needs of one's life - both pathwise and materially. If my premise is correct, the path which opens for us will fulfill every level of need. We need not worry about compromising spirit or materiality, one for the other, for at no point is such a choice required. Our lives become the balance we seek, as we become ever more able to discern (and follow, of course) the path presented to us.

But enough of such commentary. I had fortunately become reasonably adept at "following trail" and it soon became clear that my "visit" to the northwest was to extend through the winter, and I knew the trail must somehow lead to a source of sustenance. Sure enough, it appeared (and quite magically) in the form of caretaking position in the home of a woman with multiple-sclerosis: a strenuous and demanding job, but one not without reward, both spiritual and material.

Trail signals, the following spring - along with my now improved financial position - suggested that I remain in Seattle for the summer to start work on a book I had in mind. I spent the heart of summer in that endeavor - a satisfying way to pass time, although a bit of a lonely way, in a city where one still feels to be a stranger. And in the end (which is to say, by late July) it seemed to leave me stranded, with narrowing finances and no promise of any near-term refurbishment.

continued

Reduced once again to penury, as falltime approached (one who "lives by trail" exercises what often seems regretablely shallow foresight, in retrospect), I once more considered a return to California, but was once more "conscripted by the fates" - this time as the agency for a friend's migration from Arkansas to Washington. Merging our resources, we passed a comfortable winter on Whidbey Island, north of the Seattle metro area. It was comfortable, I should specify, in only physical terms, for my own finances had totally bottomed-out by midwinter and it was apparent that my tenancy on Whidbey - begun with bright prospects - was not being validated by the Universe. I sensed that I must soon leave.

As you might imagine, from the constantly shifting trend of my tale and the apparently rudderless rambling that I keep referring to as a "trail", I was beginning to feel like the old villager in the zen tale whose fortunes, in the light of successive events, can never be said to be either bad or good. It seemed, indeed, a rambling without purpose. But as the year began to flower, everything that had happened to me slowly assumed the dimensions of necessity.

For the sake of an overdue brevity at this point, I will simply say that I find myself now - a half year later - a fulltime student at a local college, midway through a three-term proficiency program in the graphic arts and "desktop publishing." And I must emphasize that it was only by the magic of following such an indecisive trail that all this came to pass for me, for none of it was intended. Without my ever knowing (or seeking) the requirements for a return to school, my trail had circumstantially fulfilled every one of them: a year of residency in the state, qualification by right of poverty for the bootstrap financial assist, and qualification by place of residence (on Whidbey Island) for the particular program under which it was forthcoming.

But even in thusly qualifying, one more bit of circumstantial magic was required. I'd had no further ambition, at the time, than for a course in word-processing...and most curiously it was not available! So I was encouraged to go out and find something that would meet my re-training needs. And I found a program that I had not even imagined for myself.

And still, this unplanned trail continues to unfold: Suddenly I am awash with unexpected 1987-88 financing (the normal educational funding for the insolvent undergrad, but to a simple-living Taoist it is a cornucopian windfall!), and my sights are now set on transferring to a degree program at the U. of Washington. And I swear to you, Ananda, I had absolutely nothing of the sort in mind, even as recently as a month ago! So...never underestimate the potency of not knowing where you're going.

It is quite an energizing experience, to be back on a campus after some forty years away, and to be "prospecting" a continuance in this direction. I find that I'm more than adequately competitive with today's youngsters, and bring to the contest qualities they cannot touch. And it refreshes me immensely, I need hardly add. Whoever thinks sixty is "over the hill", or who foolishly plans on the likelihood that it will be, would be better advised to learn to let Spirit and Nature take a free hand in shaping their future. Conscious mind is simply not expansive enough to know the things actually within our reach, nor creative enough to know how they may be brought to realization. Take it from one who has reason to know.

My best to everyone out there...

Irv Thomas
2112 NE 137th St.
Seattle, WA 98125

Dear Cloud-Hidden Friends:

Thanks to Lynn Olson for identifying some major hurdles/dilemmas inherent in our perception of Buddhistic teachings - principally that "life is suffering". I am no scholar in these matters, and would certainly welcome correction, BUT could it be that "suffering" refers to our existential "pain/terror" of awakening? That all who would wish to awaken to the great illusions that so veil and distort the hidden truths about our existence, MUST experience the full impact of life as essentially illusory, and thus the experience of suffering? In our society we invest in all manner of illusory aids, precisely in order to avoid having to face the dread of awakening, of having to "suffer".

For me the word 'suffering' lies very closely to 'awakening' - much as 'responsibility' lies very closely to 'freedom', and 'wisdom' to 'foolishness'.... which prompts me to share the following recent reflections on this latter pair of "partners".

Foolish Wisdom.

Gassho,



The ABILITY to be foolish or silly, is often essential to anyone wishing to don the responsibility of wisdom. He/she who fears being thought of as foolish, cannot be wise.

To be able to act foolishly, from a position of choice, we need to cast aside all our presumptions and illusions rooted in our personal ego - to let go of whatever keeps us "upright" and highly protective of our many public facades - to give no credence to what others may think of us. We have to be willing to surrender and to be openly vulnerable to the unknown - to risk being annihilated. We have to be willing to die to everything that we have so carefully constructed around ourselves, in our incessant efforts to protect our externally cultivated images and search for security.

One can only afford to be foolish or silly from a position of total authenticity and integrity - any trace of pretentiousness immediately undermines the true potential and value of our foolishness, for we would then be being foolish out of some ego dictated need to be foolish! The moment that we have to be, or want to be, foolish, we have missed the whole point and value of foolishness, as we would be acting on behalf of our ego needs - entrapped by a compelling search for attention, wanting to be noticed, adored, respected, liked etc.

The ability to be unconditionally foolish - that is to say, without seeking any kind of personal gain or return, is absolutely essential if we are to know wisdom.... the wise person can be spontaneously foolish! It has often been noted that people considered to be genuinely wise or perhaps even enlightened (it is interesting to think of enlightenment as meaning made-lightnot heavy...easy) are blessed with a great propensity for laughter, which at times can be quite raucous! Some wise Masters have frequently been known to thus respond to a student's most serious questions!

It is also worthy of note, that the traditional Court Jester or Fool in medieval times, as well as those in Shakespeare's plays, were frequently entrusted with the task of speaking the greatest words of wisdom. They were granted permission, as it were, by the fact that they could be utterly foolish or silly, to express what no one else could risk saying.

But a word of caution to anyone seeking to consciously learn how to laugh for effect - to put forward the jokes and the funny stories, as hidden pleas for acceptance in their bidding for social stature. It is a fine line of distinction that divides these two completely different worlds - the one totally authentic and free from pretensions or conditions; the other totally self-seeking and contrived by the hidden dictates of our insatiable ego needs.

The ability to be foolish or silly from a position of choice, and without any possibility of "hurting" anyone or anything, harbours, in my estimation, one of the great secrets of life, and to understand and experience its active presence in one's life, is indeed a mark of great fortune. Young children, when not self-conscious, enjoy the natural ability to be spontaneously foolish or silly, but alas it is all too soon lost or given up or repressed in the interest of an emerging persona.

How then do we rehabilitate our propensity for healthy foolishness in the adult world? I know of no easy way, and yet it does seem to come as part and parcel of the road well travelled.... if and when we go far enough beyond our ego's influence.

John H. Boyd

CHFL:

Hey, DOM, glad to hear you're still around someplace floatin' in the "clouds". I'd love to hear the late history of Stillpoint, if you're willing.

Hi LYNN, ya Ol'son: "I never promised you a rose garden."

SUFFER = SUB (Lat) + FERRO (Lat) < BHER (PIE): to bear

= a force that lifts up from under and bears the burden (cross).

SUPPORT = SUB + PORTARE (Lat) < PER (PIE): to lead, pass over

> PR-TO: to carry

= a force that rises up from under and carries (transports).

AA, AlAnon, ACoA: I just (June 21st) joined up. There is no question that it is THE American thing: I'd suggest, as a Purist, Tao (Quietism) rather than Buddhist. But that's nitpicking. It is "Psychology" put to work. After all the understanding (therapy), the spirit must be freed to move. That is the essence of ACoA (AA theory) - and IT'S BEAUTIFUL.

My whole life has been dedicated to fixin', rescue and "cross-talk". And here is the truth that American religion forgot: the love of the spirit-breath-atman-etc. "Stuck": Gestalt's "Impasse". My own stuckness has evaporated in the company of others willing to admit to another that they truly are the children of the typical American dysfunctional family.

Dalai Lama: THE EIGHT STANZAS FOR TRAINING THE MIND by Gadamba Geshay Langitangba (AD 1054-1123):

"(4) I will learn to cherish beings of bad nature and those pressed by strong sins and sufferings as if I had found a Precious Treasure very difficult to find.

"(5) When others out of jealousy treat me badly, with abuse, slander, etc, I will learn to take all loss and offer the victory to them.

"(6) When one whom I have benefitted with great hope unreasonably hurts me very badly, I will learn to view that person as an excellent Spiritual Guide."

- provided to me by my "Higher Power".

Dames: "The wall (ego prison) has its cracks" See "The Crack in the Cosmic Egg." by Joseph Chilton Pearce. As you pointed out, the CRACK is in our own self-constructed ego (soul?). donJuan: step through the crack in the world.

WORLD = WEOROLD (OldEng) = WERALDH (Teut)

= WIROS (man) + ALDH (age): the life and age of man

WIROS = WIR (VIR) + OS (-AZ: he or that which) has WIR

= WIR = VIR = VIRILE = man, manly, virtue

= VIS = VITAL, force, vim, vigor, violence

= VICE = vicious, vitiate; VITU = vituperate: abuse

= WEI (PIE): twist > wire, thread, wiry, vita, vine, wine (DNA?)

= WEI (PIE): the vital force that gives life, capability of action

THUS WIRAZ: he who has the vital force in him

= VIRTUE: the having of the vital forces within one

ALDH = AL + DHE (PIE): to set, put, lay down > establish, make happen

= AL (PIE): to grow, nourish, also high, deep: ALTUS = exALT

(with the negative AB: AB-AL-ISH = ABOLISH: to retard growth)

4/1/01
THUS ALDH: to establish and actualize nourishment

and thus growth = OLD, ELDER, ALDERMAN, ADULT

THUS WIRAZ-ALDH = WER-ALD: the nourishment, growth, maturity, flourishing and evolution of he who has the vital forces within him. THUS WORLD (verb) = To nourish, mature and lift the vital forces in man to the fullest heights (or depths)

AND WORLD (noun) = the complete history of the nourishment, growth, maturity, flourishing and evolution of the vital forces in man, both individually and jointly (how he holds to the thread of life and uses it in action and how he learns from his experience) = not a planet, not material but the life, experience and ages of man: his-story. Thus we are referred to the crack in our own total or global welt(cosmic)-anshauung (outlook, gestalt, stance, attitude, set). I welcomed your letter tremendously. It was very well done. Thanx much.

Greg Gibbs: "All paths lead to -" Indra's net: all - ALL is interconnected: you can get anyplace from where you now are. If "God" is ALL: then "ALL" is God. Then if we love and care for ourselves, we love and care for all "others" - and vice versa. Remember: "He who knows, doesn't say and he who says, doesn't know. (UH-oh !!) By the time I finished your thing, I was laughing and dancing for Joy with you. Thanx, Greg.

Johann vonVogel: per "Catholic conditioning": see Roberto Assagioli's (Psychosynthesis) The Act of Will.

Marvel undone: Duality incorporates Polarity. Quietism is designed for living IN the medium, continuum of confusion, ambivalence, suffering and uncertainty between the poles. Krishnamurti: "Be completely and continuously aware and make no effort."

Acey D: " - wherever you stand is the land of Truth". The Amer-indian sez: Where you stand IS the Center of the Earth. "Keep your head cool but your feet warm." Thanx, I needed that.
yellow mouse



TWO PARTIES

For the CHF
From Norman Moser

The Beauty of a Human Being

The Beauty of a human being,
like the beauty of a horse,
is not always manifest in the physical,
is not always clearly definable,
clearly visible

May just be glimpsed in a passing glance,
a quick lovely gesture--
a certain smile or wink or look,
a certain tilt of hat,
a certain way of dancing
or of carrying the body

The beauty of a human being
may sometimes be mostly in the eyes,
may usually be seen somewhere
in the body or the mind
but may not be immediately perceived
especially if it's a man
we are looking at

That indefinable thing grace
may just be the harmony of all the parts
and a certain show of power
or of tenderness and quietness--
spontaneity, abandon, gaiety,
quick warm movements or laughter,
yet somehow there is this mysterious control--
the dancer leaves the highwire.

The beauty of a human being,
like the beauty of a cat,
may just be in the languor of a stretch
or languidness of a stride;
while not always at once seen in the physical,
we immediately watch it,-
to see where it comes from.
Then we laugh, realize it must
it must be the grace of god.

(after a party at the Clausens') 4.30.77 Oakland

Another Kind of Party, Another Kind of Beauty

Your beauty will have to remain as it is, Bonnie
as it was that night.

It will never fade.

Will always be vivid in my mind--

I will never forget

your dress the color of light purple birds,

your skin the color of your dress.

Your skin the petal of an Iris.

He wanted us to think he loved you to death,
that life would be unbearable without you,
and it's true, my life is unbearable
without a certain she.

But I don't believe him for a minute.

Your blood and his spilled the morning after

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TWO PARTIES: Another Kind of Party, Another Kind of Beauty/2

because of his own inability to understand
and control himself and accept your No.
He only loved himself.
He never loved your purple birds
like we did.
No more music and laughter there.
Not even the gun will speak anymore.
Not now.

(morning after this one, host shot and killed
hostess and himself) 5.6.77 Oakland

o-o

All That Beauty, All That Pain
--at Sunset on the Town--

(to C. M.)

I had to walk away
from all that beauty,
all that pain,
because you were not mine,
though you enveloped me
as you did the world
in all that glow

The sun worshipped us too,
mushroomed in
big tropical flower
that held us for a full half-hour,
then disappeared over the hill.

Later I did the dance
of return, and burn,
relinquishing you to the gods
from whence you came--
for you were not mine.
All that beauty, all that pain.

The promise, the promise,
never quite fulfilled.
The flower outside
seldom quite so lush,
so marvelous, as the one inside.

Nov. 6, 1974 Carrboro, NC

Norm Moser

Dear Cloud Hidden Friends,

In case any readers out there haven't seen my first letter to Cloud Hidden Friends, I am a Shin Buddhist and a student at the Institute of Buddhist Studies. And this letter might be entitled, "On Passion, Aggression, and Ignorance In the Safeway Parking Lot."

In polite society, you seldom get your klesas raw. Nobody ever slugs it out, everybody locks the bedroom door, and people devote as much energy to pretending that they have no passions as they devote to gratifying their passions behind the scenes. Yes, that's how it is in a polite society, but who says that we live in anything of the kind? Which brings me to my experience on a recent summer evening in the Safeway parking lot.

As my husband and I were about to put the groceries in the trunk of the car, a man raced out of the shadows and tried to snatch my purse. Now I didn't know that he didn't have a gun or that he wouldn't break my skull if he got annoyed. So if I'd had an ounce of sense or a moment to think, I guess I would have just let him have the purse. But as it was, certain fundamental character traits of mine took over and I screamed, fought, and clawed. He knocked me down on the pavement and pulled at my purse. I screamed louder, fought harder, and kicked madly at his testicles. At about this time it registered that my husband, heroic Buddhologist that he is, was hitting my assailant and shouting, "Get away from her!" I guess that it registered with the assailant, too, because he turned around to attack my husband. He punched him in the shoulder and tore his shirt in half before some burly Safeway employees finally materialized (it seems that my screams had been heard in the store, in the next store, and in the next block). When they ran the purse snatcher to earth, one of them asked him why he tried to steal the lady's purse. "I had to buy some dope," he replied.

As I picked myself up off the pavement, clutching my purse (he never did get the purse), it occurred to me that by comparison with the battles of normal life, this conflict had been refreshingly direct, elemental even. And I had to commend my opponent on his rare honesty about his motives and spiritual state. If he had been some Buddhist, he probably would have accused me of displaying ego attachment to my purse. Then, instead of throwing me down on concrete, he would have lectured me about my failure to let go of my anger about getting my purse snatched. I would be lucky ever to hear the end of it. A year later he would suddenly start bellowing about what a lousy Buddhist I was because he'd heard that I had complained (probably in a letter to somebody in Tanzania) about the theft of my purse.

And all that would upset me a lot more than getting mugged. If you're quarreling with a Buddhist, you can reduce him to the last possible state of obsessive rage just by telling him, in well chosen Buddhist words, that he doesn't have any right to be angry. For deep down in his non-soul, a Buddhist probably thinks that no matter what you have done to him, he shouldn't be angry.

Now this is an issue I have got to resolve. Buddhism happens to be my life. And I can't go on and on feeling that I haven't

got any business writing and preaching about Buddhism when, beneath my pious exterior, all I can think about is my desire to throw several people off the roof of the headquarters building of the Buddhist Churches of America.

Now there is an old Mahayana Buddhist principle that before you can do about any problem, you have to have compassion on yourself. Or Shin Buddhists would probably say that you need to realize that Amida Buddha has compassion on you. It comes down to the same thing. I'm too egotistical to really have compassion on anybody, even myself. Having compassion on myself would involve facing all of my own weaknesses, and how can I do that? This ego of mine is nothing but a mass of desire and aggression and self-delusion; how can it admit the truth about itself? Yet there is hope. If the self is a great web of self-delusion, no self-delusion can ever quite be complete. A traditional Shin metaphor says that our attachments are like very black clouds keeping the world in darkness. But even on the darkest day, some light always get through. Amida, who is Buddha nature, the chink in my illusions, the very principle of selflessness and compassion, is the sun; and he sometimes enables me to feel a moment of compassion in spite of myself.

And why do I talk about compassion on myself? Because, as I keep telling everybody I know, my situation is indeed pitiable. Tiresome as it is to be enmeshed in passion, aggression, and ignorance, I can't get unmeshed as long as I have a body. My body cannot go on existing unless I am constantly driven by desires to feed it, keep it warm, and care for it generally. Neither is my body likely to reproduce itself and carry on my species unless I have powerful sexual desires as well. Having a human capacity for foresight, I don't just want food and sex and shelter now; I want to see to it that I have them tomorrow and next year. Add my built in primate desires for things like status and affection and power, throw in my big, complicated, human brain, and you can see that I am doomed to have powerful and complicated desires every day of my life.

And of course, something might frustrate my desires. A hungry hyena or a purse snatching junky or the Department of Internal Revenue might take away the things that I want. Or something might injure this body of mine. If I have reproduced, something might injure my babies. Of course these days, threats are more complicated than they used to be. Instead of an oncoming sabre toothed tiger, I may have to fight a computer error. But I still feel threatened. I still get frightened. And I still fight back. What it amounts to is, I want to live. I have to want to go on living, or I won't survive. And if I am to go on living for very long, I have to be prepared to protect myself. So I have aggressions. I can't do without them.

And why do I need a capacity to ignore whatever makes me uncomfortable? Because I want to live and I know that I'm going to die. I can't face that, not really. I can't just go along watching the Johnny Carson Show and cleaning the bathtub and selling cupcakes at the temple food fair unless I somehow manage to forget that I'm going to die. So I do manage to forget it. And once I've learned to forget that, I'm in training to forget any desired fact.

So I have desires, I have aggressions, and I have a highly developed capacity to forget. I not only cannot help having these things, I need them and couldn't go on without them. For that reason, it's pointless to feel guilty, or to let other people make me feel guilty, about the fact that I have certain feelings (though it is to be hoped that I don't really throw anybody off a roof). But does that mean that there can be no relief from the messy little soap opera that is life?

No. For if I can understand all this about myself, maybe I can understand that everybody else is in the same proverbial boat and therefore is just as deserving of compassion as myself. Or if I can never really realize that, the All-Compassionate One can. (I hope it's clear by now that when I talk about him, I do not mean a divine being sitting off on a cloud somewhere. I mean the Buddha Nature, the possibility of enlightenment that is always somehow present even in the most hopeless situation, the selfless view of things that is never quite totally inaccessible to us benighted beings; and I doubt if that's completely clear, but maybe it will give you some idea what I'm talking about). No matter how rotten I feel, Amida understands everything, accepts everything, and loves everybody. And if I can realize that, I may be able to accept myself. I may even be able to put this mess in perspective.

In gasshō,

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For the CHF

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Dear Fellow Pilgrims:

Some of us have been concerned with the meaning of suffering lately. It is a topic not likely to go away anytime soon. It is also a topic perfectly at home in Buddhism; and I find it actually a great relief to not have to be constantly emphasizing only the brighter side.

I can't think of anything more basic to Buddhism than the Four Noble Truths, as in the Buddha's First Sermon at Benares. The First Truth, that of suffering, is something we all experience, and will continue to experience as long as old age, sickness, and death are still around. There is even one Buddhist school that says fully realizing the Truth of Suffering is alone all that is really needed to attain Enlightenment. It is said that, at the deepest level, Samsara and Nirvana can not be separated.

Sometimes the First Truth is understood as meaning that all of life is suffering, but that can be somewhat misleading. The Sutra actually says that "the five grasping skandhas are suffering". One's ordinary existence is composed of the 5 skandhas, and is deeply entangled with the "graspings" of desire and craving. Suffering is then the inevitable result.

I find it quite startling that conceptual thought is regarded as one of the 5 skandhas. It then also can be a subtle form of grasping. In that sense Buddhism is closer to psychology than philosophy. From a psychological point of view, the actual practice of Buddhism might itself also often be a subtle form of grasping, with the consequence of suffering. Krishnamurti convincingly proposes such a view, and if my own life is any example, I'd have to mostly agree. It is hard to find my lofty ideals for Zen or whatever to be forever eluding my grasp, or to see what little progress I or we seem to have made to come tumbling down with the winds of change. It must also be terribly hard for Tibetans to see Buddhism being obliterated in their homeland, and the tragedy in Cambodian defies conception. As for the "New Age", I'm not sure what it will be, or whether I'll even like it if it ever does come. Ideals which are mixed with graspings also lead to suffering; and How one believes is as important as What one believes.

For Buddhism, non-grasping or truly letting-go is essential. The word for grasping is "upa-dana", and it's root meaning provides an excellent clue to the nature of this non-grasping. "Upa-dana" is the opposite of "dana". It means taking as the opposed to giving, and Buddhism is the way of giving. Dana in the highest sense is free from grasping for any kind of reward whatsoever. Such is the constant emphasis of the way of the Bodhisattva. Giving alms is of course only one form of dana. It might also be found in giving a flower, a smile, or a poem; and the Dharma is the highest gift of all. It might be noted that one of the many forms of Bodhisattva dana is the giving of fearlessness - quite a gift indeed.

If you take the Buddha's First Sermon, and add to that the naturalness and spontaneity of what is traditionally regarded as his First Sermon on Zen, it seems to me that sums it all up rather well.

That too is what "Buddha- Mind" is all about- which happens to also be an alternative name for the Zen School, and I much prefer it. Buddha-Mind-Fullness, or Nembutsu as it is often called, is then at the heart of Zen.

THE FIRST SERMON OF THE BUDDHA

Thus have I heard: at one time the Lord dwelt at Benares at Isipatana in the Deer Park. There the Lord addressed the five monks:—

“These two extremes, monks, are not to be practised by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the passions and luxury, low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and useless; and that conjoined with self-torture, painful, ignoble, and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathagata¹ has gained the enlightenment of the Middle Path, which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nirvana.

“And what, monks, is the Middle Path, of which the Tathagata has gained enlightenment, which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nirvana? This is the noble Eightfold Way: namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, monks, is the Middle Path, of which the Tathagata has gained enlightenment, which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nirvana.

“(1) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of pain: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. In short the five groups of grasping² are painful.

“(2) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: the craving, which tends to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding pleasure here and there; namely, the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.

“(3) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain, the cessation without a remainder of craving, the abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.

“(4) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the way that leads to the cessation of pain: this is the noble Eightfold Way; namely, right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“‘This is the noble truth of pain’: Thus, monks, among doctrines unheard before, in me sight and knowledge arose, wisdom arose, knowledge arose, light arose.

“‘This noble truth of pain must be comprehended.’ Thus, monks, among doctrines unheard before, in me sight and knowledge arose, wisdom arose, knowledge arose, light arose.

“‘It has been comprehended.’ Thus, monks, among doctrines unheard before, in me sight and knowledge arose, wisdom arose, knowledge arose, light arose. [Repeated for the second truth, with the statement that the cause of pain must be abandoned and has been abandoned, for the third truth that the cessation of pain must be realized and has been realized, and for the fourth that the Way must be practised and has been practised.]

“As long as in these four noble truths my due knowledge and insight with the three sections³ and twelve divisions was not well purified, even so long, monks, in the world with its gods, Mara,⁴ Brahma,⁵ its beings with ascetics, brahmins, gods, and men, I had not attained the highest complete enlightenment. This I recognized.

“And when, monks, in these four noble truths my due knowledge and insight with its three sections and twelve divisions was well purified, then monks . . . I had attained the highest complete enlightenment. This I recognized. Knowledge arose in me, insight arose that the release of my mind is unshakable: this is my last existence; now there is no rebirth.”

Thus spoke the Lord, and the five monks expressed delight and approval at the Lord’s utterance. And while this exposition was being uttered there arose in the elder Kondanna the pure and spotless eye of the doctrine that whatever was liable to origination was all liable to cessation.

Thus when the Wheel of the Doctrine was set turning by the Lord, the earth-dwelling gods raised a shout: “This supreme Wheel of the Doctrine has been set going by the Lord at Benares at Isipatana in the Deer Park, a Wheel which has not been set going by any ascetic, brahmin, god, Mara, Brahma, or by anyone in the world.” The gods of the heaven of the four Great Kings, hearing the shout of the earth-dwelling gods, raised a shout . . . The gods of the heaven of the Thirty-three, hearing the shout of the gods of the four Great Kings . . . the Yama gods . . . the Tusita gods . . . the Nimmanarati gods . . . the Paranimitavasavatin gods . . . the gods of the Brahma-world raised a shout:⁶ “This supreme Wheel of the Doctrine has been set going by the Lord at Benares at Isipatana in the Deer Park, a Wheel which has not been set going by any ascetic, brahmin, god, Mara, Brahma, or by anyone in the world.”

Thus at that very time, at that moment, at that second, a shout went up as far as the Brahma-world,⁷ and this ten-thousandfold world system shook, shuddered, and trembled, and a boundless great light appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the gods. . . .

THE FIRST SERMON ON ZEN

The legendary story of the origin of Zen in India runs as follows: Śākyamuni was once engaged at the Mount of the Holy Vulture in preaching to a congregation of his disciples. He did not resort to any lengthy verbal discourse to explain his point, but simply lifted a bouquet of flowers before the assemblage, which was presented to him by one of his lay-disciples. Not a word came out of his mouth. Nobody understood the meaning of this except the old venerable Mahākāśyapa, who quietly smiled at the master, as if he fully comprehended the purport of this silent but eloquent teaching on the part of the Enlightened One. The latter perceiving this, opened his gold-tongued mouth and proclaimed solemnly, ‘I have the most precious treasure, spiritual and transcendental, which this moment I hand over to you, O venerable Mahākāśyapa!’