

# cloud-hidden friends letter

Issue #29

A BUDDHIST PERIODICAL

First Issue 1989

SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE  
IN HONOR OF ALAN WATTS

The CHF Letter is dedicated to sharing in the spirit of the universal Dharma. Our emphasis is mostly on Zen Buddhism, but not at all in some sectarian sense. As examples of such a spirit, we look to D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. Thomas Merton might be another example, since in his later years he commented that he could see no contradiction between Christianity and Buddhism, and that he had determined "to become as good a Buddhist as I can".

Our "subscription fee" is not a monetary one. We prefer to instead require your active participation. This could be in the form of either writing a letter now and then for our pages, or by personally replying to some of the letters appearing in the CHFL. We hope to be able to publish everything we receive, but letters should be of a reasonable length, and in the spirit of the CHFL.

Our phrase "Cloud-Hidden" is taken from the title of a book by Alan Watts. He in turn borrowed it from a ninth century poem by Chia Tao, which is translated here by Lin Yutang.

## 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."



*Daruma (Ta-mo, Bodhidharma)*

CHFL, c/o Floating Zendo  
753 44th Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94121

## NEWS AND NOTES

1. This is a special issue of the CHFL in honor of the fifteenth year of the passing-beyond of Alan Watts. There also was a celebration of the occasion recently at Green Gulch which was co-sponsored by the Society For Comparative Philosophy and San Francisco Zen Center.

The celebration was a happy one with poetry, music, noise-makers, good food, and all. However one of the things that struck me was that quite a few of us for some reason seem to be getting older. As a matter of fact, quite a bit older. Perhaps then we should be planning the next celebration as a larger more co-operative event.

Here are the addresses of a few groups that are carrying on in a spirit such as Alan's:

The Society for Comparative Philosophy. P.O. Box 178, Sausalito, CA 94966

The Alan Watts Fellowship. 577 East Broadway, S. Boston, MA 02127

And for books and tapes: Mastering Enlightenment Arts, Box 303, Sausalito, CA 94966.

Also, Alan Watts Electronic Educational Programs, P.O. Box 938, Pt. Reyes Station, CA 94956.

2. We originally requested that your letters for the CHFL be no more than two or three pages long. However letters have recently been so few that space is the least of our worries. So if you write something longer, and it is in the spirit of the CHFL, we probably would have room for it.

3. The Fourth North American Zen Teacher's Annual Conference was held at Mt. Tremper New York this summer. As usual it was an informal meeting with no official agenda. One of the more interesting topics was why several groups find it very important to have a special room set aside for Kwan Yin. This provides the opportunity for a more devotional and individual practice, something that is often lacking in a more macho kind of Zen. I think this is a very significant development. It also is no doubt significant that most of the participants continue to prefer to be called by the modest title of "Zen Teacher", rather than something like "Roshi" or "Zen Master".

---

Ananda Dalenberg, Clerk

For Alan Watts

No longer cloud hidden -  
Each day more crystal,  
More clear -

and also

For James Broughton

Alan's friend, who is still here,  
And whose own words and wit  
Improve even sad events  
With a cheerful tear -  
In his fashion I have fashioned  
This poem for Alan -  
On the 15th anniversary  
Of his death and on the occasion  
Of the celebration of Alan's life -  
At Green Gulch this 20th November day -

*Victor di Suvero*

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Round it goes and nobody knows  
Where it goes when it goes round  
And nobody knows and nobody tells  
In spite of the apells, in spite of the bells  
Nobody tells and nobody knows  
And round it goes with the smoke of the flame  
Without any blame playing a game  
That nobody knows and nobody tells.

Alan came to the world to dance - he said  
To dance like a bird at the end of a twig  
To dance like a bird in the sky above  
And dance he did in a cloud of words.

Alan came to the world to write - he said  
To write like a bird in the sky above  
To write and to sing the treasure trove  
And write he did in a cloud of words.

Alan came to the world to speak - he said  
To speak like a bird in the hearts of all  
To speak and to show us another way  
And speak he did in a cloud of words.

Alan came to this world to play - he said  
To play like a bird in all his games  
And he played his life with his beautiful voice  
And he did it all in a cloud of words.

The clouds rained down and the words became tapes  
And the tapes became books and then became smiles  
And the clouds rained down and the game went on  
While we turned around to carry on  
So as to come here this sunbright day  
Better for us because he was here  
Laughing a lot and casting out fear  
Teaching us lessons we learn better each year  
So that when it's our turn to kick off and fly  
We'll follow his tracks up into the sky  
Or into the ground or into the wind  
Or into the minds of those we know  
Who also know that it does go around  
And nobody knows where exactly it goes  
And nobody knows and everyone cares  
In spite of the spells, in spite of the bells  
Nobody tells ----- and nobody knows -  
And round it goes with the smoke of the flame  
Without any blame, playing the game  
That nobody knows and nobody tells.

Victor

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For the CHFL

Roberto Breckenridge  
262 Kings Road  
Brisbane, CA 94005

Dear Cloud Hidden friends:

Sitting on the dock waiting to board the ferry from La Paz to PoLoBamBo, which is somewhere on the coast north of Mazatlan. It's part of a three month backpacking, hitch hiking, busing, camping, cheap hoteling trip through Mexico from the Tijuana border as far south as Yucatan.

The last time I talked to Ananda about the CHFL, it was another five year anniversary of Alan Watts departure from life as we know it, and he was thinking of another commemorative issue. That was quite a while ago, and I don't know how that idea is developing or even if the CHFL will continue. But I write of my connections between memories of Alan and my wanderings this summer.

As Alan said, the trouble with jet travel is that the easier it is to get somewhere, the more likely it is that the place you go to is just about like the place you left. The beach resorts of Mexico, Acapulco, Cabo San Lucas, Cozumel, etc. are like that of course. Like Hawaii or Miami or God knows how many other places. When I quoted Alan on this subject, my rope jumping, long curly haired, bearded Mexican travelling companion laughed almost as joyously as Alan so often did. It has taken us more than two weeks to travel a few hundred miles from San Francisco to La Paz on the southern tip of Baja California. Things at this level are very difficult indeed.

For me the days of Alan Watts were the 50's and 60's. The days of the "beats" and the "hippies". I was around S.F. in those days but a bit too timid to get in them that much.

And as I say as a joke, "too young to be a beat and too old to be a hippie". But these images of the smile on Alan's face and the gleam in his eyes keeps coming to mind, and I see that we are never too old or too young to be fully alive. But often we are too scared, it would seem.

Don Quixote, like the brave knights of old, traveled with his vision of the beautiful Dulcinea. I maintain mine of the Lady Ursula (the painter and talker of Inverness), and also there is my hero Han Shan, often painted with a smile as wide as Alan's. It feels so good to carry stuff in a pack, wander and travel in and out and through the great natural beauty and incredible trashy ugliness of Mexico. And to walk along philosophizing and explaining this and that, quoting Alan, Fritz, Ananda, and others, and telling stories of all the adventures that have been life through the door called "The Wisdom of Insecurity" (by Alan Watts of course).

I turned 59 last week. Excuse me for seeming to brag, but things have been getting a lot better as age advances. Lots of fresh fruit, tortillas and fish, plenty of sun, sleeping on sandy beaches, starry skies, sunsets, moon rises, cold showers, dirty toilets, dusty streets, junk cars, birds, dogs, and everything else. Legs getting stronger, stomach shrinking, chatter, chatter, chatter, Spanish everywhere. Thank you Alan, Fritz, Ananda, Arturo, Dick Price, Knute, Gia Fu, Gi Ming, and all.

Praise God / Praise Tao.

R.B.  
Mexico

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For the CHF Letter

Mark Watts

From The 1988 Celebration In  
Honor Of Alan At Green Gulch

Alan Watts was often asked the question " what will happen to me when I die?". To this, he would respond with a question, as teachers sometimes do.. "Who is asking the question? Is it the isolated individual self? Well, most surely you will be utterly annihilated in death. Or is it the everlasting spirit, who recognizes itself again and again in the comings and goings of things?". Sometimes I think it is death that keeps us honest. For without it we might chatter incessantly, but in its face we awake to the illusionary quality of ourselves. While the body grows old, the spirit gives life, and we have been here, in this present moment, forever. Let us not mourn the illusion, but instead, celebrate the truth.

Sincerely,

Mark Watts

For the CHFL

Ananda Dalenberg  
753 44th Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94121

Dear Fellow Pilgrims:

I often think of religion as being of two kinds, either generic or brand-name, and in this regard, I think of Alan Watts as being a great champion of the generic. Maybe the distinction I have in mind is related to the difference between religion and philosophy, the latter being concerned with wisdom as such, rather than its corporate brand-name setting. Anyway, Alan was certainly a great lover of wisdom, a true philosopher. But for him, philosophy was in its original sense, where it included such as religion, psychology, physics, and medicine, as well as other sciences.

The relation of philosophy to medicine is interesting. Wisdom can be considered as being a medicine of the highest kind, and the philosopher as being a physician, or a meta-physician. The Buddha, for example, is often referred to as the "Great Physician", since it was he who prescribed a medicine able to relieve the many sufferings of the world. Although Alan was no Buddha, I'd say he was a not half-bad as a meta-physician.

A good physician, when writing a prescription for our ailments, makes it a rule to prescribe a medicine in generic terms, rather than as some company brand-name product. What is basic is the generic. Often however, a deluge of brand-name advertising may generally succeed in thoroughly confusing the matter. Religious matters might be thought of in a similar sense, and Alan always emphasized the generic. I so greatly admire the way he would wade through the outer-trappings of various labels and small-minded concerns, and get at the essence of some religious teaching. For him, great wisdom is great wisdom, period. And a great compassionate heart is a great compassionate heart.

One place such wisdom appears quite clearly is in the Tao Teh King by Lao Tzu. In fact, Lao Tzu's medicine is so generic that no one has yet figured out a way to effectively package it under some exclusive brand-name. It is available at your local library to any lover of wisdom anywhere. . The legacy he has left is then a universal one to all of mankind. As a matter of fact, the Tao Teh King is so widely read and loved, that it has even made its way into more than a few Christian and Hindu monasteries.

Of course it is not only Lao Tzu who is somehow universal, but also many others. For example, some who come to mind here are Kabir, Saint Francis, Brother Lawrence, Ramakrishna, Gandhi, Aryadeva, Hui Neng, Rumi, Al Ghazali, and many others. But often it is very difficult to understand the spirit of their message, since it may be somewhat veiled by a dense overlay of concerns superimposed by later traditions. If our own culturally-bound

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projections are then added to that, it is a wonder we can perceive any wisdom at all. To make our way through such obstacles, and to more directly imbibe in such a universal legacy, we greatly need the help of a genius such as Alan.

I think of great founders such as Christ and the Buddha as also being a part of that legacy. But because they are founders, they are all the more tightly intertwined with matters of institutional identity. The overlays then are even thicker. Much more is at risk, and exclusive brand-name problems arise all the more intensely. And this is far from some trifling matter. Indeed, if history is any example, it could easily lead to war.

Obviously the path that most people take in all of this is of the brand-name variety, and that goes for both medicine and religion. We prefer to join in a religious group having some exclusive corporate identity. This does offer various advantages, such as a certain kind of security. Also identity problems are mostly laid to rest. This is all the more tempting if the corporation is rich and politically powerful, since it is then able to promote and protect the interests of its members. The corporation may also claim that it is able to maintain certain standards of purity in its product. However, if history is any example, the advertising in this regard may be somewhat seriously misleading.

It is not then at all surprising that a champion of the generic such as Alan would not fit the usual institutional mold. He was also quite an individual philosopher in his own right, apart from his commentaries on more traditional matters. For example, he actually has had something meaningful to say on the subject of Nature, Man and Woman. In contrast, in the last three thousand years, what other philosophers have had to say on the subject seems to be totally irrelevant, although there may be a few exceptions of which I am unaware. But although he was quite an individualistic thinker, it was not his real intent to be set up some new independent school of philosophy. I think I can safely say that, since I knew him personally for many years. He was first and foremost a lover of wisdom, of any wisdom, Lao Tzu's wisdom, Shankaracarya's wisdom, Eckhart's wisdom, Kabir's wisdom, your wisdom, and also including a precious variety called no-wisdom. That, I think, is his kind of spirit, and the kind of spirit he would wish to pass on.

What is utterly beyond me is how Alan is so often regarded as being some interesting new kind of dilettante bohemian. Alan had a fundamental impact on many people's lives, including my own, and that most certainly was not because he was some kind of bohemian or dilettante. He took his work seriously, and he took us seriously, just as also did his early mentor, D.T. Suzuki.

As for his personal life, in response to some of his critics, I can also speak up on that score. I feel obliged to do so before it

is to late, since I'm not getting any younger. I have personally known quite a few Zen Roshis and other teachers over the years, and I have the highest respect for many of them. And in comparison, on matters of personal integrity etc., Alan measures up awfully well. For example, I have never known him to take cheap shots at anyone. And he never took advantage of innocent admiring students, never promoted his own beliefs by putting-down others, never sold-out to the security and riches of some spiritual organization, never fooled others with priestcraft shell-games, never retreated from the nitty-gritty of everyday family life into the seeming holiness of monkish isolation, never criticized some spiritual teaching by mixing it with the institutional muck that surrounds it. That is, almost never. And never did he give up insisting that it all somehow be filled with joy and life, and not some ponderous glum and dreary affair

Why then anybody would even bother to reply to the charge that he drank too much, I don't know. Even so, I might comment that I think of Alan as being in the tradition of the Japanese priesthood, where sake is a common occupational hazard. But they are not at all puritanical about it, and are more inclined to gratefully regard o-sake as a precious medicine intertwined with the stress and many special problems of a priest's life. But, by the way, it is also true they do drink too much.

Although Alan's way was not that of some big and exclusive religious organization, he did found the Society for Comparative Philosophy, and it is a corporation. But the SCP has so far deliberately led a very modest existence, and so has not been exposed to the dangers and temptations of great success and prosperity.

Actually I am somewhat inconsistent here, since it baffles and frustrates me why the Society has not prospered more. I often find myself thinking about what grand future prospects it might have. After all, Alan has helped so mightily in passing on a precious legacy that somehow belongs to us all. Perhaps those groups who are carrying on with a spirit such as Alan's should be encouraged to become more active. These would be primarily the Society, the Watts Fellowship, and Mark Watts and Sandy Jacobs. Maybe it is time for them to more proudly raise such a banner. I'd even like to see some amateur trumpets join in the parade. I don't know exactly what such an assemblage might be called, but I'm pretty sure it would be fun.

Sometimes it seems that it is not only history that often runs in circles, but also my own thoughts. I seem to have come a full one hundred and eighty degrees. I began by bemoaning the evils and pitfalls of organized religion and brand-names, and I end up contemplating the possibility of raising proud banners and joining in some parade.

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I wonder, if I continue on long enough, will it bring me back again to the way of the sage who wanders somewhere on the mount, "cloud-hidden, whereabouts unknown"?

I would be interesting what old Lao Tzu might have to say about all of this.

Floating Zendo

Namaste,

Pilgrim Ananda

P.S.

I thought I might also include a little verse I read in honor of Alan at the recent celebration at Green Gulch.

By the way, the Buddhist name given to him at his funeral at Green Gulch is Yu Zan Myo Ko, meaning Profound Mountain, Subtle Light. He also was given the title of Dai Yu, meaning Great Teacher.

A L A N W A T T S ! !

You the Daring One, the Courageous One !

You, the Giver of Great Courage !

Here we are all caught together, Alan,  
Caught as jewels in the Great Net of Indra !  
Though we may only dare to half-believe,  
We are jewels dancing in the Light.

But even in perplexity and doubt,  
There too you found delight , Alan.  
Once I asked, "But then what of darkness,  
What of samsara baffling my every thought."

You replied "Wait without thought",  
And quoting a favorite verse continued,  
"For you are not yet ready for thought, So,  
The darkness shall be the light  
And the stillness the dancing."

You dared indeed to dance, Alan.  
And in the stillness of this Zendo,  
We salute you, Great Zen Teacher !  
Dai Yu Alan !!

Pilgrim Ananda



For the CHF

# TH DAY ADVENTISTS

Rest Is Over!  
Do Encounter!!  
Join And Network Extensively!!!  
Is (your) Rest Over?

I'de and Yu'de  
Ratherbe Pastor  
Box 2153  
96 Washington St.  
Quincy, MA 02269

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1/1/89

CLOUD-HIDDEN FRIENDS,

IS IT TRUE ALAN WATTS ONCE  
(SUBSTANTIALLY) SAID:

WHAT WE HAVE, WE LOSE

WHAT WE LOSE, WE HAVE, FOREVER

?

?

I'DE RATHER YOU BE PASTOR

I'de Ratherby Pastor  
yu'de Ratherby Pastor

FR up

Indeed, you are now beyond harm, a secret soldier in the army of Non-Being to whom only Nothing is important. from TAOISM: The Parting of the Way - Holmes Welch - Beacon Press.

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For the CHFL

Dave Klebert  
248 LasMiradas Drive  
Los Gatos, CA 95030

Dear Cousins:

As I told Ann Watts at Alan Watts 15th anniversary memorial service, the thing I liked about her father's writing is that people could see themselves--their own thoughts and feelings--in Alan's eloquent words. A case in point:

When I was as philosophy student at U.C. Berkeley, I had a job in the Campus library, where I had occasion to use the bathroom from time to time. The walls of the bathroom were covered with graffiti, mostly of a relatively witty, even scholarly nature, as befits a university library bathroom. One day I was moved to write the first graffito I'd ever written in my life: "We are windows through which the universe contemplates itself". The next day I found that someone had written underneath my contribution, "Then we'd better use Windex".

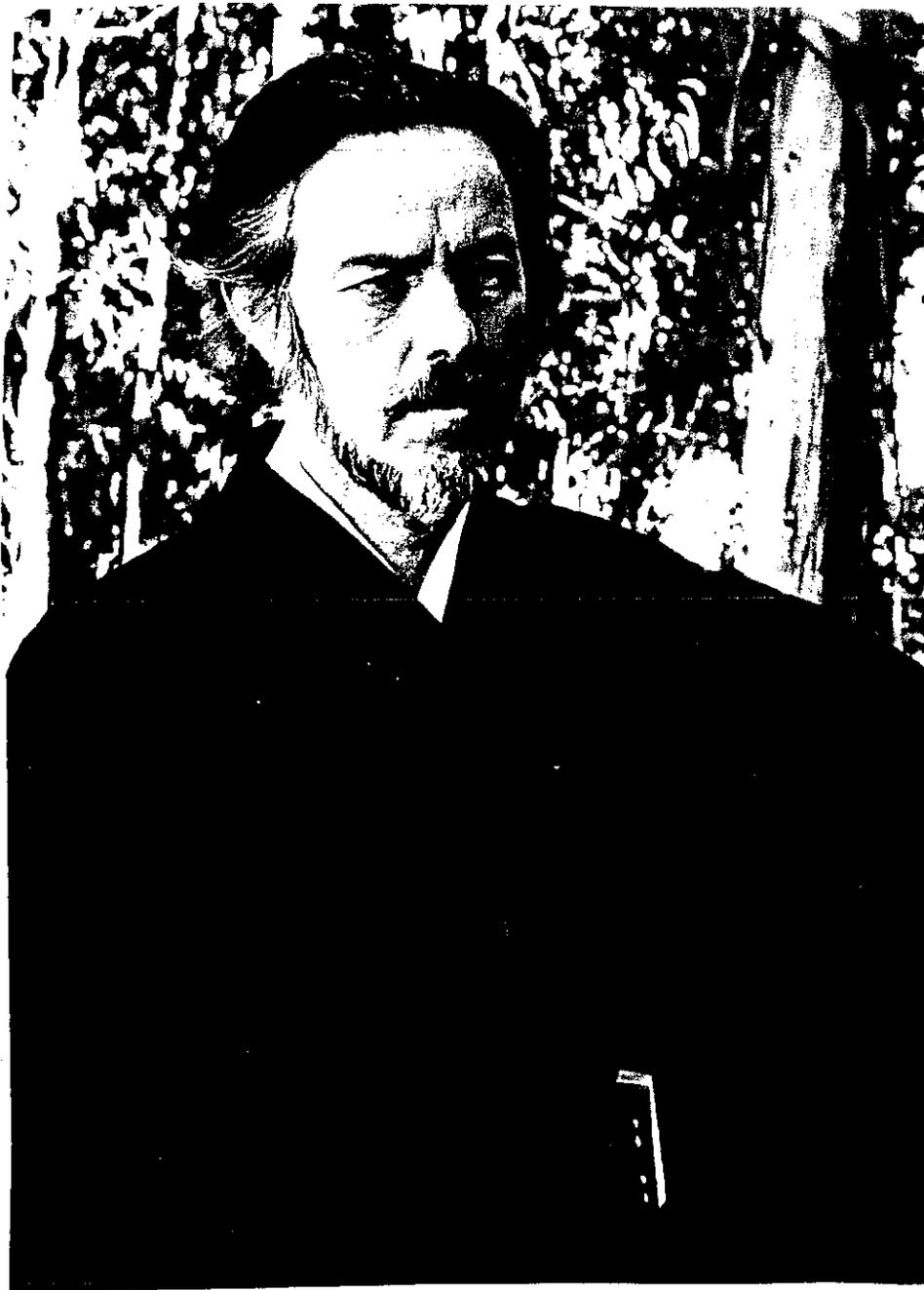
Anyway, several years later I read "Cloud-Hidden whereabouts unknown" and came across statements very similar to my graffito. I have since read several other of Watts books and am frequently gratified to find confirmations of my own insights and beliefs eloquently expressed by Alan Watts.

Alan was sometimes accused of being a charlatan, partly because he was sometimes self-deprecating and humorous about himself. But he was not a charlatan--at least in his writings he was never dishonest. We are all aware of his human failings, but insincerity was not one of them. Alan was a valuable teacher and an enjoyable friend, even for those who never met him in person, like myself. Come too think of it, probably the closest I ever came to meeting him was at the "Gathering of the Tribes" in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco in summer of 1967. He was one of the sanest, most lucid leaders of the "flower-child" counter culture movement.

So where is he now? Cloud-hidden? He lives on in the hearts of all of us.

Your Respectful Cousin,

Dave Klebert



A Poem by Gary Snyder, From The 1973 Crossing Over Ceremony

He blazed out a the path for all of us,  
and came back and made it clear. Explored  
the side canyon and deer trails, and  
investigated cliffs and thickets.

Many guides would have us travel single  
file, like mules in a pack train, and  
never leave the trail. Alan taught us  
to move forward like the breeze--tasting  
the berries, greeting the bluejays, learning  
and loving the whole terrain.

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FINI