

cloud-hidden friends letter

ISSUES #30 #31

A BUDDHIST PERIODICAL

FIRST & SECOND ISSUES, 1990

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."



CHFL, c/o Floating Zendo
763 44th Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94121

NEWS AND NOTES

1) My apologies for being very late with this issue, so late that two separate issues are combined into one. I should add, however, that recent reports on our demise have been greatly exaggerated. The next issue will maybe be out in time to greet the New Year.

2) Maybe the CHFL would benefit from a few changes. I have been discussing the possibility of changing the title to the "Zen Freethinker", to reflect the problem many of us have with sectarianism and formalism. Also, Freethinking is a rich tradition in the West, and such a spirit is deeply present in Voltaire, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and others. Freethinking, as a religious tradition, is also often referred to as "deism". It is more of the nature of a movement than an organization, and so is difficult to pinpoint and define. Nevertheless, I think it would be fair to define it as follows: "Freethinking is an affirmation of natural religion and the natural divinity which is the inmost nature of every one. Revealed truth or priestly authority may in some ways be important, but are nevertheless secondary, and for the highest truth one must turn deeply within". Freethinking is in some sense a major challenge to the authority of the established church, although the history books usually prefer to dismiss it lightly as a mere aberrant blip on the more normal course of events. As I see it, Freethinking would be perfectly at home in an American kind of Zen. Also I'd say "Zen Freethinker" would be a better term than "Tathagata Zen" in describing a spirit such as that of Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, and Nyogen Senzaki, all of whom were a bit unorthodox, to say the least.

3) The Alan Watts Library has found an excellent new home. It was recently given by Zen Center to the California Institute of Integral Studies. The CIIS Library is of over 35,000 volumes, and it is the kind of library Alan would have loved. Also accompanying the library is a modest Alan Watts Memorial Fund, which hopefully will be growing. Plans include an annual Alan Watts Memorial Lecture, the first of which was given by Dr. Masao Abe, who in many ways could be said to be the natural heir to the spirit of D.T. Suzuki. The Watts Fund also was instrumental in having Dr. Abe teach at the CIIS this year.

The CIIS began as a graduate school of religion, philosophy, and psychology. Psychology, however, eventually became by far the strongest department. They offer about 80 courses every quarter. They are carrying on in much the same spirit as the old American Academy of Asian Studies, where Alan Watts was director for a number of years. They are at 765 Ashbury St., San Francisco, CA 94117

4) Paul Reps, author and occasional contributor to the CHFL, died recently at the age of 94. Reps was a real pioneer in Western Zen, and quite a "Zen Freethinker", I would say. His presence was always a delight and joy, and a perfect antidote to the formalism and grim grit-your-teeth zen which seems everywhere these days.

Alan Marlowe, another contributor to the CHFL, is also no longer with us. Alan was a student of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, and later went on to become a close student of Trungpa Rinpoche. Alan was a real pilgrim, with a vital, free, and venturesome spirit. Many will miss him, and that most certainly will include myself.

4) There were quite a few responses in regard to my "Billions of Religions Quiz" which appeared in our last issue. Since several of your letters are about the quiz, it seems appropriate to first refresh your memory by mentioning briefly the twenty main topics of the quiz (also extra copies of the quiz are available upon request if you don't happen to have one).

- 1) Supreme Being, God, Or Such.
- 2) The Original Nature of Mankind
- 3) Heaven And Hell
- 4) Prayer and Such
- 5) Religious Miracles
- 6) Fundamental Source Of Religious Truth
- 7) Religion and Political Government
- 8) The Best Form of Church Government
- 9) Soul or Higher Self Etc.
- 10) Lesser Gods and Deities
- 11) Membership Restrictions
- 12) Just and Holy Wars
- 13) Laity and Priesthood
- 14) Evolution
- 15) Freewill
- 16) Following a Moral Code
- 17) Supreme Being and Such, One and Many
- 18) Divine Incarnation and Oneness
- 19) Many Lives and Rebirth
- 20) The Truth and Other Religions

About four alternative views were given on each of the twenty topics, often mentioning the term "Supreme Being". The preface to the quiz asks each individual to either give one's own definition of Supreme Being, or to substitute "some other term such as God, or Allah, or Brahman, or Tao, or Absolute Suchness, or Great Spirit or Ultimate Divine Reality, etc. ". Such looseness, or narrowness, of definition proved to be a great problem to some.

From the responses, it is apparent that what is also needed is a more specifically Buddhist version of such a quiz, and any contributions in this direction (if you dare) would be welcomed.

Namaste,

Floathin' Zendo
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San Francisco, CA 94121

Ananda Dalenberg
CHFL Editor

Joel Weishaus
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Dear Ananda;

Yes, another year, another decade. Happy New Year!

I'm very busy, every day, trying to finish the Nuclear Enchantment of New Mexico project. We have an Aug 15th deadline, and most of the work yet to be accomplished. That and all the things that go into a life.

In a sense "isolation" has been good for me, and I feel like I'm slowly rejoining the world, although from another perspective, not so much involed as evolved; into what, however, I'm not sure.

Have been reading the CHFLs you've been so kindly sending. You know, maybe 99% of the people believe a certain way, in a certain God, because their parents do. It is a conditioned response. And some of them are willing to die for their conditioning (not wanting to, able to, face the possibility that it is their childhood they are defending). Others, a few, try other Ways, then return, as the conditioning (like pattern recognition) is just too strong. "I am a Catholic." "I am a Jew." Etc. The radioal point of Zen, it seems to be, is the questioning of who I am, and not accepting any answer. (If Christ was, is, considered as The Question, instead of The Answer, I could embrace Christianity.) So that Zen, in effect, is self-destructive, always reorganizing the view of one's Self. Positive!

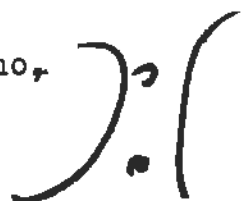
Religion, as you know, means "to tie," "to bind." But to what? To whom? To someone else's Vision? And when does spiritual quest become social need? Most of the time, I euspect, people are "religious" out of social need, not spiritual. Bingo! And most people turn to God because they're poor, or disappointed, and want something, some thing. Is this spiritual need, or greed?

So I'm one of those who didn't get past question #1 of your BILLIONS OF RELIGIONS QUIZ, although I read to whole thing. At age 50, as I enter the final decade of the 20th century, looking at the world, I suspect the motives of all people who assume power: political, religious, monetary, or pure celebrity. And all people who worship a God, which they do, I suggest, also, to gain power. All power, to me, is a corruption of the soul.

What of my life, then? Hopefully, it is a creative one. I love the Gods in all their forms, their multiplicities and duplicities; their rock forms, tree forms, skyscraper forms, their endless shapes, and the way they show up in our dreams. A "Supreme Being," a dictator of the soul, is against all that life as awakened as me. Monotheism works politically (which was its original intent) not epiritually. The spirit is not bounded by such concepts, such wishes, such desires.

Well, a letter I didn't set off to write.
Just to wish you and yours a Happy New Year.

Love & Gassho,



Dear Cloud-Hidden Friends:

So here we are stepping into a new decade of grappling with life's great mysteries and challenges - may our Clour-Hidden fellowship continue to invite us to share our personal wonderings with each other. The current issue(#30 no less!)was brimming over with "good food and wise counsel" - many thanks to those who made the offerings.

I would like to suggest that, to my way of thinking, there IS a profound contradiction in our desire to find it possible "to join in harmonious religious fellowship with others". Religions are, by design and definition, structures deeply rooted in their own (often quite self-righteously so!) ideological and dogmatic beliefs. They thus cannot help but be instruments of divisiveness, separation and conflict, while they also of course, offer us solace and "security" for those seeking an external (to themselves) focus or label for their personal identity and affiliation.

Much of human history is the history of our struggles to assert or defend the "superiority" of our codified beliefs, values and principles in the name of religion - our particular religion. Personally, I find that all religions are ideological traps designed to get us off the hook of having to face our sense of existential purposelessness and emptiness, and that the price we pay for that kind of "insurance" - measured in terms of self deception, illusion, conflict, as well as our inability to transcend the dictates of our personal egos - IS enormous!

Spirituality is, for me, a whole different dimension of the human experience, and though often associated with religion, it exists beyond all the confines of boundaries and labels. Personally, I have no trouble at all, in my own journey, with embracing the concept of spirituality as providing the "basis for a higher and deeper unity". I find that it is only by "getting in touch" with my own essential spiritual nature, that I can encompass and hopefully transcend, the experience of being separated from the greater Cosmic Whole - of knowing that I am part of the Great Mystery - the Tao.

The reason "why it is so difficult to find any one with whom you really agree", is simply because we are perpetually trapped in experiencing ourselves as separated off from the larger scheme of things, and thus from each other. There is no possibility of "agreement" among people who are attached to specific sets of religious edicts, with those who hold different tenets. Further, I don't think that there is any way out of this dilemma, until we can transcend our personal existential sense of separation, and thereby enter a state of unity consciousness, where no sense of separation exists!

The term "Supreme Being" is, for me, together with God, Allah and the many other such names, too closely identified with a personified Deity - too closely identified with a paternalistic father figure or power (inevitably of male gender!), that usually "fits" the needs of those who feel comfortable within religious structures. I personally find it IS quite possible to write, talk, think and be, at the deepest levels (in so far as one can presume to know!) of the spiritual human experience, without having to use terms that have these omnipotent and paternalistic connotations attached to them.

I wonder if others share my concern with these distinctions? Thank you Ananda for your questionnaire/quiz "Billions of Religions" - it provoked, among others, the above thoughts in my own mind. I think that it is worth noting that Buddhism, Zen and Taoism make little use of any kind of person-alized deity or father figure in their scheme of things. Krishnamurti also had no time for such figures in his perception of the spiritual life.

In friendship and with love,

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John H. Boyd

For the CHF

Bob Smith
294 Seneca Place
Westfield NJ 07090

Dear friends

I can now identify myself. This is ABDBDCRQDBADCCCCDCRAC. Or at least I was a week or so ago when I completed A D's quiz. I suspect that, by admitting that I (and I bet a lot of others) am hesitant, unsure and may change my mind I've added at least a few more billion possibilities. Thanks for sending it. I've enjoyed and been puzzled in equal amounts.

You will see from the address above that Carol and I have moved from Cape Cod. Those of you that have followed my somewhat sparse correspondence will remember that we moved from Westfield almost six years ago. As our years on the Cape went on Carol disliked it more and more. It was just too much out of the mainstream for her. At the beginning of 89 she said that she had to move. We chose to come back here. Westfield had been our home for eighteen years and we still had many friends here.

When Carol first discussed moving I was very upset. Then as I began to understand how unhappy she was I became more accepting. Hey! after all I knew who I was and what I was here for. As a truly spiritual being, I can do what I must in the world no matter where I am. Right?

We moved. Bought a house that needed much work. I charged into being a spiritual Mr. Fixit. As the cold weather of the late fall arrived and the work of fixup came to an end; I went into a huge depression. Where were my friends? Where had my beach gone? I had structured my day and now my structure was gone - where? Wait a minute. Isn't this what you wanted? Time to meditate and write? Yah but, I didn't meditate or write. Life was the pits. I had to face facts. I knew it, but I wasn't living it. Outer directed I am. Face it. Accept it.

I decided not to start a new practice. If clients come let them find their way to me. I joined the local rescue squad. Then volunteered at a nearby hospital. Between those and the course I'm attending to learn to be an E.M.T. I'm making some new friends and being of service. I know, I know, my dependencies are showing, but there it is.

Working with the squad and at the hospital has brought home to me some interesting thoughts on death. Westfield has an ageing population. Owing to this I seldom have a call that's for a person under sixty and the majority of them are very serious illnesses: Chest pains, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Cancer, Congestive Heart Failure and the like. All of this has brought me face to face with death in a way that's been quite startling.

There are several layers of us in this rescue thing. EMT's (that's me) are on the front line. Followed by the Paramedics and their Mobile Intensive Care Unit, then there's the Emergency Room, and the hospital itself. I look at the hospital as we approach, with our lights flashing and siren blaring. Lately I see it as a monument to

our fear of death. We bring, our oftentimes, aged, ill, frail, patients straight from the nursing home. Blind, deaf and incontinent we bring them to be saved. Saved? Saved from what? To be returned. Returned to what? A woman we recently picked up at the hospital said, "I hate it, I ask God every day to take me, I guess he doesn't want me."

On another side I watch, on the TV news, the violence that continues between the pro choice and pro life groups. I can't see any possibility for the choice folks until they admit to being pro death. How long can they deny there is life in the womb? To me it is totally irrational to continue the charade that choice is only choice. Yet there is clearly much on the side of fetal death. There are indeed many times it would be wise to terminate a pregnancy. To do so and deny death and the responsibility for death will eventually loose us the possibility of the choice.

If we accept death in the case of a fetus where does it stop? What about capital punishment, suicide, the gravely ill? "Thou shalt not kill," we read. Are we to believe that? Have any of you read the book, 'Peace Pilgrim?' She trusted God to give her daily what she needed to survive. I admire her courage and resolve. Yet, where would Peace have been if it weren't for those who worked to feed and give her shelter? As I thought about that I suddenly saw that the very nature of life is that we take life to sustain life. We cannot live without killing. Even those that are pure vegetarians must kill. We must learn to take responsibilities for our actions. And then how about our non action. I've heard that every day thirty thousand children starve. What did I do today? Did I even take responsibility for doing nothing?

Daily we prolong life in a variety of ways and call it science. It is. We view a longer life as civilized, a better standard of living. Is that so or are we driven by a fear of death? As we find more and more ways to prolong life what do we do if we reject those ways? Is there a difference between refusing chemo for a metastasized renal cancer than for Hodgkins Disease? When is it time to quit? Or is the answer to that never, if we shalt not kill?

"No Code" is the euphemism we have for no extreme measures. (Even in our language we push away death.) I heard it as we transported a woman from our local nursing home to the hospital. She was a 'No Code.' But we have a new geriatric advocate in New Jersey who is beginning to sue rescue squads for accepting 'No Code' orders. Elderly abuse it's called. Presumably it is not abuse to begin CPR in the ambulance even though, in a person of advanced age, it is probable that all of their ribs will be broken in the attempt. Whose decision is it to stop? If we drive around a bit perhaps I'll be too tired to continue. It's tough to die if no one will allow it. Then again perhaps the person didn't want to die. Was the "No Code" order given by a family member who did not want to continue paying the nursing home bills?

We all hear how important it is for patients to fight for life. Many of the recently popular Drs. point this out. An individual is good, strong, right, if one has a positive attitude and wants to live. One is weak, finished, wrong, if one wants to explore death as a healing.

Does all this sound bitter? Perhaps it is. I did not set out to be reproachful. I want merely to begin discussion. In my opinion we must, we absolutely must, come to grips with this issue. Not only individually, but corporately. The headline in the Newark Star Ledger today speaks of the crisis in health insurance. That is but the tip of the iceberg. And a drowning burg it is. Well enough of this.

In peace and love,



Elson B. Snow
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San Francisco, Ca 94109

dear fellow hobo(s),

this response is the quiz(zical) reaction I put together in lieu of a letter; I still do not know what to make of it as it appeared in the Hidden Cloud collection last month; at first, I thought it was under the influence of Colonel Olcott run amok; and then, I thought I would try answering it without getting into philosophical soup; in some ways, it reminds me of Bultmann's intellectual block with a choice to flirt or stand up the mythical mistress (leaving her at the altar!) of archtypical religion:

I SUPREME BEING OR SUCH

According to instruction in the first topic the questionnaire should not be further advanced, as it represents a kind of intellectual block (closure), which under certain circumstances cannot be placed aside in accordance with this quiz. However: any "substitute" cannot be made for the supreme being (not even replaced by the ethereal concept found in Buddhism); I will simply take the risk of omitting this #1 topic but will continue the quiz as I do not want to be associated with the big bang nonsense, either. This will no doubt earn the reputation of bad faith from all corners; perhaps, my usual stance of avoidance will make any decent thinker despair, like Karl Jaspers who complained that church people always quit just as the discussion begins to take on significance!

II ORIGINAL NATURE (honsho)

- (D) another important alternative: Three possible sources (aside of the original intuition of the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni Buddha); 1) Confucian two opposing schools, one opting for the good, and the other as bad. 2) zen: What is your original nature before you were born? 3) outsiders to shin buddhism believe that buddha nature is denied, and nature of mankind is sinful, or evil. This is simply misreading the indicators in Pure Land Buddhism, a confusion of collective guilt with behavioral residue amassed by individuals. Our illusions should point directly at an existential approach to religion, we cannot reduce karmic responsibilities to the adoption of the axiom, "human nature is neither good or bad". Existence is fraught with evil consequences and we continue to exist in the world of constructed things.

III HEAVEN AND HELL

- (D) another important alternative: I think most of us should admit all these layers experienced within this lifetime, or just lying on the other side. Images in sutra literature are not false or daydreams of fundamentalist buddhists, I would neither equate them as "states, realms, oneness with, etc." It appears that the author of this particular question is troubled (or should be) with

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religious terminology complicated with cultural cross-fertilization. I would expect the buddhist to recognize cosmic dimensions to Buddhist concepts and not reduce them to some simplistic model where religious imagination is allowed to merely seep through the cracks and crannies of our rational processes. Contrary to our twentieth century minds, the simple projects of counting the buddhas and bodhisattvas are not idle superstition, and we ought to be able to talk about these things without embarrassment or or make up some unpalatable patter about analogous thinking in discussing such matter (大事) related to rebirth and practice. For those who think they can find a geometrical place for heaven or hell, or believe they are "real" only as a mental event, or "thought-experiment" may continue their valuable poetic exercise, But I doubt that this course has brought them into earshot of religious commitment and authenticity.

IV PRAYER (eko)

(C)

Of course there are the religious (of all kinds) recognizing prayer. Strictly speaking, in the buddhadharma there is no alternative for prayer; whatever supplicatory action is tolerable consists no more than the transference of karmic merit for others, and other energies directed on behalf of living things. Raising the thought of enlightenment (bodhicittam) should never be considered "prayer" nor the taking of the three-fold refuge. Also vows should never be regarded as prayers, even when considered as power.

V Religious Miracles

(B) Religious miracles do happen, but they are not very important.

VI FUNDAMENTAL SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH

(E) B and D are approximately correct for raising the question of historicity and the reservoir of human thought: its seers and literature; however, neither of these two answers show any insight into the trikaya and buddhist doctrine spilling over all historical lines, particularly the nirmankaya from which vantage point of existence we glean spiritual knowledge. The parenthetical phrasing (not necessarily of a historically factual nature) is especially meaningless unless we are consigned to historical studies related in some way to our religious literature.

VII RELIGION AND POLITICAL GOVERNMENT

(B) I think this is the best answer: at least it is a thoroughly american problem that needs addressing and is a concern we have given little attention; somehow our issues must be historically related to doctrine, and as a viable tradition we should participate in those issues affecting our collective belief system.

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VIII THE BEST FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

- (B/F) The reason for a multiple answer is complex, perhaps explainable by three assumptions: 1) conviction of correct arguments by anarchists opposition to the right to govern; 2) recognition of historical necessity; 3) the abhorrence for ~~totalitarian~~ totalitarian rule (A), and resistance to the mandarian approach (civil service/confucian/D). The B/F answers are reminiscent of zen and shin traditions' response allowing for historical institutions and satisfying the organizational category of sangha and monks type communities. The key is the mahayana dictum: not to cause a schism in the universal sangha!

IX SOUL OR HIGHER SELF

- (D) By translating this question back into Buddhist language, we are in a strange position of having nowhere to go, not even in the denial "there is no such thing" in B and C, not even if we were pudgalavadins!

X LESSER GODS AND DEITIES

- (A) We must omit, of course, the mention of supreme being in this breath; and, we should (in this context) insist on talking about rejecting the whole ontological assumption in this question. IS is a mighty and weighty question!

XI MEMBERSHIP RESTRICTIONS

- (A) Open membership as recognized in the historical sangha and classification. This should not imply that rules cannot be used *by* various affiliates.

XII JUST AND HOLY WARS

- (C) Without equivocation, although background activities by Buddhists in the Peace movement are needed for strictly ideological reasons.

XIII LAITY AND PRIESTHOOD

- (B/C) The dual response allows for acceptance of monastic and non-monastic styles. The either/or distinction is not acceptable. The (A) response is not acceptable, but a bias of humanistic reduction in favor of a popular "layman religion".

XIV EVOLUTION

- (D) Unanswerable. The question is meaningless except for a parlor game, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" "origins" is not a religious or scientific pasttime; for either discipline the problem is in the way for authentic experience.

XV FREEWILL

- (B) Partially correct, in so far as the recognition is made of the overwhelming importance of karma, but why the implication that this acceptance is the same as "destiny" or "fate". Are we stuck with a calvinistic answer? Liberation from fetters is a classical notion in the buddhadharma; we should have a notion of freedom without the idea that all things are predestined; I think the universe is "messy", and we would benefit by looking at the philosophical notion of freewill with 20th century clarity, and not with the mists of 19th century polarization of pessimism and optimism.

XVI FOLLOWING A MORAL CODE

- (E) In the denial of religious codification of behavior we should not be charged with eliminating the practice of sila, the acceptance of certain behavioral response to practice as priests or laymen. Prescriptions can be used for attaining certain results. "refraining from" has practical results eliciting in good, bad, or neutral effects in the discipline of mind, body, and speech. I recognize practice as the altruistic experience of mahayana Buddhism, an ethical program that is not a codification of a behavioral system.

XVII SUPREME BEING AND SUCH, ONE AND MANY

- (E) Some other important alternative. In logic the buddhists are in favor of a pluralistic position, "particulars vs universals"; carried over into practice the so-called unified approach might be discernable in the transcendental path (of the yogacara, for example). The "one" is just as unjustifiable as the "many"; or, if talking from a practical experience it is the arising and passing away of the dharma(s).

XVIII DIVINE INCARNATION AND ONENESS

- (D) Incarnation is a foreign concept in the buddhadharma (unless one is referring to the trikaya or rebirth doctrines?), and has no place in the embodiment implications of "divine oneness" etc. The buddhadharma is not at home with the fringe of theosophical interpretation.

XIX MANY LIVES AND REBIRTH

- (A) We live many lives (not incarnation, please)

XX THE TRUTH AND OTHER RELIGIONS

UNANSWERABLE: Except to state that Buddhist concern for satya or dharma is not equivalent to christaian or moslem "truth", and perhaps not closely related to Gandhian program. Whether a christian or moslem say

the world is round, flat, or square, it is not a Buddhist problem regardless whether he says it is round, flat, or square. I think the Buddhist idea of truth is better seen as as authenticity, genuine, and/or purity in contrast to filthiness.

I think the whole problem of this Quiz and me, is due to its direction out of con/text. In many ways it seems comfortable in a christian context, but don't you think it is loaded against Taoists, Buddhists, Confucians, Shamans, etc. whose shadows and lightfalls are tracing different forms and shapes? The questionnaire form seems to be a foreign object within the mandalic type thinking in which Buddhists excel!

I take to heart (in spite of my above answers) brother Gibbs epigram,


"Beware of oversimplifications even when they
are given by the most noble of teachers"

Good advice, I think, for all of us who have stumbled in the thickets of american buddhism.

gassho,

ebs

year of the horse, 1990

馬年
一九九〇
一月六日
信敬


For The CHFL

Dave Kiebert
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Dear Cloud Hidden Friends:

Thank you very much for sending me the latest issue of the newsletter. I enjoyed reading all of it, especially Al Huang's reminiscences about Alan Watts and advice about accepting and utilizing imperfections, Gregg Gibbs comments about a need for balance between tradition and personal spiritual experience, Richard Bell's "choose truth first, path second", and Ananda's religion quiz.. Regarding the latter, I had most difficulty with question number 19, "Many lives and rebirth". I had difficulty with choices "C" and "D". I decided my position on this issue is somewhat paradoxical and might be expressed as follows:

- I, Dave Kiebert, as a unique combination of genetic attributes, live only once.
- I, the Cosmic Self, as the Universe experiencing itself, am Eternal, yet incarnate endlessly in time and space.
- Each lifetime - indeed each moment of the Eternal Now - only comes once. As the Zen poem says "Inch Time Foot Jade" (an inch of time is worth a foot of jade.)

I call myself a "Mystical Fatalistic Pantheist." Mystical because I believe mystery is the ultimate ground of all knowledge, and I identify the Individual with the Cosmic Self; Fatalistic because I believe the entire universe is governed by fate, which is incorporated in our very atoms; and Pantheist because I perceive the entire universe as a living, evolving, more or less conscious being which I consider divine and sacred.

I have some questions or concerns about Buddhism which I hope some CHF's might help me with. Firstly, Buddhism seems to be disturbingly life-negating. As I understand it, orthodox Buddhism teaches that "All life is suffering; all suffering is caused by desire (i.e. the will to live); and the path of wisdom is the renunciation of desire and attachment to the physical world." Secondly, the historical Buddha seems to have been quite anti-feminine and anti-sexual. Did he not leave his wife and son -- whom he called Rahula (or "fetter"), and did he not three times refuse to allow his wife and sister to join the Sangha - finally reluctantly allowing the establishment of an

order of nuns only upon the condition that nuns be subservient in all ways to monks?

I will grant you there is much inevitable suffering in life, especially the universal experience of eventual loss of loved ones to death. But is there not also much joy in life? Is there room in Buddhism for love of family, for sexual pleasure, for the taste of food and drink, the delights of music and dancing, poetry, and the arts? Is sensual pleasure and love of life all error and foolishness? Is there not much wonder and beauty in the Universe, moonlight, sunsets, rippling water, wind blowing through the trees, etc.? I would like to know what Buddhism says about the goodness of life.

I too observe the hopeful events in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world with cautious optimism, and I look forward with excited curiosity to the new decade.

I hope you are all well and happy.

Namaste,

Dave Kiebert

CHFL:

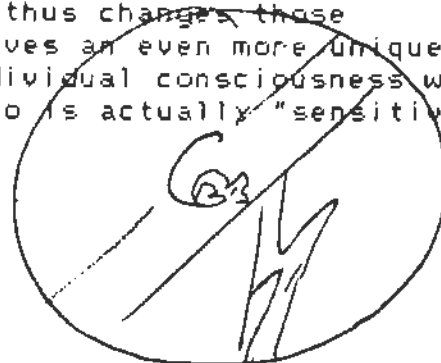
Gregg Gibbs: WATCH! that word "believe" as in "I truly believe that K was wrong to believe --". The Buddha didn't BELIEVE or believe IN his 4fold Truths, he KNEW them to be correct FACT. "Believe" indicates that one does NOT KNOW and requires this mental commitment to conjecture and opinion. I am not being an authority figure for I have no "other" opinion to suggest since I "believe" that ALL opinions are BS (Fritz Perls Gestalt: BS = rationalizations).

" - people - with no integrity, nothing holding it together and no power to nurture them" - NOW WHO is the authority figure? You state categorically: "Zazen is for healthy people." So, is DELUSION healthy? YOU answer this challenge to your unconscious definitions. "Well-adjusted" ??? I advise that you search yourself (in meditation) as to the loading you place upon these phrases. Since "religious traditions" aren't "designed to" help us with the lives we lead, state just what they are designed to do.

Ananda: " - some kind of personal compromise is necessary is one hopes to join in religious fellowship" -. True, IF - you change the word from "hopes" to "aspires". There are those who "hope" for "brotherhood" (community instead of alienation) and then there are those who "aspire" to "join" something.

Your Questionnaire: my own personal view is obviously colored by Wild Fox Zen: thus I fit into your - too much individualistic class. But each person (of the billions present today) has his own UNIQUE blend of values, truths, beliefs that he adheres to. And as he studies, meditates, etc and thus changes those unconscious conditioned sets, he achieves an even more unique blend. To be able to speak to the individual consciousness with what s/he needs requires a "sensei" who is actually "sensitive" and who can thus speak to THAT.

yellow mouse



Edward Star
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CHFL:

As of late i've been thinking of the proper or in my case the improper use of concepts, ideas, terminology of religion, and in particular Buddhist. Having maybe a little edge in understanding beyond my car mechanic, though nowhere near what is desired to really discuss with a learned person, i often feel in a kind of verbal limbo. Not that using a concept or term correctly isn't a biggie to me in itself (Shirley McLane and i do it all the time), rather it's what the misuse can imply or how it can lead to an incorrect notion, which is the greater concern. You know, designer religion; i'm O.K., but your not., sort of thing, plus all the subtle misinterpretation which can have farreaching influence or effect. Anyone remember EST ? I remember a friend of mine who paid 500. just to be told he procrastinates and that he was an ass. I could have saved him the money, but i guess he felt an ill mannered suit would say it better. New age advertising gimmicky groups do a fairly good job of bending the truth, let alone taking the integrity out of profound though often hard to understand concepts. It would be nice if we could reduce concepts to their simplest notion, but it unfortunately doesn't clear anything up and leaves things flat and tasteless. Yet these groups may have a place in our apparently apathetic society, where we easily divorce ourselves from anything that doesn't suit our fancy. What is of more concern is people (#%!!?) like Elizabeth Clair Profit with her Universal Church Triumphant (I AM DAT I YAM) who so willingly twist idea and imagery to suit her own needs (Big Bucks). Actually she belongs in her own category, like the National Scum-Bag Hall of Fame. In other words she isn't just a naive air head, ill-directed, as she's much too calculating. On the other hand, there are groups although quite sincere and upright, likewise have allowed precise traditional view points to become muddied through sloppy interpretation. Theosophy, Self-Realization, Masons, Baba Free to take your money John, Baba this, Guru that, Swami snatch your wallet, etc., groups that take a little of this, a little of that, and mush them together as if i might add they were really meant to be like that (hey i didn't mean to shot the Cow, it just looked like an overfeed white dog, and since it was in my back yard. . .). Acknowledging the wrath of sincere Zennist to come bouncing upon my balding rusty head, i'd almost include Shasta Abbey for their quite cultish feel and heavy-handed (is it just me ?) Fem Fuhrer (Please K.R. don't thank me, i already know i'm a bastard). And many of the Tibetan Buddhist (exceptions: Gelug-pa, and a few others) groups for the way in which they function in the U.S., often acting like Angelic Gypsies from Hell, playing Kissy face with wealthy American patrons, and in general growing in size like gang-busters because they have alot of neat toys to sell. My appointment calendar should be quite open by now. Neither of the above, however qualify as any sort of inappropriate belief system, just that they may be on the cutting edge. This of course is my own loose spring as well, and why i can recognize similar structures, those more and those less so.

The common ground seems to be a belief system added to justify the tool rental. Though on the other side for the moment, i do remain close to the line or edge (Marion get your sword !), as i'm overly involved by curiosity in all too many diverse belief systems, this combined with a pathetically poor memory can be counter to appropriateness. ((If anyone is waiting for me to come to a conclusion or tie this up nice and neat, had better read someone else, as i'm just inappropriately scratching an itch)) New friends often have shown some confusion when they've been to my house with all the odd assortment of religious statues, beads, Buddhas, Christ-Marys a plenty (actually i don't over do it, like theres no neon bleeding hearts or the like). As before this they tend to view me differently, as i'm one of those blue collar folks who never seem to get out of their work clothes. I'm perpetually in paint splattered faded carpenter pants, tattered shirt of some sort, beat up shoes, and what with an externally polite though common personality, shit eating grin but frequently grumpy, quick to cuss or take a swing, a die-hard war monger, you could see that i'm never accused of anything remotely metaphysical. If pinned down (you know:"what are you dude !") which is rare, i tend to use the odd (and shameless) pseudo term "Buddhiac-Catholic", rather than descriptions which are often too personal to discuss at length (Sufi, Yogi, Martial Artist, Asshole), if it comes to it. It even strikes me as strange that as a person who makes his living doing renovative house painting, that it is without a doubt the most secretive aspect of my personality, nor is it that way because i yearn to do something else, rather i love it far too much. The actual preparation and painting is restful, nurturing and a great sense of pride and joy in my life. So much so that i dislike even talking about a job while in progress, but relax my guard when the work is completed. Sorry, back to the main line. I'm not a Buddhist, yet i study at it because of its way of examining ideas so clearly (atleast for the most part). I am a Catholic in the bare bones of basic structure and icons, though don't have a practice as such, though i do say the rosary (not for the stations of the Cross, but for the Mother). And i don't practice my own brand of either, and don't see the Christ as a different kind of Buddha, or vice versa. Though i do tend to view the essential nature of the Pureland and active lay Marian Catholicism as somewhat similar. And sorry but Kuan Yin doesn't quite do it for me, and the Tara's what with their wonderfully large rounded breasts and generally kick ass bods, seem rather cold and distant to this yahoo. Back, back, back, i keep wondering away from the main road, oh yea, i use the misnomer "Buddhiac" as it implies for me the essence of the techniques of Buddhism, a tool users guide, a shameless Rick Griffin-Dead Heads approach. As i'm decidedly more naive than its scholars, more exoteric than its esoterist (hey Elton), and still somewhat different than pop-culture Budhi-duty (Watts, Ginsberg, Lama Govinda-in-Marinda). I really enjoy Buddhist literature quite alot, until some semi-divine nice guy-gal says odd stuffus like " by just

repeating this mantram once, the nearby mountains, rivers, toe jam, and your aunts ear lobes will achieve enlightenment in x number of years (have a cup of Kalpa !)". Though i do see great importance in alot of this stuffus (hey it is stuff-Us !), it does seem too great a distraction at times, and just tiring at others, sorry. I don't have the same problems with Catholicism even though it has much greater distractions, numbingly banal, guilt ridden and overly sweet. Yet all of it makes its own odd sense to me, has anyone ever seen the Catholic program "In My Fathers House" with Fr.G.W. Rutler ? The man is quite astonishing in his direct clarity and is wonderfully intelligent, the other Catholic programing is however a washout in either dryness or cuteness. Anyway i was born as such, its my property even if i don't like some heavy-handed parts, the Pope, etc., but even what i dislike i have atleast a kind of remote respect for. Back to that horrid term Buddhiac, which for me is a kind of truce between the two beliefs, and finding its scholars alittle touchy at times when an outsider bungles through their order of things, i prefer to use a misnomer from the 60's. You know, when some of us really thought that Theosophist knew what they were talking about, or that an occultist could understand metaphysic's ? Which is sort of like a devout fast food junkie having broccoli dreams. So while having only demented broccoli dreams, and finding no error in physical and intuitive flexibility, i try to be mindful of my ability to misuse the genuine article. I'll grant that i might include guru-bashing. One step forward and a half step back. Later dude.

note: Just before setting the above to type, the Churches announcement about the mixing of Asian practices hit the paper. Very interesting and i of course both agree: it must remain true to its unique approach regarding its tradition and disagree: always so up-tight ! relax alittle Pope-dude !.

Greg: I found it also interesting to note your article last issue for your usually indepth insights on attentiveness (Watts, Krishnamurti).

Mouse: Hi Mouse buddy. Always enjoy your stuffus, even though it's mostly over my head. Hey lots do lunch, Cheese and crackers, squeek, squeek.

Ananda: At the present time there isn't really anything more on Miner i as such. I've stopped its function by merely no longer doing anything about it. I felt somewhat obligated to carry the ball atleast until its concept became solidified. It became painfully clear that i'd bitten off more than i could chew as eventually i hit the mental wall and frankly was and am not up to it academically. Plus it did have some hairy edges, animistic-Yama Bushi stuff, quasi Shinto-Buddhist stuff and unworkable stuff. And it just did not belong here, this time and space, etc., or atleast i'm not what it needed, and since you can't exactly look up Yama Bushi types in the want ads. . .

Dear Cloud-Hidden Friends:

How delightful to get the special commemorative issue in honour of Alan Watts - our collective silence has recently been too long, and obviously a reflection on our meagre contributions Ananda's way. Perhaps remembering Alan Watts' enormous and original contribution to clarity, where many obscurities cloud our Zen Buddhist and Taoist pathways, might be instrumental in helping us to refurbish our own will to keep our letter exchange fellowship going? I personally hope so.

Having acknowledged our unquestionable great debt to Alan Watts for his personal light, I find myself questioning the ultimate wisdom in any conscious or deliberate remembrance of people or events passed. I mean this, not in the strict historical sense of an important fact or event that obviously took place in a time now passed, but rather within a context of our own attachment or dependency on that memory for our own sustenance, reassurance or inspiration. Of course, I am referring to the need to remember, the need to recall or perhaps even the need to revere a particularly precious memory of a significant person or event. I think that it all boils down to being able to distinguish (noting that it is often a very fine line that divides the two) between living in-the-memory of someone or something, where the actual memory itself becomes an essential component of our own sense of being or *raison d'être*, and living through-it, where we are touched or blessed by the experience, but where we move on much enriched yet without any attachment to the memory of that experience.

I know that we all do this to some extent, and I don't want to be misunderstood to be implying that remembering someone, something or some event, is to be scorned or deprecated as a fact....not at all. All I'm anxious to clear up in my own thinking, is the seeming contradiction that all must encounter who follow the teachings of Zen Buddhism, which clearly point out the desirability of seeking to be non-attached - particularly to things passed. I know that, Krishnamurti for one, always urged us to question the value of holding on to the memory of events passed as aids for gaining self-awareness or self-knowledge. I simply wish to pose this as a personal question, and would welcome your comments and personal experience of how we can best deal with this kind of situation in practice.

Thank you Ananda for your generic as opposed to proprietary brand distinction in the manifestation of religious forms. I find it a very useful comparison, as it points out the limiting effects of all specific labelling. The moment that we confine any dynamic body of wise teachings within the rigidity of dogmatism or any kind of doctrinaire labelling, we have lost sight of the most essential factor, namely that real wisdom must always remain generic. It cannot possibly be otherwise! The moment that "wisdom" appears packaged under some "brand-name", beware of its almost certain fraudulence! I have a sense that Alan Watts knew this instinctively, and that it gave him an extraordinary degree of personal freedom to see things as they really are and to venture within the confines of many diverse religious forms with total impunity. The nearest he did come to identifying himself with any one label, I think, was Taoism. I'm also pretty certain that Lao Tzu was someone who clearly spoke and lived as a "genericist" too. You can't really pin any label on him!

In the spirit of fellowship, goodwill and openness.
Most sincerely,



For The CHFL,

From Ananda Dalenberg
753 44th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94121

Dear Fellow Pilgrims:

Greetings! It seems my "Religious Quiz" in the last issue has kicked up quite a fuss, which is what I had in mind. Some of you had a quite a problem with the term "Supreme Being", and were unwilling to substitute some other term as was suggested. To some degree I share in such an uncompromising spirit, but I think communication remains essential. I'd say, for example, that it might be very rewarding to sit down with some friend and compare thoughts on something like the twenty topics, as long as it is based on a relationship of mutual respect. It is amazing what old friends don't know about each other, and that might even be true of one's own family.

The quiz uses a somewhat Western vocabulary. I must confess, I actually was a bit apprehensive about using a more Buddhist perspective, since I was afraid it would all too clearly show that Buddhists have consensus on very few things. The same problem may be doubly true of a fragile collection of independent types such as that of the CHF. We New Age types tend to presume, without really thinking about it, that we share in some general philosophical consensus, and our tendency may be to protect what is actually an illusion.

I originally intended the quiz as a kind of exercise in my own personal dilemma or koan. On one side of the dilemma is religious fellowship or sangha, which requires that one share in the same views with others, though this may mean some important personal compromise. On the other side, is facing issues responsibly and squarely, and standing up for one's own beliefs no matter what the cost may be, even if it means that one ends up entirely alone. I am equally drawn to both alternatives, and am then caught on the horns of a dilemma with nowhere to turn, and my flipping around from one side to the other, doesn't really work. This then is my personal "koan", along with at least several more of such koans, and for each person it is different.

Koans, it seems to me, are meant to be real life gut wrenching dilemmas with no easy answers. Take Bob Smith's letter, for example. What do you do in that ambulance with some medical crisis involving "no code" and some frail senior citizen? What do you do?

Of course in Zen the ultimate answer is only found at the level of Bodhi or Awakening, but that is not some far distant thing, but is found right in the midst of suffering and samsara.

Koan is, I think, a Zen version of the Buddhist Middle Way. But the Middle Way is not some bloodless blah compromise that somehow manages to avoid the two extremes. I greatly prefer gut koans to what may mostly be mere philosophical riddles found in the history books. As for the answers, well, that's not easy, and maybe that had best wait till later. Hopefully a few of them will appear in some future issue (that's a joke, son).

I apologize if the quiz seemed to pose too much as some official catalogue of the various orthodox views of different religions. Actually the last thing I want to do is to go around pontificating on what true orthodox views really are and rejecting others as being heretical.

Namaste,

Ananda