

THE ZEN FREETHINKER

Issue #34

Second of 1991

Formerly Known As "The Cloud-Hidden Friends Letter"

The Zen Freethinker is devoted to a more natural and free spirit in Zen, with an emphasis on the more individual way of a pilgrim, rather than the way of an organization, temple, or sect.

Such a spirit is perhaps best exemplified by Daisetz T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and Nyogen Senzaki, three important early pioneers of Zen in the West. Although they greatly loved traditional Zen, in their own lives they each chose to go a more free-ranging and individual way, remaining unallied to any particular organization or sect. Nor did they seek some lofty religious title, no doubt in the spirit of Rinzai's phrase, "A true man of no rank". They then might indeed be regarded as being Zen Freethinkers. Among many others that might be included here are Paul Reps, R.H. Blythe, Christmas Humphreys, and those in Japan with a spirit akin to that of D.T. Suzuki, although they themselves did not use the term Zen Freethinker.

There are of course also other Freethinking traditions. In the West, Freethinking is often scorned as representing some unholy den of atheists libertines, and deists, even though it would include such eminent figures as Edward Herbert, Voltaire, Rousseau, Spinoza, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. For us this seems an illustrious heritage, for which we have some real affinity. Although trying to define so free and varied a tradition is hazardous, it might be fair to say that "Freethinking trusts most deeply in natural religion, and in the natural divinity which is the inmost nature of everyone. A Freethinker then is free from dependence upon revealed truth or external religious authority". Combine such a definition with an equally or even more hazardous definition of Zen, and you have a Zen Freethinker.

In any case, we aim to go beyond the barriers dividing East and West.

For our "subscription fee", we request a letter from you now and then for our pages. But if that is too much to ask, we would accept some small monetary contribution.



Lord Buddha preaching the Dharma with Shāriputra Shavira and Mah Maudgalyāna Shavira.

The ZF is a Beneath the Pines Publication, and our whereabouts are somewhat hidden in San Francisco fog. We then are fond of an old Chinese verse by Chia Tao. Lin Yu Tang 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."

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THE ZEN FREETHINKER

NEWS & NOTES

ISSUE #34

1) There have been more comments on our new title the Zen Freethinker, not exactly all positive. As editor, I then might make a few comments. I was very fond of the old title myself, but the reality of it all had to be faced. Last year we were obviously about to fold because of a lack of interest. The only alternative then seemed to be to take some big step, such as a name change. Even so, note that our "Cloud-Hidden" verse will continue to appear on the front page.

Some have commented that the term Zen Freethinker is redundant. I would agree that ideally it would be so, but would add that Zen has big problems, such as sectarianism, dogmatic formalism, macho militarism, lay/monastic dualism, patriarchal elitism, and suppression of women, all of which certainly are not characteristic of a Freethinking spirit.

The best antidote here may be to emphasize more the Freethinking side of Zen, but in a way which is harmonious with our own roots. Zen, for example, has historically been very open and inclusive of different native traditions, such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. But surely it would be a great mistake to try to substitute some far-off native tradition for that of our own.

But just what is our own native tradition? Obviously from one point of view, this would mean the Judeo Christian tradition. But there is another obvious alternative, which is our own Freethinking tradition. As Americans, for example, surely our own native tradition is represented in some very deep sense by the ideals of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and as it says in the Declaration of Independence. that all men are created equal. Note that for Whitman and other Freethinkers, this is a religious statement. Such values have permeated the lives of perhaps most of us, to the degree that we are mostly unconscious of them, as would also be characteristic of a native tradition. In this sense, for us the solution is to be what we are.

Some of you seem to be apprehensive that our new title may be taking a step in the direction of "Zen stink", a common ailment for which Zen is rightly famous. Perhaps we ought to take a cue from Elson Snow and aim to be Zenfree Thinkers. It would be unfortunate indeed if we were to instead end up Zen Freestinkers.

As editor, I might also confess that I am in some ways an unrepentant beatnik, and I fully intend to remain so, although it is not always easy. And if you really want to know, I do believe it is a good idea to bathe once a week, as was the firmly established tradition back on the farm in my childhood days in South Holland Illinois.

2) The next issue will probably be out next month. It would be appreciated if you would help spread the word to new subscribers.

Letters appearing in this issue are from:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Basco | Frederick Franck |
| Richard Bell | Yellow Mouse |
| Richard Boerstler | Elson Snow |
| John Boyd | Ed Star |
| Robert Breckenridge | Bob Smith |
| Gregg Gibbs | Don Stevens |

Floating Zendo

Zen Freethinker, 753 44th Ave.,

Ananda Dalenberg, Editor

San Francisco, CA 94121.

Dear Zen Friends,

When I heard that Paul Reps had gone on in the midst of the Gulf conflagration I at once saw his calligraphy of the beautiful big cup and his inscription: I DRANK A CUP OF TEA AND STOPPED THE WAR!!!! It is time for me to stop the endless mind chatter and just drink my cup of tea.!!! Thank you, Paul, for this and much, much more.!!!! When I opened one of his books just to get that feel of his presence, on page 49, the cover cracked open to "in the mind of light one does not die." Wow.!!!

Checking my memory the correct quote is below:



drinking
a bowl of green tea
I stopped the war

I will go at once to wash my mouth out with soap for the following:
THE ZEN TEACHINGS OF BODHIDHARMA, Translated by Red Pine, North
Point Press, S.F., 1989. If I dare it, I'll give away all the books
on my shelves leaving only this: "the only volume of the great
teacher's work currently available in English."(Outline of Practice,
Bloodstream Sermon, Wake-up Sermon, Breakthrough Sermon)
Enough, enough, enough!!

With gassho,
Richard

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For the ZF

January 5, 1991

ZF c/o floating zendo
753 44th Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121

Dear ZF's

Best wishes for the New Year and greetings from New Jersey. Issues 30, 31 and 33 have found their way into NJ from Cape Cod. I note with interest the transition from CHFL to ZF. For some reason it seems a move from lightness to something more heavy. Did I miss 32? Was it the Cloud Hidden Zen Freethinker?

The new issue seems to live up to its name for free thinking. Yet for all of its Zenness the word "should" is used liberally throughout. But, be that as it may let me not be the one to say we shouldn't use should. On the other hand, perhaps one has to use "should" to be a true freethinker. Hm, is Zen Freethinker an oxymoron.

In 30/31, A.D. mentioned our "own personal dilemma or koan." I wonder do we spend too much time pondering our koans rather than living them? I do. I wonder can I learn to live life - just live it - without thinking about it? Nike says - Just do it. Now isn't that a fitting image, a worn training flat on a pedestal.

So far as the near east is concerned, without the countries behind the wall as enemies we had to find someone. Drugs didn't do it (as in "the war on") so we found Iraq. Now corporately we can stand together with our manhood intact. Can no one ever believe Pogo?

IN PEACE & LOVE
Bob

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Richard Bell
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97520

Dear Cloud Hidden Freethinker Friends:

When back in November Ananda asked me what I thought Voltaire, Rousseau, Spinoza, T. Paine, B. Franklin, T. Jefferson, et. al. had in common, I guessed "Being Masons?"

So, what's in a name?

OK, Freethinkers, the quest for G_d and the realization of Reality, Enlightenment, Truth, Life, etc. appears to me to be the same thing and that thing innate to life experience...

...[for the prize behind door #2 (the middle way)]...
"What of these secular traditions we practice?"

"What is a Buddhist?" is like the age old question "Who is a Jew?" There are secular, cultural Buddhists, temple priests, practicing students, lay priests, and philosophical "life-ists." Some absorb themselves with traditional practices and some use the "tools," "perspective," or "philosophy," on wherever they find and live what they do.

The definition is wide open (or...open just enough to admit those of those we admire). If the Buddha dharma is whatever works, then the field is especially wide. All sincere seekers (and others) must be Buddhist. If Buddhism demands traditional, culturally Asian practice it leaves out some good ones.

Maybe the question is "What is Buddhism?"

Try this on for size;

"Experiencing what is and experiencing the experience of experiencing what is."

Or;

"Paying attention."

Plagiarized, but I like them.
I don't anticipate them being widely accepted.

I'm sometimes asked why I don't call it Freethinking or Life?

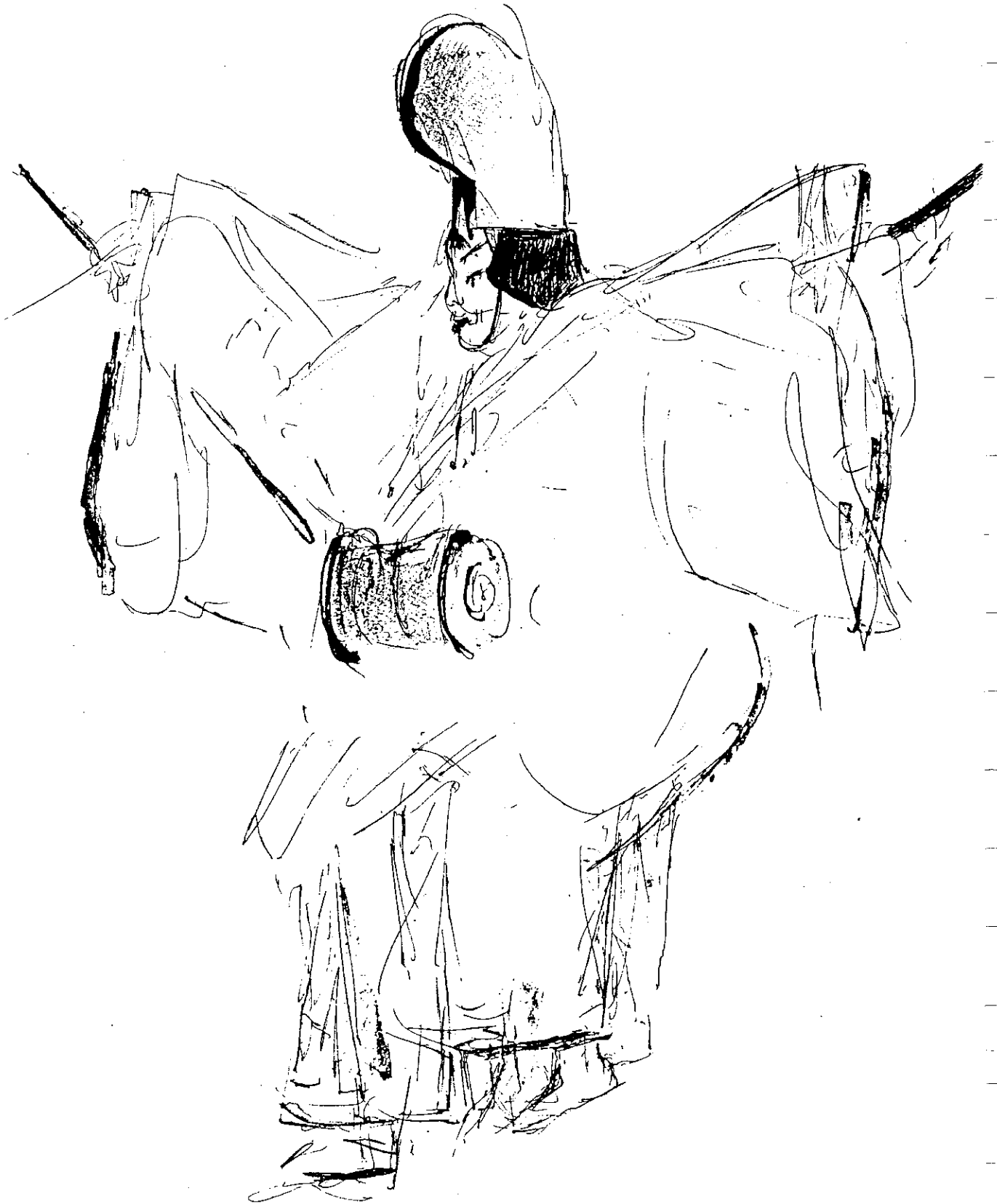
I argue that foreign words and traditions are nice but that perspective, style, or philosophy make a Buddhist. I've yet to convince a practitioner of traditional stuff. They give me the hairy-eyeball.

Comments????...

Yours in the Dharma,



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Tugan Kay

Frederick F. F. F.
Artistic Prooy # 11

A NOH DRAWING

Six centuries old, Noh is the creation of Zeami (1363-1443) and his father Kanami, who transformed what until then had been a vulgar entertainment into the noblest of arts: at once dance, drama, opera and liturgy. In the Noh play the sounds of the three-piece orchestra (knee-drum, shoulder-drum and transverse bamboo flute with sometimes a stick drum added) do not illustrate the action but set its tone, as the mask in Noh is not a disguise but a tool of transformation. The voices of the choir, of the often masked main actor, (shite) and his counterparts, seem to come from the very depths of silence. The movements, up to and including the final dance (it has often been called the pretext for a Noh play) are pure zazen in motion. ★

Six centuries old as it is, Eugene Ionesco, the French-Roumanian playwright, called it "the avant-garde theatre of the future".

One of my favorite Noh plays was on the program when I was in Kyoto last month, Zeami's "Tenko", the drum that fell from heaven:

A pregnant woman dreams about a golden drum falling from heaven. She gives birth and indeed a few years later a golden drum does descend from heaven. Her little boy catches it, strikes the drum. It produces a heavenly music. The miracle is much discussed. People come from far to hear the little boy play his drum. The news penetrates even to the imperial court. The emperor is obsessed: he must own this heavenly instrument. He sends an envoy, but the little boy refuses to give up his drum. Then the emperor sends his soldiers. They find the boy, hidden in the forest, drown him and triumphantly bring the drum to the palace. The emperor tries to play it. It is mute. Court musicians are called, but no one can get the slightest sound out of it. The emperor, by now distressed, commands the boy's father to come to the palace. The father only has to touch the drum and the heavenly music wafts through the halls. Now the emperor becomes contrite, orders a solemn memorial service to be conducted for the little boy. The child's ghost appears, reconciled to his fate, but in possession of the golden wonder drum he plays it while dancing that final dance of the Noh play which so often bridges the chasm between life and death, between one incarnation and the next.

I hope this fulfills all your wishes! Warm regards!

Dear Freethinking Friends:

The sheer complexity of our current human predicament in the Gulf War, poses enormous problems for all of us on a number of different levels, no less for Zen Freethinkers than for others. Personally I am appalled that whatever available wisdom we presume to have, is of so little use to us in resolving this and other conflicts on the world scene. Behind these massive assemblies of war making machinery, glorying in their techno-sophisticated fire power, are deep currents of human greed, fear and self-interest. How can we ever possibly hope to transcend our own incessant commands to action, to retribution, to dominance and to the exploitation of others? Each nation or group of nations self-righteously claiming God's favour for themselves! Surely the time has come to "grow up" and to realize that war can no longer serve us as a valid way of settling anything, no matter what the circumstances are. But are we not collectively trapped in/by the dictates of ego, and thus perhaps destined to continue going round and round in our myopic circles of perpetual illusion and fearful of ever having to wake up, lest we should have to take responsibility for all the injustice, sorrow and suffering that is rampant on our planet?

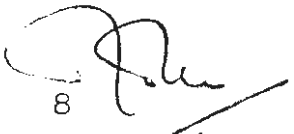
Among the most disturbing aspects of the current conflict, is the fact that it has become (among other things) a highly contentious and polarized confrontation between parties with different religious affiliations. Nothing is more "contaminated" and blind than conflicts rooted in religious beliefs, where the righteousness of one's own point of view (one's whole identity in fact) is based upon or endorsed by divine authority or doctrine. The mere assumption of such an omnipotent authority for one's own self-righteousness, can obviously lead us directly to fanaticism, martyrdom or a "jihad" type of mind set that is totally inflexible. Our entrapment in the illusion of being totally justified in holding such inflexible points of view, is total and rigid and cast in black and white terms.

To rise above the confines of such conflict (all conflict in fact!), requires the ability to transcend the limits of a (you and me split) dualistic reality, and move to a state of oneness where unity consciousness becomes a reality in our daily lives. It certainly strikes me that the chances of a critical mass of people achieving such a non-dualistic state of awareness is currently pretty slim - not that I'm personally given to pessimism as a matter of course!

As usual our collection of letters provided much food for both mind and soul. Sorry to learn that brother Paul Reps is no longer with us in the flesh. Though I personally knew him not, I deeply respected his attempts to lighten and simplify the burden of those who pursue Zen "too seriously". It always seems so difficult in dealing with the most profound aspects of life, to avoid falling into the deep chasms of extremism that lie on either side of our path. Thank you Jerry Bolick for bringing Akegarasu's "Shout of Buddha" to our attention. Also Tom Thompson for sharing your good personal space and fortune with us.... I completely agree with you regarding Mary Lutyens' book on J. Krishnamurti "The years of Awakening", and might add the sequel book, also by Mary Lutyens, "The Years of Fulfilment". I have always found a great deal of wisdom in all of J. Krishnamurti's books.... but who on earth is U.G. Krishnamurti? As for Kanya McGhee's comments linking the Christian Story to Natural Phenomena - I'm totally put off by such narrow (to my mind) epistemologies or cosmologies. Very reminiscent of all black and white platforms that claim to have found a valid framework that explains the great mystery of creation or some such! Is brother "Yellow Mouse" hibernating or has he inadvertently got caught in some cloud-hidden mousetrap while trying to get to the cheese?!

Yours in the spirit of openness, friendship and love,

John H. Boyd,
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Ontario. M9A 5B2
Canada.



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Robert Breckenridge

"ZEN FREETHINKER" ?? The meditation freethinker?? The word "zen" we all know, is the Japanese pronunciation of "chan" which means meditation, you know. Perhaps best not be too literal lest our title be seen as an **oxymoron**. You know this word "oxymoron" I suppose has recently become popular. Anyhow, one hopes it does not refer to freethinkers like us who contribute so generously writing for this journal.

Meditation is more about **notthinking** than about **thinking**. One knows this because one has read many books about it, heard many lectures about it, thought about it and talked about it often. "Sit, close mouth, put busy tongue on roof of mouth, quiet tongue, quiet mind.

But do it later please, not now.....first finish reading this important message from my tongue to yours, because here you may finally find the answer you seek and also get good taste tickle tongue. We can't meditate all the time. **Meditate when meditating! Think when thinking!**

Freethinkers think freely: unburdened by systems, preconceptions, ego investments, projections, taboos, groupthink, leaderthink, delusion, illusion or such silly constraints as trying to come across as intelligent or wise: Ignorance is bliss and fooldom is freedom.

But think how? With words of course, in brain symbol bits that make tongue wiggles, of course. In systems with phonemes, morphemes, syntax, you know, The System, I know The System. My brain wiggles my tongue wiggles your eardrum wiggles your brain. (Of course if we do it in writing there's a lot of other intermediate steps with fingers, paper, ink, word processors, licking envelopes, etc. etc. In writing one wiggles brains distantly - not intimately.)

Right here in front of us is the System we use: Our beloved English Language..... Or does it use us? Once it starts going inside one, it is extremely difficult to get it stopped - even for just a few minutes. And it has rules and they have to be followed or it won't work right. If one really goes in for Freethinking and stops following the rules, people will not understand and they will say you are not making "sense". Keep it up too long and they might lock you up as a danger to yourself and society or now maybe you just can't get a job and you have to beg for food and sleep in the streets. This freethinking can be a very chancey as tables might be if they were under their legs rather than realizing that in the inner depths of realization, it goes forward more delicately with what the next moment has brought before it was beginning to end.

Had Bodhidharma stayed in the past where he belonged, we might not have considered the distinct possibility that within the limitations of The System, the unlimited lies under the surface, bubbling with an intense energy that one might never have perceived if one had not undertaken the opportunity to finally, once and for all, begin to end the beginning, and that's why we call it Zen.

However, you may or may not agree with the foregoing, in ways above and beyond, or behind and below, the conceptions and deceptions whereby the truth is often not found in the wiggles and marks in black on white paper, and once again return to the kitchen where you might open the cabinets or refrigerator and find what you are actually seeking in a box, can, jar or plastic package. After taking in such profound reality before you with gusto, feel it transformed, within a matter of days, into something perhaps even more real - so real in fact that you may find it nearly unbearable to contemplate for more than a moment, and certainly not place on the altar - because it has become the **Now!** Not letting homogeneity be overly intertwined beyond the physical or metaphysical limits that the theologically disoriented real time accuracy leads to an ontological reexamination of the educationate reargination dunt umbg orgbarintained warbsof gallyramb = true freethinking.



Robert

CHFL, ZF - Whatever ?

1/30/91

Zen Free-thinker vs Cloud-Hidden Zen Friends: I see the dichotomy as rather: Dialogue amongst Friends vs Exposition "About" something. I love to preach but my experience indicates that I make an ass out of myself when I do. So I prefer to speak at somebody who has the right, permission and desire to rebut, amend and propose his own view. It is my opinion, belief that ripe "Zen" behavior is rather blunt, undignified and confrontive (IKKEI). While the beginner should only listen, the adept must try out his "zen"(?) in zen exercise (combat) but only with other adepts - the master never "plays" (Remember the finger * cut off ?). I'm happy to shift away from dialogue (since nobody ever joined me, anyway) and begin to expound my "wild-fox" zen. (* That's what happens to finger-pointers.)

The "controversy" over edstar's piece is a perfect example (I respect ed's use of his name in lower case to express humility). If a "friend" is depressed, we ought welcome his expression of it, for that IS HIMself. Reference back to him (dialogue) is expected to reach inside him and jar him into reality and thus out of his conditioned feelings (stasis: anastasis). If the "zen game" is what we are about, then what I said is sufficient unto itself. But if the game is exposition, then the communicator must step outside himself as an actor and explain his usage of words. And I don't think that role (expositor: finger-pointer) is a zen role. "The man who has climbed up the signpost in order to better read the signs can point the way, BUT he himself is NOT on the Way, he is stranded up the signpost." So, in my reply to ed:

ie: "- and a bow to the east." Must I explain the depth meaning of the bow which is ALWAYS "to the inevitable" (quoted from a zen master) ? And this bow is to the rising sun, the symbol of nature bringing light (enlightenment) by dispelling the darkness - which is nothing (no-thing) at all other than the mere absence of light.

ie: "-or I'll come down there and drag you off your high Chevy seat." ed uses his Chevy as a metaphor for his "ox" or "water-buffalo" and I shifted it to the "high seat" (I didn't "have-to" insert "high".) occupied by the Abbot in a monastery. My statement refers to the ancient tale of Zen games played by the visiting adept out to test his zen, who in the midst of the solemn rites strode up to the high seat, grabbed the master and threw him to the floor, climbed up and occupied the seat himself. The master then grabbed him and threw him back out of the seat - he then bowed to the master and left. Zen masters tell us to apprehend the inner meaning of such events but NOT TO EXPOUND "ABOUT" it. (I know - there is more to that story.) "Never confuse the finger with the moon." Actually, Zen is a piece of shit - I suppose you think that is naughty - but it IS scripture (shit-stick).

As an exercise in exposition, Ananda asked me to comment on gerunds: Taken from Chapter II of my book NO NAME WILL DO:

And there is a second linguistic problem: materialism. When we refer to God, one is forced into confusion by the very fact that the word "God", is a NOUN. A noun is a thing. I am not referring to ANY belief system, I am referring to a linguistic truth: NOUNS REFER TO THINGS and are the subjects or objects of an action or verb. Thus WE PERMIT "God" to be an actor or to be acted upon. Thus "God" is limited and cannot BE a power for "he" is NOT A VERB: "IT" is a noun. Unfortunate - for when we say: "God is love", we are pointing to two nouns across an equivalency: noun G equals noun L. So LOVE MUST BE A THING, also. We are trapped in our language with no way out. If you

wish to find out about God, you ask: "WHAT is IT?". "What" and "it" can ONLY refer to things: ie, materialism. If we suppose God to be an energy flow, "it" is therefor NOT a thing and a noun cannot be used to symbolize this concept. And then the question becomes unanswerable. Love is not a noun, "it" is a verb. We may say properly: God loves. But then love is separated from God. God DOES it (love) but love cannot be God.

Now if "God" is NOT a noun, then "God (a verb) is Love (another verb)" becomes true. That equivalence, however, rules out all other "verbs", such as "truth", "power", "justice", "good". What we mean to say (but we don't say it) is: Love is one of the ultimate and vital powers in the universe to be admired, adored, respected, adhered to. We use "god" (as we ought) as a reference to our personal psychic activity (process, happening) of attention setting. If we MUST have a compulsion, let it be to something as "good" as "Love".

In this realm we may end up with no nouns to make sentences out of. Homo may do an action called "love", which makes sense since homo is a thing, an animal. What then is: "man"? "It", too, is a noun. But is the center of our being, a THING? NO! For when we arrive at the "center", by definition, we have left all the peels (things) behind. We have NO THING left to the circle other than the abstraction: location - and that only for where the circle (peels, things) once was.

We want to understand clearly that our thinking is muddled by the presence of the linguistic problems inherent in our language. In order to find truth, we must be in control of our linguistic tools. TRUTH: our western languages have a materialistic set that forces on all of us that materialistic WAY of thinking and seeing. We won't get out of that set by wishing for it or in any other way. We must meet it head on and expose it and deal, cope, with it - not complain about it.

*

We have already seen one modern english linguistic problem: materialism. The reverse is best illustrated in the linguistic shift that occurred with the advent of science (circa 1800): gerunds. Western languages have used gerunds so long, as to have forgotten that they are verbs and not nouns in certain vital usages. The word "being" is one of these. We use "being", as in "human being", in such a way that the "be-" and the "-ing" (see KING pg xxx) are made one. But a "Being" is NOT a THING. It is a happening: an event, something changing.

"Happening", "changing", "moving", "being", "shouting", "running", "hitting" are NOT nouns (a status), they are action words: VERBS. They do NOT refer to THINGS, they refer to something which "happens", "changes", "moves", "shouts", "runs", "hits". Thus "snow happens", "life changes", "families move", "Harry shouts", "scatbacks run", and "batters hit". All these are actions, happenings, events.

A "being" thus is something that "be's", or "is". But "be's" implies "continue to be". When we look at a person standing still, we make the mistake of thinking that nothing is happening. But there is something very "vital" happening: s/he is NOT a "thing", an inanimate object: S/HE IS ALIVE: LIVING: BE-ING. S/he is continuing to BE, to exist as a LIFE here and now. The necessary flow of energy that distinguishes hir from a dead body is flowing through hir and making hir what s/he is. Without that spark of energy, s/he would NOT BE: truly, nothing happening any more. But so long as s/he BE'S, there is an event happening. An event so remarkable, so singular, so fantastic, that we MUST bow down and worship it. The spark of life, cosmic energy, God's power, the eternal force of the universe is somehow entering hir and keeping hir in BEING. That energy flowing through hir

continued

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center IS GOD (verb). That human is not A being (a thing) S/HE ~IS~
BEING: an event in process.

*

Ananda asked me what happens if you add "the" to a gerund as in "the being". I use the following to "attack" Christian fundamentalists: Jesus is said to have said: "I am the Son of God." I KNOW that he never said that and I can prove it to the satisfaction of ANY fundamentalist. How ??? Simple - Jesus never spoke English. Yes, that's cute, but it also points out the vital translation problem: all of the languages that Jesus might have spoken have no articles. In order to translate from, say Aramaic, into English the translator MUST add an article. His choices are only "a" and "the". But there is a world of difference between the indefinite and the definite article. If he says: "I am THE Son -", it implies "the only", but if he says "I am A Son -", it says "one among others" and that makes a vital theological distinction. To select "the" over "a" only measures the translator's hubris. But no Christian would ever pay him for using "a" (rather crucify him, I think).

English does allow no-article to indicate an abstraction: "Monarchy is bad." Thus, "I am Christ." (as in "I am King.") points out that the word "Christ" is an abstraction, a generalization without reference to either some specific person as "Christ" or numerous "Christs". But it does refer to a specific abstract concept to which the word "Christ" is appended as the label. I suggest that Yeshuah intended to communicate a specific concept - and the Christian's co-opted the label to their own use. (sounds normal, doesn't it ?).

But, in fact, "the" only points to some specific item and doesn't deny the existence of other similar items. If I say: "Hand me the ashtray.", I do not say that it is the only ashtray in existence, but I do refer to some specific ashtray (that might be handy to you ?). Thus the implication "the only" arises out of Christian usage and not out of the language. Thus "Hand me THAT ashtray" clearly says there are others. "I am THAT Son of God." is probably the correct translation. And WE brilliantly understanding zenners immediately see the usage "THAT": TAT TVAM ASI; HAM SA; TATHAGATA !
yellow mouse



From Ananda, A favorite quote by Albert Einstein:

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. ... If there is a religion that can cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.

*Act like a crazy dog. Wear sashes & other fine clothes,
carry a rattle, & dance along the roads singing crazy dog
songs after everybody else has gone to bed.*

quoted from Robert Bly's LEAPING POETRY,
a poem called CRAZY DOG EVENTS (Crow Indian),
arranged by Jerome Rothenberg

I do not know how to address this letter after the dropping of the old title of Cloud Hidden Friends; a sad choice I believe! Perhaps old Tom Paine could qualify as a forerunner of a freezenner, but old Tom Jefferson and Voltaire of all people? The author of *Candide* can be seen as a weary companion of the 20th century American. I was surprised to reread *Candide* in esperanto for the third time and my recent reading was most enjoyable of all as it met the requirements of pop-pop americana! Are you sure these humanists are moulded from the same humanistic liquid as "freethinking"? My grandfather, a midwest type, was self-labelled as a "freethinker"; but do we really qualify for this dubious honor? He thought Darwin had something more to say for his times. He fought the church tooth and nail. The Cloud Hidden Friends was a title more profound, more encompassing, and definitely more altruistic in a more conceivable way than expressed by sectarian blather, "I am not a sectarian!" Our old title was comfortable for under this banner I could continue my liking for monto (sangha) feelings, and love for the myokonin personality (good friend of the way /zenchishiki/kulaputra). Does freethinking zen offer reconciliation?

Old Tom Jefferson could stand on his porch in the evenings and stare out at the vast wilderness, and from his position to the Pacific Ocean there were populations, however small, in scattered villages of Indians living in more diverse styles than we conceive today, for our knowledge comes from Hollywood and a distorted memory of our storytellers. Our contemporary americans do not know america, and we are devoid of myth except for the imagination and those few like the Cloud Hidden Friends, for example, who could actually understand mythmaking, its use and abuse as religious thinking. I thought the Watts-syndrome included our poets like Whalen and Snyder, Vachael Lidsey and Whitman, and Rexroth, Patchen and John Muir; how can we possibly forget the ho-bo(es) of the twenties, the thirties, and the flower children who almost recaptured our utopian map of the United States? Freethinking zen? Our country is honeycombed with non-freethinking utopian schemes, and if we do not have the experience of a New England town house and Atlantic seaboard communes, nor the populist experience of the midwest and far west, we have a tradition under our feet of the political wobbles in the great northwest and tramps of San Francisco. Historical Thoreau-ism has a closer link to the international dharma than some scheme as a freezenner philosophy.

I fear the new header has eliminated Pure Land imagery, and along with it any reference to visual meditative forms. There are certainly many ways to skin cats: if any of our readers do not like institutions, it's OK, institutions are never liked by adolescents, either; and it is not even necessary to like them when we become arthritic and cranky with age. But is this the real point originally made by the *Cloud Hidden Friends Letter*? The last thing I want to join is a freethinking society. I'd rather join a temperance society which my grandfather belonged, (for whatever reason I was not told). Those of us contributing, enjoying and receiving Ananda's Letter are not cradle Buddhists: we have an advantage and disadvantage. But I, for one, do not want to drink from the cup of human kindness offered by freethinkers.

*pacific rim buddhists
let us not unite
or fight*

*or even curl our lip with contempt:
must we make a point not to remember,
serendipity came from the Buddhist Island
now torn from its original seam?*

Zenfree Thinker, Shaku Shinkyō

Greg Gibbs
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Dear CHFL pals & sparring partners,

As has often been the case in the past, I fear I may offend a person or two with my comments here. That is my Zen-Freethinker side. The Shinshu/take tradition as-it-is side also offends some (Ed Star?). I can only hope that most of you will understand that I do mean well.

Reflections on Dave Kiebert's letter

Buddhism is not life-negating. It affirms life. Its orientation is toward cultivating an appreciation for life prior to its being sundered by the desire for the good/pleasant and aversion for the evil/painful. It seems to be desire-negating largely because we look at works written for monks by monks about how monks and nuns should try to live and practice.

Monks and nuns have dedicated themselves to cultivating an appreciation for non-dual, universal life before it is broken by greed hatred and delusion into dualities like the approved of and the disapproved.

A crude analogy might be that we emphasize the taste of life before it is mixed with desire and hatred and fantasy amongst fellow and might-become Buddhists. Like appreciating the taste of a very pure spring water before it is mixed with kool-aide or scotch. We are not scotch-negating, kool-aide negating or desire-negating. We are affectiandos of life itself. Every now and then we may toss back a glass of kool-aide with enjoyment. (If we're Jodo Shinshu, more likely it will be a scotch and water)

We don't emphasize how wholesome it can be to sit with a friend and have a few scotch and waters. We don't even emphasize, in the process of teaching Buddhist living, how nice it is to share a glass of kool-aide with a favored niece or nephew. Our job, as Buddhist teachers, is to cultivate an appreciation for the water itself (viz. for life itself)

Life is something much better than we usually manage to notice. The truth is an unbroken universal life which appears as you, me the typewriter, etc. This true life, the Dharma, contains fully each of us and all of our loved one's in all their uniqueness. We say that life is non-dual so as to not swamp the uniqueness of persons places and events in some bland Oneness ("The night in which all cows are black", as Hegel put it). But it is something very much like universal oneness which we teach and revere.

"What Buddhism says about the goodness of life" is, then, that life is good in a sense that transcends "good" and "bad" as we normally discriminate them. The Zen stream of Buddhist tradition carries on sayings like "every day is a good day" and "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha" as ways of conveying this worthiness beyond high and low. As Buddhist teachers we don't say much more than this. We don't want to encourage or discourage drinking scotch, kool-aide, etc. It might confuse the teaching that all water is good water, every day is a good day. As individuals we cherish the pleasures in our lives and especially the warmth exchanged amongst friends, loved-ones and those we encounter briefly, but deeply. On this matter, see the next section.

Reflections on going to see Jade East dance

Last month I went to see the young actress who performs under

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the stage name of Jade East do an erotic dance show. My initial motivation was to revel in her striking beauty and sensuality and to experience something new. Never having been to a strip-tease club or topless bar before, I was expecting sexual arousal to be my basic experience.

When she actually began her sophisticated and erotic performance my response was at a different level. Her transient, shimmering and very real beauty was a statement to me that life is intrinsically good. Her sensuality spoke to me of the warmth of life. Her powerful sexuality reminded me of how fun it can be to discover one another in the subject-object realm of sense perception while knowing that we are not separate persons, but deeply one.

I visited her in her dressing room and discovered her to be charming and direct, a very genuine person. Her presence was similar to that of a meditational adept. She was fully present, alert, unashamed unafraid, prepared to deal with whatever occurred in the next moment. Basically, I found her to be an impressively forthright and present-centered person.

Having gone to see and incredibly beautiful woman remove her clothes in a glamorous and enticing way, my actual experience was something unexpected. Surely, I will never forget the rich glow of her unblemished skin, the gorgeous ellipses of her slim yet womanly thighs, etc. However, the most striking quality I will remember is her integrity. She is who she is. When she is in the room, she is in the room wholly, not partly mulling over the past and partly bracing for the future. I was reminded that when we live our lives in faith, we meet beautiful persons and exemplars in both expected and unexpected places. I went to a strip club to have some fun and learn about a realm of sensuality previously unknown to me. I came away having learned a lesson about mindfulness and personal integrity from an impressive young woman.

Some of you may just see this as a rationalization of my own questionable behavior. I hope that Dave Kiebert may see in this letter a demonstration that a commitment to Buddhist living does not entail a rejection of the beauty of life, even inclusive of an occasional reveling in sexual desire.

Reflections on Cal Steinmetz' letter

While of much interest in itself, this letter opens a whole can of worms for me. Regarding my chastizing you for reading abominable Hinayana literature: I meant to be making fun of myself for having such an intense distaste for Theravada. In fact, my opinion remains that it (as it is taught by Sri Lankan monks) is a non-Buddhist, often anti-Buddhist British-colonial philosophy of life. My doctrinal objections are the usual Mahayanist complaints that dharmas are substantialized, and that the letter of a medieval formulation of the teaching is elevated above the spirit and purpose of the Buddha's teaching. Even so, it is possible for the sincere reader to penetrate to the Buddhist vision which was at the origin of Theravadin literature. So my intent was to make fun of myself for my categorical rejection of Theravada. The influence of my close association with a Sri Lankan monk who is lazy, somewhat self-indulgent and completely disinterested in the serious study or practice of the Buddha-dharma is a severely aggravating factor.

That I would have attempted to jest about this is indicative of our shared frustration with the dogmatic sectarianism which sometimes exists in BCA sponsored Jodo Shinshu (viz. I was confessing to falling into the same trap in some areas).

Rev. Kodani asked about my attitude toward meditation when he and

the ministerial Candidates' Affairs' Committee interviewed me. They deduced to accept me as a ministerial candidate. I at that time expressed strong disapproval of the attitude toward meditation which you attribute to him: that it is all right to teach people to meditate in order to prove that it doesn't work or that they are incapable of it.

If Shinshu were what some Hongwanji-ordained senseis say it is, I would have nothing to do with it. Jodo Shinshu is not devotional, but much closer to meditative schools such as Zen. There is a discrete practice, -hearing the Nembutsu (uttered by oneself or others in forms such as "Namo Amida Butsu," "Namanda" et. al.) We distinguish this from meditative approaches which stress accumulating merit, building up concentrative power (joriki), or that the effectiveness of a sacred utterance depends upon the degree of attentiveness with which it is performed. Due to a skewed education, some Shinshu senseis think that the sort of approach which Shinran takes (just listen, don't worry about the frequency or focusedness of utterance) is absolutely unique. On the contrary, when Shinran says "give up reliance upon individual merit and effort" it means essentially the same thing that Dogen's "Give up gaining ideas" means. The upshot for both is the same: Just Practice. For us it means: just say and hear the Nembutsu. "Namanda" (and cognates) is a natural coming forth of Wisdom/Compassion. It is a mode in which Suchness/Tathata permeates our delusion. When the Vow of universal liberation (= Suchness) is heard in the Name ("Namu Amida Butsu" et. al.) we then move to the level of no special practice. That is, on the basis of the experience of hearing the Name as the Vow, we are able to encounter the Vow/Suchness in the way in which the light breaks through the leaves of the trees, the way the wind feels against our faces, ...everywhere! This, I surmise, is just what Zen teachers mean when they say that everything is zazen. The closeness of Shinran's teaching to Dogen's has been remarked upon by Buddhist scholar Hiro Sachiya.

In a broad sense of what meditation is, meditation is involved in Jodo Shinshu, and is even of its essence. If this simple and fluid approach to mindfulness of the Buddha (=the Dharma=Life freed of our self-centered misperceptions) doesn't appeal to you, you should invest your energies in other streams of the tradition. But if you haven't spent some weeks hearing the Nembutsu silently uttered in your mind, listening to your voice echoing the Nembutsu in your car as you drive along, etc. you haven't given the path of O Nembutsu a chance.

Your concern to avoid "negativity and division" has a bit of a world-weary ring to it. We must negate to live (see Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre and Sakyamuni Buddha on this point). E.g., saying "yes" to life means saying "no" to an American war against Iraq in my opinion and in the opinion of Zen freethinker Bosco. We could be mistaken. SH could be a new and more dangerous Hitler. Those who urge such a war are not all bad insensitive people. Still, I say "no" to war. In the same way, I say "no" to fundamentalist Christianity and Scientology. This is a divisiveness which I can live with. I say "yes" to all schools of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism with the possible exception of NSA/Soka Gakkai. To materialistic, or at least pluralistic, Theravada and to liberal Protestantism I say "Maybe, but I really don't think so." To Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, Taoism and Hinduism I say "Yes, I think, but not for me. Yes, I think, though I can't explain how." Many religious traditions are simply outside of my range of experience and understanding, and I have no opinion regarding them (Islam, Gnosticism, NSA, Greek mystery religions, etc.

In any case, Cal, thanks for pointing out my botched ironic comment

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Greg Gibbs
for Zen Freethinker

of two years ago, and thanks for your engaging and thought-provoking letter.

Summing Up

In conclusion: That was "Sorry, I meant to be chastizing myself and not you," to Cal Steinmetz. "Yes" to wholesome desires which do not become totally obsessive. "Yes" to all forms of Mahayana & Vajrayana Buddhism with the possible exception of NSA. "Maybe, but I don't think so." to liberal Protestantism and to Theravadins (who confuse memorizing anachronistic theories with the having of insight). "No" to Scientology and fundamentalism. "Absolutely no!" to war. And "Yes, yes, Yes!" to that stunningly beautiful and impressively present-centered young woman who performs under the stage name of Jade East.

For the ZF

Basco
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Dear Friends:

I call myself "pilgrim" which in Spanish is more than just "wanderer" - a few Basques came with Christopher - it is one with a purpose in mind. I am also looking for the master over the hills and dales, canyons and mesas, in fact everywhere. But I understand the master to be somewhere - in the cloud-hidden valley, gathering medicinal herbs to heal the body and the mind?

I think I now know my true self: I am Sylvester the cat, and Tweety, that cute astute, small yellow canary Sylvester is always chasing to devour. If I may, let me present to you the analogy: Grandma, who is Tweety and Sylvester's owner (God, karma, samsara), has left the house all in order (the cosmos). There is water and food for both the cat and the bird while she disappears on one of her mysterious errands. Sylvester, not content with the common staple, wants a feathered lunch - and why not? Tweety represents fresh, palpitating meat and a challenge. There is a moral here, somewhere, for there are a few instances where Sylvester succeeds in gulping Tweety; but Grandma a (God, karma, samsara) comes back in the nick of time and lands a broom on the back of Sylvester's head, making him expel Tweety from his mouth in a forceful puff of air! Is this the zazen of some of us? We who want to reach Enlightenment; not contented with the average life, strive so hard to "gulp" our selves, but since we are both Sylvester and Tweety, we cannot do so, and thus we fail time after time!

Tweety's seeming naivete: "I tink I see a pretty fat" before he escapes; and Sylvester's sneaky nature and hair-raising pranks look to us from the edge of the abyss where he (they) is about to fall, but like Houdini, comes out unscathed and none the worse for wear.

I have noticed that, in recent lectures at Zen Center, cartoon characters have been used to exsmplyfy or to elaborate a point. I wonder if to reach Enlightenment, one must search for the seed of the child in us. Was it Paul in his letter to the Corinthians who said: "When I was a child I thought like a child and behaved like a child, now that I am a man (woman) I must act like a man (woman)". Or "The child is father to the man..." of Wordsworth and Milton...what does this mean? I leave the question to the reader...

Basco

In this situation, it is not surprising that value orientations from the past appear to be in a state of disintegration or collapse. Men question whether there are, or can be, any universal values. It is felt that we may have lost, in our modern world, all possibility of any general or cross-cultural basis for values. One natural result of this uncertainty and confusion is that there is an increasing concern about, interest in, and a searching for, a sound or meaningful value approach which can hold its own in today's world.

It seems we have lost our capacity for direct-evaluation, and come to behave in those ways and to act in terms of those values which will bring us social approval, affection, esteem. To buy love we relinquish the valuing process. Because the center of our lives now lies in others, we are fearful and insecure, and must cling to the values we have introjected.

But if life or therapy gives us favorable conditions for continuing are psychological growth, we move on in something off a spiral (faith/works?), developing an approach to values which partakes of infant's directness and fluidity but goes far beyond him in richness. In our transactions with experience, we again are the locus and source of valuing, we prefer those experiences which are in the long run enhancing, we utilize all the richness of our cognitive learning and functioning, but at the same time we trust the wisdom of our organism.

The nature of the "good life" is another long term question that has preoccupied philosophers estranged from their own religious background. Rogers sought the answer to this question not in the religious or ethical mandates of organized religion, but in the empirical evidence he witnessed in the strivings of countless clients seeking a better life for themselves through therapy. Where would the process lead if carried to its end? What would the good life be for the healthy product of psychotherapy? Are there common threads through the experiences of most clients that might reveal any universal principles on this question? In "A Therapists View of the Good Life: The Fully Functioning Person", Rogers presents his own theories.

In Summary:

- 1) We are obliged to live in a world that mistrusts us in getting what we need.
- 2) To get what we want, we put in power over us destructively anarchic authoritarian personalities.
- 3) Thus religions have lost much of their beneficial influence.
- 4) We can't live a good life without examining the nature and assumptions of our values.
- 5) We have lost our capacity for direct evaluation, since we do not realize we live in a world of mistrust ruled by destructively anarchic authoritarian personalities.
- 6) But in one faith/works spiral, there is a new world for all of us.
- 7) What this world is like is defined in Rogers' "Fully Functioning Person".

Let us empower each other in spite of the general mistrust and rule by destructive elements.

Don