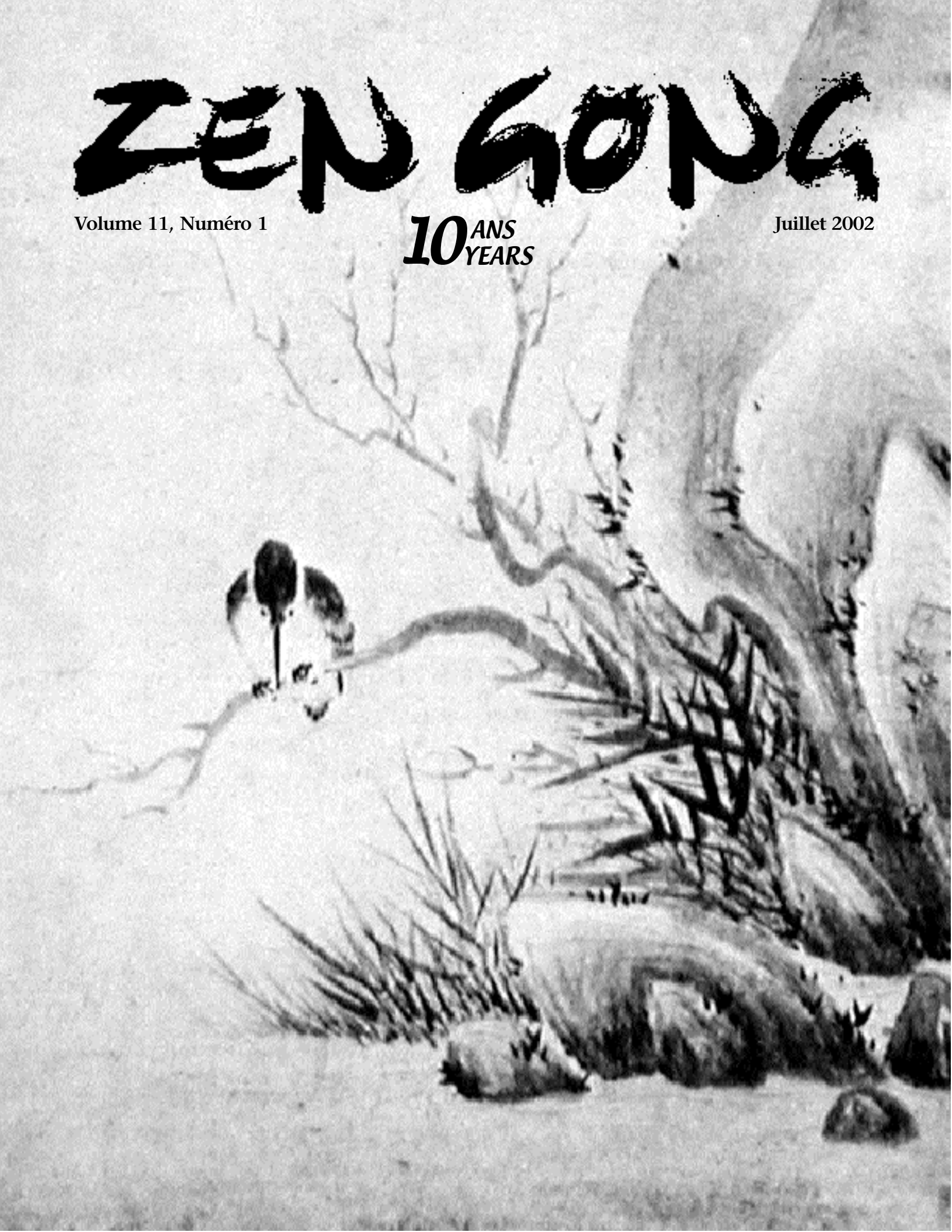


ZEN GONGI

Volume 11, Numéro 1

10 ANS
YEARS

Juillet 2002



Once you have the meaning,
you can let go the words.
But you need the words in order
to get the meaning.



Zen Gong

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Éditorial



Monique Dumont

Le Zen Gong a dix ans et des poussières. Le premier numéro a paru en mars 1992 et je pourrais presque dire « apparu » tant toutes les étapes, de sa conception à sa réalisation, se sont déroulées rapidement et sans obstacles. Comme s'il n'y avait pas eu d'efforts à faire. En découvrant le zen, je découvrais un nouveau continent, une pensée immense et une pratique spirituelle que je cherchais confusément depuis longtemps. J'étais tellement fascinée qu'il m'était impossible de le garder pour moi.

Il y a deux sentiments qui grandissent de concert avec la pratique, dit souvent monsieur Low : la gratitude et la compassion. Le mot gratitude se dit *krtajnata* en sanscrit, i.e. « conscience de ce qui est fait ». Très tôt j'ai eu conscience de la chance d'avoir croisé le chemin du zen, la chance rare d'avoir été mise en présence de cette pratique dans sa forme la plus exigeante et la plus authentique. Que cette tradition soit non seulement conservée mais revivifiée par la présence et le travail d'un maître comme Albert Low, que ce maître soit à Montréal et qu'il ait, avec l'aide d'autres personnes, réussi à établir et maintenir un lieu où je pouvais venir, et pour une bonne fois, non seulement me poser de vraies questions, mais les « éprouver » et selon mon urgence personnelle, les résoudre, que cela soit disponible pour moi, à un prix ridicule, pour ne pas dire donné (je parle ici de notre contribution financière), offert sur un plateau d'argent pour ainsi dire, m'a toujours profondément interpellée. C'est une dette que je ne pouvais pas ignorer. Le Zen Gong est né de là.

Le Zen Gong s'adresse à la Sangha, un mot qui, selon moi, désigne une communauté de gens qui forment une communauté précisément parce qu'ils éprouvent ce même sentiment de gratitude. C'est, j'en suis certaine, la gratitude qui a motivé tous ceux et celles qui ont répondu jusqu'ici stoïquement à mes incessantes demandes « Écrirais-tu un article pour le prochain numéro ? » Je les en remercie. Je remercie également tous les gens qui au fil des années ont contribué au bon fonctionnement de la revue, car ai-je besoin de le dire, je ne l'ai pas faite toute seule. D'abord Peter Hadekel qui s'est joint à moi dès le début à la rédaction et Nicole Morissette à la mise en page. À la suite de Nicole, Claude Jean, Albert Low et Jacques Lespérance se sont succédés à la mise en page (et aux très nombreuses heures de travail que cela implique). Je tiens également à exprimer ma gratitude envers Janine Lévesque qui veille depuis si longtemps (après Carole Fortin) à ce que le Zen Gong se rende à destination et aussi Pierre Laroche qui le distribue dans les librairies. Et enfin, Louis Bricault. Nous savons faire de nos réunions de « brain storming » des rencontres réjouissantes - pour l'esprit et pour le ventre - car nous sommes tous les deux gourmands !

Le Zen Gong a dix ans. Combien de temps va-t-il encore durer ? Un membre m'a écrit une petite lettre encourageante à ce sujet. Lisez-la, elle est le prochain texte.

Bonne lecture. ☸

Zen Gong is now a little over 10 years old. It first appeared in March 1992. The word "appeared" here is appropriate as each stage from its initial conception to its production ran rapidly and without hitch almost as if no effort was required. My first meeting with Zen was for me like the discovery of a new continent. I discovered a vast system of thought and a spiritual practice that I had for so long sought in vain. I was so fascinated that it was impossible to keep it all to myself.

There are two feelings that grow along with the practice, as Mr. Low says so often: gratitude and compassion. In Sanskrit, the word "gratitude" is *krtajnata*, i.e. "conscience of what is done". Very soon, I was conscious of the luck of having come across the way of Zen, the rare chance of meeting this practice in its most demanding and authentic form. I have since then been profoundly inspired by so much. First, it is the fact that the tradition has not only been conserved but is so invigorated by the presence and work of a master such as Albert Low. But in addition to this, I am still moved by his presence here in Montréal and by his success, along with the help of others, in establishing and maintaining a place where I can come and not only ask real questions but also experience and resolve them according to my own personal urgency. I am conscious too that all this is available at an absurdly low cost (I refer here to our financial contribution) and that it is all offered to us, as one might say, on a silver platter.

The Zen Gong speaks to the Sangha, a word which, it seems to me, describes a group of people that form a community simply because they feel the same sense of gratitude. It is, I am sure, gratitude that has motivated all those who have responded so stoically to my incessant requests "would you write an article for the next number?". I thank you all. I thank also all those who over the years have contributed to various aspects of the magazine, for I must admit that I did not do it alone. Peter Hadekel started out with me and Nicole Morissette initially looked after the page setting. After Nicole, Claude Jean, Albert Low and Jacques Lespérance each took over the job (and with it the many many hours of work that it implies). I want to thank too Janine Lévesque who, after Carole Fortin, has for so long ensured that Zen Gong reaches its destination and Pierre Laroche who distributes it to the bookshops. And finally, Louis Bricault. We know how to make our brain storming sessions cheerful - for the spirit and the belly - for both of us like to eat.

Zen Gong is ten. How long more can it last? On this, one member sent me a little letter of encouragement. You'll find it in the next text.

I wish you all good reading. ☸

Un échange sans visage A Faceless Exchange

David Booth



Chère Monique,

J'ai pensé un peu à tes questions au sujet du Zen Gong. Pourquoi le Zen Gong? L'effort de préparation et de publication vaut-il la peine? Quelle est sa contribution à la famille du Centre?

Le Zen Gong est pour moi surtout un contact avec le Centre, ce qui est apprécié par ceux et celles qui vivent loin de Montréal. Il y a deux aspects. D'abord c'est un contact indirect avec Albert. Quand je reçois un numéro, je lis d'abord son article. C'est comme si j'étais là en train d'écouter un teisho. La pratique retrouve par la suite une énergie. Parfois, quelques mots déclenchent une compréhension, un « ah oui, c'est comme ça », ou soulèvent une nouvelle question. Donc, il s'agit d'une alimentation à distance. C'est certain qu'on trouve des écrits semblables dans ses livres, et d'ailleurs je reprends souvent ses livres pour relire quelques pages et c'est souvent une expérience semblable. On le lit avec un autre œil.

Le deuxième aspect, comme tu mentionnes, touche le partage entre les membres. C'est précieux aussi. On le fait un peu après une sesshin mais, pour moi au moins, c'est souvent une période intense et j'ai rarement le goût de parler beaucoup. J'ai de la misère à sauter dans le social. Donc le Zen Gong me donne un aperçu de l'expérience de ceux et celles avec qui j'ai passé des heures au zendo. On ne se connaît pas mais on partage quelque chose d'intime. De plus, on peut en parler sans connaître la vie de l'autre dans tous ses détails. D'ailleurs, ce partage touche peut-être ce qu'il y a au cœur de tous ces détails de vie. C'est la pratique qui nous unit et le Zen Gong joue un rôle d'unificateur. On se rend compte que d'autres pratiquent avec assiduité et avec ardeur. Ils confrontent des obstacles et continuent quand même jour après jour. Lire le vécu des autres m'encourage. J'ai l'impression qu'on me laisse entrer dans les préoccupations intimes de l'auteur.

Si on avait l'occasion de s'asseoir ensemble autour d'un feu de camp en dessous des étoiles et si on parlait de la pratique, on ferait un partage semblable, peut-être moins formel mais avec la même ouverture. Tandis que la soirée, on commencerait à partager des choses intimes; le sens de la pratique, pourquoi on la fait, les difficultés, les espoirs, les joies, les peines, les frustrations, le questionnement. Chaque personne écoute avec intérêt, parce qu'on parle de ce tout le monde vit. L'échange fait référence à la pratique de chacun et grâce à ce partage, un respect règne. Et quand les tisons perdent leur chaleur, on a le sentiment de connaître les autres sans les connaître. Et on se connaît soi-même un peu plus en profondeur. C'est ça le Zen Gong, un échange sans visage dans la nuit étoilée. ☸

Dear Monique,

I've been thinking about your questions concerning Zen Gong. Why publish the Zen Gong? Is it worth the effort of preparing and publishing it? What is its contribution to the Centre family?

For me, the Zen Gong offers a contact with the Centre, a contact that is appreciated by those who live outside Montreal. There are two aspects. Firstly, it's an indirect contact with Albert. When I read his article, it is as if I am there listening to a teisho. Energy is restored to the practice. Sometimes there is a gasp of understanding, sometimes a question arises. It's a nourishment from afar. One can of course find similar texts in his books, and moreover I often pick one up afterwards to reread a few pages. The nourishment continues. I read it from another viewpoint.

The second aspect is, as you mention, the exchange between members. This is also precious. After a sesshin we do mingle together, but for me at least it is often an intense period and I am not often inclined to talk much. Zen Gong thus gives me a glimpse of the experience of others. We do not know one another, but we do share something intimate and this can be talked about; I mean that we can share something about the experience of our practice without knowing all the details of the others' lives. We could say that this exchange touches the heart of all these details. It is the practice that unites us and Zen Gong contributes to this. One realizes that others practice with fervour and assiduity. We see that they face difficulties and yet continue day after day. The author allows me a glimpse of his world. Reading the experience of others encourages me and stimulates my practice.

I have the impression that if we had the occasion to sit down together around a camp fire under a starry sky, we would talk and share such thoughts about the practice, perhaps in a more informal way. Perhaps late in the evening, we would share intimate details of the practice: the meaning of the practice, why we do it, hopes, joys, sorrows, frustrations and questions. Each person listens attentively because the speaker speaks of what others live in the practice. The exchange makes allusion to the practice of everyone, and because of this, a respect reigns. And when the embers fade, one has the feeling that one knows the others without knowing them. And one knows oneself too a little better. That's what Zen Gong is, a faceless exchange under a starry sky. ☸

Interview with Albert on Reading

Monique Dumont



/ How do you see the use of a magazine like the Zen Gong in a Center like ours ?

We have members spread throughout United States and Canada and one of their big problems is to maintain a sense of, not so much belonging, but participating in some wider practice. To have that kind of contact is very important. It gives one the feeling that one is not simply engaged in an isolated individual activity, but one is part of something that is more widespread, more universal.

The other thing I think is that you are very good in getting people to introduce their own understanding, their own experiences without putting it at the level of discussion. You see, I don't like there to be that kind of discussion. When it does get like that, it can so easily degenerate into a kind of one upmanship. (The process by which I say something, somebody else says something, just a little bit better, and somebody else has to just a little bit better, and so people then start first elaborating on things that have happen, and then elaborating on those and then eventually start inventing things, you know, that kind of attitude. Or alternatively people go the other way and say how terrible their practice could be, and how they are not doing anything and how etc.) That kind of discussion is very undesirable, and is why I don't have this kind of group discussion here, even though some people have asked for it in the past.

But nevertheless, to have the opportunity to know what other people are doing in their practice, is extremely valuable. When you write about your experience, you are less likely to get into that kind of - I cannot call it lying, it is a bit too heavy - that kind of fabrication, fabrication of the experiences that you had and so on. So I think from the point of view of sharing one's experience Zen Gong seems to me valuable.

It is also valuable from the point of view of the people that contribute, When one puts something into writing, it forces one to crystallize out in a way which speaking about doesn't allow one to do. It is more distinct, it is more clear when you write. When you speak, you can afford to be fuzzy, you can start a

sentence, stop a sentence, go on backwards and forwards. While in writing you cannot do that. If you're going to say something you have to say it. This forces one to ask very clearly what is it one wants to say. So, from all of these points of view, I think Zen Gong is important.

/ To have the opportunity to read your own articles is important too.

Yes, it does give an opportunity for people to reflect on things that I say in a way other than to listening to a tape. And again, reading and listening are two different kinds of experience. I think listening is a much more important way of working with these kind of ideas.

/ Listening ?

Yes. I think to listen to something being said affects one in a different way than to read something being said. This is why I think the workshops we are doing here are so important. You know the book *An Invitation to Practice Zen* is more or less what we say on beginners' course. But it hasn't anything like the kind of impact that talks on postures and practice can have.

/ What then is the importance of reading for the people who practice ?

Well, it does give you a different way to meditate, to reflect on what is being said. Because when you are listening, it is said and it is finished. That is a real advantage and also a disadvantage. So in other words, to supplement one's practice with reading is also important.

I write mainly for people outside the Center. When I write books, I write for people outside the Center. I rely on the teishos to convey my teaching, my Zen teaching. But I feel one has a responsibility to contact people on a wider basis than simply the Montreal Zen Center.

/ What is the importance of intellectual understanding ?

For some people it is not, let's face it. For others it is extremely important. For me for example it is extremely important that my intellect is satisfied. I think mainly because I am very skeptical about these kinds of, these kinds of ideas. I have always been afraid about allowing myself to get into an idea simply because the idea is attractive. I think, at one level, I am prone to do that ! And so therefore I build up a kind of wall of resistance .We can call that skepticism. And so therefore in order for me to be able to let something through that wall, it has to be reasonable. That doesn't mean to say it has to be logical, but it has to be reasonable. I think many people are like that. So on that basis, I think reading is important.

But then there is another level altogether. As you know one of the ways in which I advocate reading is as a form of meditation. I say zazen has these three aspects : meditation, concentration and contemplation. Concentration and contemplation are mainly what one does on the mat. When the mind is too scattered, too taken up, then one has to use concentration in order just to settle the mind down. And then contemplation is possible, which is just being one with, opening oneself to, an intense but not a forceful kind of practice. But in order for one to contemplate in that way one needs great faith. The greater the faith, easier it is to contemplate. My feeling is that people could read writings by people who are authentic, who are awakened, whatever that means, and can express that. This is why for example, I think reading Nisargadatta is so important. I don't always agree with what Nisargadatta says. I think he is too vedantic, he goes too much on the... too much emptiness. I think if he were to encounter a real Zen master, the master might call him a « devil in the hole » to some extent. He is very much inclined in that direction. He is a bit quietistic for me. And also the other thing I don't really approve of is he tends to be a bit simplistic. Whereas what he says is very true : « there is nothing that needs to be done », he doesn't always seem to me to have sympathy for people like you and me who really have to fight to realize what it means. But on the other hand, he is very deeply awakened.

Because you do know there are different ways,

these four ways of awakening that I talked about in that book on Hakuin(1), and in each one of those, one can have a profound or shallow awakening. Awakening is by no means homogenous. And one can be deeply awakened with the account of the dar-makaya, which I think he is, and not be so deeply awakened with the other aspects... I think he's got the essence, but he doesn't have the function. But I do feel he is extremely valuable anyway.

I think Ramana Maharshi also is even worse from one point of view than Nisargadatta, which is why I don't use him.

/ He is simplistic ?

He is simplistic, and also he is quietistic, he is withdrawing. Life is too much of a dream. There is a tendency to say life is only a dream. Life is not only a dream. It is a dream. But to say it is only a dream suggests that there is a higher reality, something outside life that one really lives. I don't think. I think that misses the point. If it is, it's just no good. This is it, here, now, this is it. We got to live this, we got to work with this.

And nonetheless, having said that, Nisargadatta and Ramana Maharshi are valuable.

/ For meditation ?

Yes, what I am saying is that by reading these people, it does enable one to deepen, one does open in a certain way. It is why it is important. For what it is worth, a lot of my early reading was on the haikus. Particularly the early real haiku Zen masters (Basho, Issa). They were something like a koan for me. In other words, one must not at all read it for information now. One must not read it to satisfy the intellectual aspect which I was speaking about earlier, but what one is doing is - you know how dry and difficult the practice is of course - and when one allows oneself to work with these kinds of people, it is like rain on the desert.

/ Words are like scaffolding, you said. Can we have this kind of practice, Zen practice, without an



intellectual scaffolding ?

Well again, it depends. You see there is some people who got a natural simple faith. And these people, to give them any kind of intellectual scaffolding, just confuses them. But most of the people that come to our Center are not of this kind. And so therefore I think they do need the scaffolding. So many of the members here are professional people, ex-university people. Many got degrees of various kinds. I don't by any means wants to say one has to have a degree, but that seems to be the way it is, and when one is of that kind of person then intellectual scaffolding is very important.

But I repeat, when I give teisho I try to give the foundation of what I am saying, but I try to give it in such a way that it leaves one with a question rather than with an answer. In other words I don't want to give someone a scaffolding to live in. I want people to realize that what is being said is provisional, what is not being said is much more important. It's like the Zen master who said : « Once you've got the meaning, you let go of the words. » And the meaning is what is important.

/ Which books do you recommend ?

Those of Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta.

And another one which is very good is the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is an excellent book. Particularly the one that is done by Radhakrishna, you know, he was the prime minister of India after Gandhi. The *Bhagavad Gita* is for the person in the world. It is the yoga of action. It is what I like about Radhakrishna's commentaries. He makes his commentaries from the basis of a man in the world not from the one of some monk or recluse. So what he has to say because of the authority he has gained to say it with the kind of political work he did is very good. He has got the authority. So therefore I think he is saying something about the spiritual life or the spiritual life in the world which is very important.

/ And other books ?

Hubert Benoit certainly, *The Supreme Doctrine*. *Lâcher prise* I think is a waste of time quite frankly. And he would agree. I think I told you I met him and I asked him about the book and he said that all this idea about divergent writing he wished he had not written because it turns the whole thing into a kind of technique. And *The Cloud of Unknowing*. You see, one of the things, we are a Christian society, whether we are a Christian or not, and although it may not be true of my grandchildren's generation, I think your generation and my generation were imbued with the Christian teaching and we do have to come to terms with that at some level of our being. I don't think we can ignore that, I don't think we can say, as so many people feel they can, « Well, I am no longer a Christian, I am a Buddhist. » I think there can be a very deep sense of betrayal in one. It was something that I personally sort of work with quite a bit and I know Jean did work with this question of how can one practice Buddhism as a Christian. Not that either of us were Christians as some of the Quebecois are Christians for example... I think it is important that we do have some kind of appreciation of how these two religions interact, in which way they are different, in which way they contribute to one another. That is why I am hoping that book on « Christian Love, Buddhist Wisdom » will be published because it can help people with that kind of difficulty. I think as I say many people have that and ought to have that kind of difficulty. So another book



of course is Master Eckhart's one, although it is a little bit more difficult to read, but if one can read him and above all read between the lines, they can also be tremendously inspired. And St-John of the Cross of course.

And in Zen, the haikus of course, those translated by Blythe are very good, and the *Mumonkan*, and the *Diamond Sutra*, definitely, and the best one I think for people is the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, particularly the one translated by Robert Thurman. It is a superb translation. And also I think it is a good idea to read some of the earlier sutras, and also these collections of short sayings of Buddha which I think are also important to read.

/ Could you speak about how you meditate while

reading and doing handicraft ?

The first thing one has to recognize is that the hands are also very important when one comes to spiritual practice. This is why there are these mudras, particularly the mudra we sit in in zazen and it is not a bad idea for someone to try to sit with other kinds of hand positions just in order to see the value to sit in this way. Just to demonstrate for oneself if the hands are loose this is an altogether different kind of practice. Or if one lets the thumbs drop for example, the practice is totally different. If the hands are alive, it enables the practice to be alive. And the hands got their own kind of hunger and one of the ways we can satisfy that hunger is with handicraft : knitting, I have done a lot of knitting, hooking rugs, needle points, all of this kinds of things whereby the hands have to be quite precise in their actions. The advantage with knitting and hooking rugs is that it is repetitive and so therefore one does not have to give it all the attention. Reading a haiku and then doing some handicraft, and then reading haiku and then handicraft is a marvellous way of meditating. The two complement one another in a way which is to me so wonderful. I spent whole days like that, whole days... it is not a striving... it is just so great to do. And you know the Desert Fathers, I told you before, when they were in the desert they would weave baskets and then undo the basket and then weave it again, and you often find in monasteries a great deal of this kind of handicraft work...

People don't do handicraft anymore. That's all gone now. Because people are sitting in front of their televisions. The consequence is that people's hands are starving. And so this to me is very important, it is certainly important for meditation.

/ It helps to calm ?

Yes it does this calming, but it is not self-calming . It is not a practice to calm, but it is a practice which by its very nature calms. I started to do it really when I was going through a great deal of anxiety early in my practice. Then it was tremendously beneficial. It made it possible to sit with anxiety in a way... it would have been difficult to live with.



/ When does reading becomes an obstacle to the practice ?

When one reads in order to get informations, when one reads in order to find out how an awakened person acts or to pick up techniques or try to understand the transcendant in a conceptual way, things like that... philosophy. Generally speaking I think philosophy is something to avoid. Philosophers are dedicated to the idea that it is possible to seize in conceptual form what is essentially impossible to conceive. Because we want that, we want to be able to do that, we want to bring it all into the explainable, we want it all to come into the world of forms or consciousness, because we want that, we lend ourselves to it and we should not be encouraged in that. This is why very often Zen masters , the koans, the haikus, Nisargadatta and these people push us beyond the conceptual mind. We have to be continually reminded the intellectual mind is of tremendous value but only up to a point.

/ And reading novels. Do you put that at the same level than watching television ?

Oh no, not at all. To read one has to be very active. It is a form of concentration, it is a form of opening the mind, it is a form of using imagination.

/ Reading has been important for you in your life ?

Immensely. Most of the spiritual insights that I had had come through reading. The first one for example was when I was reading *In Search of the Miraculous*, and I read, « Man does not remember himself ». Just for that moment, I remembered myself ; it is kensho sort of, you know a tip-taste, not profound, but it certainly gave me the flavor of what it was all about. And Hubert Benoit, when he says that « everyday mind is the way » , it really... I told myself it is real, this is real. « Arouse the mind without resting it on anything » in the *Diamond Sutra* ; number of these kinds of things that I have read and in reading them... that's it... that's right... there it is... So, when I do write, I try to introduce in my writing things like that which might shake one into seeing into contradictions, to try really spark people. ❁

« It has no form and yet it appears ».

This sums it up, it's all in that statement. It is the very formlessness that is our problem. St-Augustine once said « It took me years before I realized that reality has no form ». The thing is that our mind, our conscious mind can only deal with forms. And it can only deal with forms because the way we use words and language. Language, words are the formative influence. Gurdjieff used to talk about what he called 'formative thinking'. And formative thinking is the thinking that most people do which is thinking in words and word associations. It is thinking by associating forms and to some extent also it is finding relationships between forms. And this is looked upon as really the ultimate in thinking.

But nevertheless, we are encouraged to think the unthinkable. And the unthinkable is without form. And so therefore to think the unthinkable we have to put aside our formative thinking, our thinking that can only deal with forms. And it is this thinking that is necessary when we work on « Who Am I » or « What is Mu ». It doesn't matter how brilliant one's mind is at a formative level ; it doesn't help us one iota when it comes to working on « Who Am I » or « What is Mu ». Many people substitute this formative thinking for true work on themselves. The fact that they are able to understand Mu, to see that Mu is everything, to see that Mu cannot be described and so on, because they have these various forms in their mind that are fairly clear, they feel that they have thereby penetrated to the bottom, and they become very conceited. When you asked them a question, there is always a light smile on their face, dismissing it with a wave of the hand or a toss of the head. And this is dead thinking, this is dead practice. It is the practice of the conceited person, and how do you break through that conceit, how do you shatter that form that is blocking that man, that woman so much?

Extract from teisho 3/3 March 2002

(1) Not yet published.

L'illusion du moi

Albert Low



(Traduction : Monique Dumont)

*Voici un extrait du dernier livre d'Albert intitulé :
L'éveil - Méditations sur deux écrits du maître Hakuin.
Il paraîtra aux Éditions du Relié l'an prochain.*

C'est l'illusion du moi qui cause notre peine.

Tout le monde le sait. Des gens viennent me voir, me disent qu'ils ont un tas de problèmes, et ils ajoutent : « Bien sûr, c'est parce que j'ai un gros égo, je le sais. » Ou bien on entend dire de quelqu'un : « C'est un chic type, mais il a un énorme égo. » Qu'est-ce que ce « gros égo » ? Comment un égo peut-il être plus gros chez une personne que chez une autre ? En outre, comment se fait-il qu'une personne puisse si facilement et sans aucune trace de remords se voir comme possédant un gros égo et le proclamer ? Le mot « égo » est un de ces mots latins qui nous est tombé dessus d'une hauteur vertigineuse et nous a tous assommés. Il fut un temps où ce mot était tout à fait ordinaire, tout comme Bouddha était un mot ordinaire, sans aucune trace de mystère. Le mot égo signifie « je ». Dire « j'ai un gros je » ou « j'ai un petit je » ou « j'ai un je faible ou fort » n'a pas beaucoup de sens, n'est-ce pas ? Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce « je » ?

Quelquefois il peut nous arriver de vivre une expérience dans laquelle on a l'impression de se réveiller et où on découvre, étonné : « Seigneur ! Je suis vraiment moi ». Cette soudaine réalisation arrive parfois chez des enfants de onze ou douze ans. C'est une sorte d'éveil, c'est entrer dans la plénitude de ce « je » : je suis je. On a l'impression de pénétrer dans un monde magique, rempli de lumière. C.G.Jung parle de sa propre expérience dans son livre « Ma vie ».

Ce mot « je », comme il va de soi, comme il coule de nos lèvres sans aucune hésitation. On peut voir l'aisance avec laquelle, après une retraite silencieuse, il revient prendre sa place dans nos conversations. C'est un excellent exercice de tenter de l'utiliser le moins possible sinon pas du tout pendant un certain temps. Je ne dis pas qu'il faille pousser la chose à l'extrême et ne plus l'utiliser du tout. Ce que je sug-

gère, c'est une expérience faite sur une période limitée afin d'en étudier la portée. Si on tente de supprimer ce mot de façon permanente, un substitut viendra le remplacer. Ce n'est pas le mot « je » qui est le problème, c'est le fait « je », le « je » lui-même.

Tentez de faire le jeûne de ce mot pendant une journée par exemple. De drôles de choses arrivent. Notre vie semble aplatie, comme un paysage sans vallées et sans collines, elle perd son intérêt. C'est comme cesser de fumer ; si vous en avez fait l'expérience, vous connaissez probablement ce sentiment de n'avoir rien à anticiper. On ne peut plus penser avec autant de clarté qu'auparavant. Pour bien faire ce jeûne, il faut éviter d'utiliser, au lieu du « je », le « ça » ou le « nous » royal ou de parler de soi à la troisième personne.

Qu'est-ce que ce « je » ? Souvent des gens se suicident pour protéger ce « quelque chose ». Au lieu de l'abandonner ou de le voir meurtri, ils se tuent. Lors de l'effondrement de la Bourse en 1929, on a vu des gens se jeter par la fenêtre plutôt que de faire face à la perte de ce « je » qui était important pour eux parce que « je suis riche ». Des généraux se suicidaient après une défaite plutôt que de faire face à la perte du « je suis puissant ». Aujourd'hui, ils écrivent leurs mémoires. Qu'est-ce que ce « je » ?

Dans la Bhagavad Gita, Krishna dit : « Je suis le commencement, le milieu et la fin de toute création. Je suis la connaissance spirituelle. Je suis la logique de ceux qui discutent. Je suis la lettre A parmi les lettres. Je suis le temps indestructible. Je suis le soutien de tout. Partout sont mes faces. Je suis la mort qui saisit tout. Je suis aussi la naissance de tout ce qui devra prendre vie. Je suis la gloire, la prospérité, la beauté de la parole, la mémoire, l'intelligence, la constance et la miséricorde. Je suis la semence divine de toute existence. Rien au monde d'animé ou d'inanimé ne peut être sans Moi. »(2)

Le Christ disait : « Je suis la lumière qui illumine tout homme. Je suis le Tout. Le Tout est sorti de moi et le Tout est parvenu à moi. Fendez du bois, je suis là. Soulevez une pierre, vous me trouverez là. »(3)

Le « je » est le plus mystérieux de tous les mots et aussi le plus précieux. Réussir à pénétrer ce « je » c'est pénétrer à la source de tous les mystères. Ramana Maharshi disait à tous ceux qui venaient le consulter de se poser la question : « Qui suis-je ? » Cette question fait également partie de l'enseignement fondamental du soufisme et elle est largement utilisée dans le bouddhisme zen. « Qui suis-je ? » ou « Qu'est-ce que je suis ? »

Je suis le commencement, le milieu et la fin de toute création. Pour bien des gens, le Christ est spécial, Krishna est spécial ; ce sont eux le commencement, le milieu et la fin. Ils croient que lorsque le Christ disait : « Je suis la Lumière, la Vérité et la Voie », il parlait d'une réalité bien au-dessus d'eux, impossible à atteindre. Lorsqu'il disait : « Personne ne vient au Père, si ce n'est par moi », ils ne croient pas que ce « moi » se réfère à eux. Pourtant, Je suis la lumière, la vérité et la voie. Je suis la lumière du monde qui illumine tout, je suis le Tout. Le Bouddha disait : « Partout au ciel et sur terre, je suis l'Un honoré. » Tous les êtres sont Bouddha.

Par contre, Hakuin dit bien : « C'est l'illusion du moi qui cause notre peine. » La cause de notre peine est l'illusion du moi et pourtant je suis la lumière du monde. Un aphorisme nous venant des Égyptiens dit : « Je suis le silence qui est inconcevable. Je suis la proclamation de mon nom. » Quel est ce silence ? Quel est ce silence qui ne peut être ni saisi ni compris ? « Je suis la proclamation de mon nom » - comment puis-je être la proclamation de mon nom ? Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire ? Suis-je le silence ou la



proclamation de mon nom qui, après tout, est un son et non pas un silence ?

Toutes choses proclament mon nom ; le jappement du chien proclame mon nom. Mais qui suis-je ou que suis-je ? Dans un kôan du Hekiganroku, le maître Chokey dit : « Le ciel peut bien tomber, mais ne dis-pas que le Bouddha avait deux enseignements. » Hofuku, un autre maître, lui répond : « Alors, quel est l'enseignement du Bouddha ? » « Les sourds ne peuvent l'entendre » dit Chokey. Hofuku lui rétorque : « Tu ne dis pas le principal ; ce sont des paroles accessoires. » « Alors quel est l'enseignement du Bouddha ? » reprend Chokey. « Prends une tasse de thé » lui dit Hofuku.

Le Bouddha n'a qu'un seul enseignement. Pourtant, d'un côté il y a l'enseignement que les sourds ne peuvent entendre, et de l'autre « prends une tasse de thé ». Quel est cet enseignement que les sourds ne peuvent entendre ? Je suis le silence qui est inconcevable. Qu'est-ce qu'il veut dire par « prends une tasse de thé » ? Quelqu'un a suggéré que cela voulait dire : « Bois du thé et calme-toi. Ne sois pas si énervé ! » Vraiment ? Il aurait pu tout aussi bien dire : « Ferme-la ou je t'assomme ! » Qui suis-je ? Je suis le silence qui est inconcevable ; je suis la proclamation de mon nom. On ne peut avoir les deux. Je suis un individu ; je suis un. Partout au ciel et sur la terre, je suis le seul, l'Un honoré. Comment peut-on dire qu'il y a deux enseignements : je suis le silence et je suis la proclamation de mon nom ?

Dans un autre kôan, un non-bouddhiste se



rendit auprès du Bouddha et lui dit : « Je ne vous demande pas une parole, je ne vous demande pas le silence. Quelle est la vérité ? » Le Bouddha tout simplement s'assit et l'homme atteignit un grand éveil. Shustari, un poète sufi, écrit :

« Après l'extinction, j'ai surgi, ainsi suis-Je Maintenant Éternel, mais non pas moi, Pourtant qui suis-je, ô moi, si ce n'est moi ? »(4)

Comment allons-nous comprendre le Bouddha qui tout simplement s'assoit ? Le Sufi dit qu'après l'extinction, au-delà des mots et du silence, j'ai surgi, maintenant Éternel, mais non pas moi. Pourtant qui suis-je, ô moi, si ce n'est moi ? Nous sommes renvoyés à la question : « Si tout retourne à l'Un, où l'Un retourne-t-il ? »

Le Christ, Krishna, un sage Égyptien, Joshu, un maître sufi - de grands esprits, tous tournant autour de cette question : « Pourtant qui suis-je, ô moi, si ce n'est moi ? » Voyons maintenant ce qu'un philosophe moderne, Martin Buber, dit sur ce sujet, dans un langage beaucoup moins poétique il est vrai :

« Le monde est double pour l'homme, car l'attitude de l'homme est double en vertu de la dualité des mots fondamentaux, des mots-principes qu'il est apte à prononcer. L'une de ces bases du langage, c'est le couple Je-Tu ; l'autre est le couple Je-Cela. Donc le Je de l'homme est double lui aussi. Les mots qui sont la base du langage n'expriment pas une chose qui existerait en-dehors d'eux, mais une fois dits ils fondent une existence. »(5)

Je suis le silence qui est inconcevable. Je suis la proclamation de mon nom. Qu'est ce que « parler » veut dire ? Qu'est-ce que la parole ? Qu'est-ce qui constamment prononce les mots fondamentaux ? Ce ne peut être « je » ; c'est le « je » qui est parlé. Ce ne peut non plus être « cela », car « cela » est parlé. Ce ne peut être « toi », car « toi » est parlé aussi. Quelqu'un a déjà dit que tout prêche le Dharma : les collines, les pierres, les arbres, l'herbe. Nous dirions que tout prêche le Dharma : les automobiles, les usines, les avions, les ordinateurs. Tout parle « mon nom ». Comme le disait le Bouddha : « Partout au ciel

et sur terre, je suis l'Un honoré. »

Pourquoi donc Hakuin dit-il que la cause de notre peine est l'illusion du moi ? Quel est l'aspect illusoire du moi ? Si vous croyez que l'égo n'est simplement qu'une pensée, un mot, un concept ou une idée, vous banalisez toute notre pratique. Hakuin ne parle pas d'un problème de sémantique, ce n'est pas un problème de langage ou de psychologie. Il ne parle pas non plus de quelque chose qui serait lointain, philosophique, que seuls de grands esprits pourraient étudier. C'est juste ici, si près de nous. Qu'est-ce que « je » ? Qu'est-ce que « cela » ? Hakuin nous dit : « Voyez, vous avez un problème. Vous croyez être pauvre ; mais en réalité vous êtes riche. » L'illusion du moi est l'illusion de la pauvreté. Vous avez l'illusion que « je » est très important, exceptionnel, mais il ne l'est pas. Il est incomparable. Il est tout. Pourquoi se satisfaire du bon et ainsi perdre le meilleur ? Pourquoi se satisfaire d'un million de dollars et renoncer à votre héritage humain ? Un maître disait : « Même une bonne chose n'est pas aussi bonne qu'aucune chose. »

Une nonne disait : « Je ne peux arracher la mauvaise herbe ; si je le faisais, j'arracherais la fleur. » « Le voleur, mon fils », dit le *Sûrangama sûtra*. La cause de notre peine est l'illusion du moi. Pourtant, partout au ciel et sur terre, je suis le seul Un honoré. Où est la mauvaise herbe ? Où est la fleur ?

Un moine demanda à un maître : « Oublions le doigt ; qu'est-ce que la lune ? »

Le maître dit : « Le doigt ! »

« Très bien alors, qu'est-ce que le doigt ? » dit le moine.

« La lune ». ❁

(2) *La Baghavad-Gita*, (commenté par Shri Aurobindo) (trad. française de Camille Rao et Jean Herbert), Albin Michel, 1970, pp.,198-199 (paraphrasé).

(3) *L'Évangile de Thomas*, (traduit et commenté par Jean-Yves Leloup), Albin Michel, 1986, p.188.

(4) Martin Lings, *Un Saint soufi du XXe siècle*, le Seuil, 1990, p.142.

(5) Martin Buber, *Je et Tu*, (trad. de l'allemand par G. Bianquis), Aubier, 1969, p.19.

Pour marquer notre dixième anniversaire, nous avons choisi de vous présenter certains articles parus dans les numéros antérieurs et écrits par quelques-uns de nos « Anciens ». Les membres récents auront ainsi un aperçu de ce qui s'est déjà publié et pour les autres, ce sera un rappel. Nous vous les présentons tels quels, avec leur propre mise en page au moment où ils ont été publiés.

Une chose est évidente : même s'ils ont été écrits il y a plusieurs années, il n'y a rien de démodé dans ces articles. Ils pourraient tous être écrits pour la première fois maintenant. C'est bon signe. C'est le signe que même si nécessairement notre démarche évolue, au moment où nous écrivons sur notre pratique, nous tentons de nous connecter à une source d'authenticité qui ne dépend ni de nos humeurs, ni de celles du temps ou des modes de pensée. ❀



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Alan Travers : As Long as it Takes (Vol.2, no.1) Avril 1993
Bill Byers : Coming Home (Vol.3, no.1) Mars 1994
Elizabeth Namiesniowsky : An Encounter (Vol.3, no.2) Juin 1994
Pierre Lanoix : La voix de la pensée cachée (Vol.6, no.2) Octobre 1997
Jean Low : Sitting Long and Getting Old (Vol.8, no.2) Novembre 1999
Louis Bricault : Gratitude (Vol.8, no.2) Novembre 1999

To mark our tenth anniversary, we have decided to present some articles written by some of our early members and that have already appeared in past editions of Zen Gong. Recent members will thus have the opportunity to read some of what has already been published, and for the those of you who are long standing members, these articles will be a reminder. We present them in their original form as first published.

It is clear that even though these articles were published some years ago, they have nothing that is out of date. They could have been newly written. This is a positive sign. It's a sign that even if our practice is evolving, we try, at the time of writing, to make contact with a source of authenticity which does not depend on mood, time, or fashions in thinking. ❀

Comment j'ai découvert le Zen...

On m'a demandé de parler de mon expérience personnelle sur ce sujet. En faisant un retour en arrière, voici quelques faits que j'ai retenus.

Plusieurs événements, dans ma vie personnelle, ont convergé à un moment donné pour m'amener au Zen. Depuis quelques années, ma vie de couple était difficile. J'avais fait certaines tentatives pour essayer de l'améliorer : des lectures, de la thérapie de couple et des ateliers de croissance, mais le problème demeurait, même si j'arrivais à le voir différemment. Toutes ces démarches me laissaient insatisfait jusqu'à un certain point. Au niveau professionnel, mon désir d'ascension sociale était rapidement arrivé à un cul de sac.

Au niveau spirituel, c'était le néant. Venant d'un milieu catholique très pratiquant, j'avais délaissé petit à petit la pratique religieuse. Mais je sentais pourtant le besoin de lire des textes inspirants, comme je l'avais fait à quelques reprises au moment de mon adolescence. Je ne voyais pas d'autres moyens pour cheminer sur le plan spirituel et je ne savais pas par où commencer. Ma perception des choses a changé lorsque j'ai découvert le Tao Te King, ce livre écrit par Lao Tseu en Chine au temps de Bouddha. Ce livre m'a plongé dans la perplexité. En fait, je n'y ai rien compris. C'est en cherchant à en savoir davantage sur le taoïsme que je suis tombé sur « Le bouddhisme Zen » d'Alan Watts. J'ai découvert alors avec émerveillement la philosophie taoïste et la philosophie bouddhiste. Il n'était pas question que j'en reste là.

Le livre de Marilyn Ferguson, « Les enfants du Verseau », m'a apporté aussi des éléments d'information importants pour m'amener à méditer. L'auteure faisait un survol des nouveaux paradigmes apportés par le Nouvel Age dans différentes sphères comme la santé, l'éducation et la religion. Pour ce qui est de la religion, tout semblait converger vers la méditation comme l'approche la plus intéressante et la plus profonde. De plus, lors d'un atelier de

croissance plutôt éprouvant, j'en étais arrivé à la conclusion que je devais être plus présent dans ma vie quotidienne et que je devais trouver des moyens pour y arriver. Finalement, un copain que j'ai rencontré lors de ces ateliers m'a suggéré d'assister à un atelier d'introduction au Zen donné par le Centre Zen de Montréal. C'était en 1981.

Evidemment, je n'ai pas découvert le Zen à ce moment-là, ni par après. Mais j'ai commencé à me rendre compte qu'il y avait autre chose que le corps et le mental. Après avoir lu le livre de Philip Kapleau : « Les trois piliers du Zen », j'ai senti le besoin d'aller méditer régulièrement au Centre, et ensuite de faire une sesshin. Cela me faisait un peu peur car je ne savais pas comment j'y arriverais physiquement et mentalement. Mais j'estimais que je pouvais faire comme les autres et de plus, j'étais prêt à tout pour m'arracher à mes insatisfactions.

...et l'intégration du Zen dans ma vie quotidienne

Apprendre à se discipliner, c'est-à-dire rester assis et concentré pendant vingt minutes, ce n'est pas facile au début. Mais ceux qui persistent y arrivent tous. Une des difficultés est de se lever tôt. Dans mon cas, je devais me lever une demi-heure avant mon fils, âgé de deux ans, car c'est moi qui m'en occupais. Jusqu'ici ce n'est pas si mal, mais le fait de me lever à 6h30 n'était pas une garantie que je restais réveillé. Au début, je devais prendre des douches tièdes pour m'aider à rester réveillé.

Mais on s'aperçoit qu'en persévérant, le Zen nous stimule, et on vient à bout de ce genre de difficultés. Quand les conditions ne sont pas là pour pratiquer le Zen, il faut les créer. Pour ce qui est de ma vie de couple, l'habitude de me lever tôt ne l'a pas

dérangée : elle ne pouvait pas être plus dérangée qu'elle ne l'était ! Un an avant ma séparation, j'ai eu l'occasion de faire quelques sesshins, ce qui m'a beaucoup aidé pour passer au travers. En me mettant en contact avec un peu de paix intérieure, ils m'ont aidé à dédramatiser l'événement.

Il faut dire qu'avec le temps, ce n'est pas seulement le rituel du matin qui change, les priorités aussi changent. On essaie alors de créer de bonnes conditions pour mieux méditer et intégrer le Zen dans sa vie quotidienne. Ainsi, j'en suis venu graduellement à adopter une alimentation végétarienne, à regarder de moins en moins la télévision, à orienter mes lectures et à sélectionner mes relations. Ça m'a donné un mode de vie moins mouvementé et plus propice au travail intérieur. Lorsque nous commençons à saisir qui nous sommes et ce que nous faisons sur cette planète, nous dirigeons beaucoup plus notre énergie vers l'essentiel.

Après ma séparation, je suis allé vivre au Centre Zen. Mon fils, alors âgé de trois ans, venait au Centre une fin de semaine sur deux, et il était toujours bien accueilli par Albert, Jean, et les autres résidents. Avec le temps, j'ai développé un rituel de prière avec mon fils avant le coucher. Parfois je lui lis quelques paragraphes d'un livre de prières pour son âge, et nous le commentons ; parfois, nous y allons selon l'inspiration du moment. Je l'ai également encouragé à être formé selon les principes de l'Eglise catholique, pour qu'il connaisse la religion de la majorité et qu'il ne se sente pas à part des autres. Actuellement, en plus de méditer tous les matins, il m'arrive de méditer deux soirs par semaine durant la semaine, à la maison, lorsque mon fils (maintenant âgé de 12 ans) est occupé à faire autre chose. Je lui laisse la possibilité de me déranger en tout temps s'il a quelque chose à me demander, ce qu'il fait rarement.

A mon arrivée au Centre, en 1983, nous étions huit résidents avec Albert et Jean. Nous nous répartissions certaines tâches comme la préparation des repas, l'épicerie, le ménage du zendo et de la maison, la cloche matinale, etc. C'étaient de bonnes conditions pour pratiquer. A une certaine époque, à la fin de la soirée de la méditation, nous avions l'habitude de prendre une tisane avec ceux qui étaient venus méditer. Le fait de vivre en résidence nous donnait également l'occasion d'établir des contacts plus approfondis avec certaines personnes de l'extérieur du Québec qui venaient aux sesshins et qui devaient se rendre d'avance ou rester plus longtemps à la fin d'une sesshin. Ce mode de vie exigeait cependant qu'on adapte notre vie sociale à notre vie communautaire. Nos activités sociales (sorties, amis, etc.) avaient lieu surtout durant la fin de semaine. Il y

avait également le travail qui nécessitait certaines adaptations d'horaire par rapport à la vie du Centre ou parfois l'inverse. De plus, avec la pratique, nous ne voyons plus le travail de la même façon. Ce n'est plus un moyen pour arriver à quelque chose, mais un moment de vie complet, comme on l'apprend durant les périodes de travail dans les sesshins.

J'aurais souhaité que certains résidents restent plus longtemps au Centre. Le fait de vivre avec des gens qui partagent les mêmes priorités spirituelles et qui vivent en harmonie représente de belles conditions de vie. Mais la vie étant ce qu'elle est, il y avait toujours du changement : des résidents qui partaient et décidaient même de ne plus revenir au Centre, d'autres qui critiquaient le mode de vie à la résidence. Je me souviens encore de bons moments comme le pique-nique annuel autour de la piscine, ou le party du Jour de l'An où chacun apportait de la bouffe. Je serais peut-être encore là aujourd'hui, mais mon fils souhaitait revenir vivre avec moi, et pour d'autres raisons personnelles, il était préférable que je me trouve un appartement. Bref, ces cinq années passées au Centre ont été pour moi un privilège.

Quant à ma relation de couple, la réalité n'a pas toujours été facile. Après ma séparation, il n'était pas question pour moi de revivre une relation sous n'importe quelle condition. Ce n'est que lorsque j'ai rencontré ma compagne actuelle, qui poursuivait un cheminement spirituel et qui faisait de la méditation, que j'ai décidé de m'engager sérieusement de nouveau. C'est elle qui a eu la tâche la plus difficile dans l'adaptation à nos pratiques spirituelles différentes. Evidemment, ça a soulevé de la poussière à quelques occasions au début et ce n'était pas facile à manier. Mais avec son ouverture du cœur, son « background » spirituel, sa grande capacité de compréhension et son humour, nous y sommes arrivés. Je dois avouer que très souvent je me suis senti maladroit dans ces situations.

Bien sûr, l'intégration du Zen dans notre quotidien se réalise ou non à chaque instant de la journée. Demeurer conscient du moment présent, de ce qui se passe dans notre corps, notre esprit et notre cœur, est un défi de tous les instants. ■

As Long as it Takes

Student: How long will it take to come to awakening?

Teacher: About five years.

Student: Five Years! As long as that!

Teacher: Well, in your case, ten.

Over twenty years ago, following ten years of alcohol and drug use (from the age of fourteen), two failed years at university, impenetrable relationship problems, and consistently high anxiety, the search for a way out began in earnest. Several episodes of getting sick from hashish helped to drive the point home and all of this coincided with a course on world religions which provided an introduction to Buddhism and Zen. So at the age of twentyfour, having read "The Three Pillars of Zen," I staggered into the Zen garage for repairs. The body was still in pretty good shape, but the engine was burned out and the battery was dead.

Estimating that the repairs would take five years (an eternity at the time), the practice was begun. There was the expectation that after that time, it would be possible to "handle the traffic," so to speak.

It is amusing now to look back at that initial estimate of five years, having learned a few simple but valuable lessons in the meantime. One of them took ten years. That was to admit that I had no idea what Zen was or what I was doing. Reading quite a few books on Zen in the early years was both inspiring and misleading. The security and superficial confidence provided by this 'knowledge' of Zen eventually wore out in the face of some tough Rochester sesshins.

A second lesson was about avoidance of pain. After all, Zen was supposed to relieve pain. Zen was a technique which somehow would solve the problems and they would fall away on their own. To a limited extent, that was true in that some of the anxiety eased off, but there were harder nuts to crack which were ignored for too long. It took a long time to realize that the pain (not Zen) is the tool. To put it another way, the pain or the difficulty or the question provides not only the exact point of entry, but also the energy to go deeper into the practice. The questions can then be applied to The Question.



SINGE, Hakuin Zenji, 1685–1769

Hakuin accompagna cette peinture du poème suivant :

Le singe veut attraper la lune dans l'eau;

Tant que la mort n'aura pas eu raison de lui, il s'obstinera.

Que ne lâche-t-il la branche et ne disparaît-il dans l'étang profond:

Le monde entier resplendirait d'une clarté éblouissante!

The tendency to avoid is often irresistible. There is no substitute, however, for "facing the music" as honestly and openly as possible. This can be humiliating and understandably, is not usually seen as an appealing solution.

There never seemed to be a choice. Life was more difficult without sitting and sesshins than with them. Call it no choice, perseverance, or whatever, it has been the most valuable lesson of all. Faced with what appears at times to be an impossible task, eventually the question takes its grip and the energy rises if one keeps going and going. The question of how long can be answered in only one way: as long as it takes. ■

Coming Home

*Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the Tao?"
Nansen answered, "Ordinary Mind, that is the Tao."*

There is a pattern to our lives. There is a golden thread which is always present. We usually ignore it, even push it away, but it abides. When we look back over our lives we sometimes discern it clearly. It leads inevitably to our present situation, to the immediate present. It is not anything unusual or mystical. It is ordinary mind.

"Ordinary mind is the Way." What can this possibly mean? Often our minds are filled with anxiety and frustration, with numbing fears and a sense of incompleteness which cries for resolution. These negative states of mind are the very things that we are trying to overcome, how can they be said to be the Way?

We all hope that spiritual training will pervade our lives with joy and tranquility. We may even hope for more, for extraordinary experiences, for "enlightenment." But "ordinary mind?" What a letdown! What an anticlimax! What a strange idea with which to approach a spiritual practice.

In this vein Yasutani Roshi was asked by a student, "What is the fundamental difference between you (Yasutani) and me?" Yasutani answered, "Nothing, absolutely nothing. But I know it and you don't." Now, what does this mean?

This "ordinary mind," how does it apply to us? We, who try to sit regularly, perhaps even attend sesshin. We, who may consider ourselves to be special, to be "spiritual" people. At the very least we must be closing in on this "ordinary mind." All of this may have also been on Joshu's mind when he asked the question, "How do I get onto the Way?" Nansen's answer is, "The more you try to get on it, the further you push it away." This answer is not a game, it is not a riddle. If we take it seriously, this answer is a threat to our life strategy, spiritual and otherwise. What are we to do? We, like Joshu, come to practice as a last resort. This, we feel, is where we will make our stand. But if we what we are doing only "pushes it away", then where is there to stand?

Returning Home

Yet we are told over and over that we are whole and complete, lacking nothing. In the words of Zen Master Hakuin, "The earth where we stand is the pure lotus land, and this very body the body of Buddha." Many religious traditions have stories

which illustrate this point. There is one Hassidic story which is worth retelling. It involves a poor peasant who dreamed repeatedly that there was a fortune in gold hidden behind the wood stove in a certain hut in a far-off country. This dream became the focal point of his life, so much so that he determined to find this house and claim the fortune. After searching for many years and suffering many deprivations, he finally succeeded in finding the house of his dream. He told his tale to the owner of the house who said, "This is very strange. I, too, have repeatedly had a dream which was very similar to yours." He went on to describe a dream which was exactly the same as that of the peasant. With a shock of recognition, the peasant recognized the house which was being described in this second dream as his very own. Overcome with joy and gratitude the peasant thanked the man, and began the long and difficult journey home. Sure enough, there, behind the stove, he discovered the fortune that he had been seeking.

We, too, have a sense of being on this peculiar type of voyage, a voyage that will take us home. There are moments in our practice when we become aware of this truth. It subtly infiltrates our lives, it even finds its way into our dreams. Each sesshin is a reaffirmation, a return to our true home. It first hits us with a shock of recognition, like a chance encounter with an old friend whom one has not seen in many years. "This is it! This is what it is all about! How could I have forgotten again!"

Coming home. What a joy, what a relief! Though the way may be difficult, the result is inevitable, since it is no other than who we are.

Yet this return to what we are is no idea that we can grasp. As the koan (Ordinary Mind is the Way) goes on to say, "The Tao does not belong to knowing or not-knowing. Knowing is an illusion, not-knowing is blankness." The language and logic of everyday life have not equipped us to deal with this kind of truth. What is there in our experience that can prepare us for this? Are we "home" or aren't we? If we are not then our "home" must be somewhere else or it must not exist. If we are home then why are we so ill at ease, why is it necessary to put in all this hard work? Accustomed as we are to the use of logic as the ultimate arbiter of reality what can we make of this situation? Everything here is turned around and this turning is not towards greater complexity but back towards extreme simplicity.

In short this is a koan. Working on a koan is difficult because it is too simple. We have a pressing need to understand and this understanding often means explaining things to ourselves. It means, if you stop to consider the matter, splitting ourselves in two. What we are looking for is beyond such divisions. What we are looking for is ordinary mind.

Ordinary mind

Ordinary mind is the pattern of our zazen, the pattern of our daily lives. It is becoming distracted and recentering, forgetting and remembering. How easy it is to forget! This may be one reason why many religions have developed elaborate rituals which are designed to help people remember. When you forget, when you have become reabsorbed in your own melodrama, sometimes you have to back off and calm down until you return to the present. What is this business of forgetting? When you forget, where are you? What are you?

Our lives are a strange combination of reality and unreality. Sometimes things make perfect sense, the kind of sense that you don't have to think about, the kind of sense that's just there. On the other hand, sometimes it is as though our lives have been choreographed by a madman. And when the madman is in control, all that we think that we have learned seems to vanish. From that point things go downhill very quickly.

Then, having been caught up in illusion for a time, there develops a need to suffer. At a particular moment, the body/mind breaks down in some way. It may come about as the result of a shock. Perhaps an illness. Perhaps we learn that a friend or relative has died or gotten seriously ill. It may arise in one of a thousand ways, but at such a time we may remember our own mortality and think about the lives that we have constructed for ourselves. We may be driven to reconsider our hopes, our fears, our plans for ourselves. We may allow ourselves to become aware of our compromises and it is natural at such a time to feel ashamed. We cannot then go on the way we were, at least not for awhile. At that very moment, at the moment of crisis and despair, do we have the strength to persevere, to stand our ground and not run away? And if we have run away, do we have the courage to see this, to return and start again?

When I was a young man in university, I had a friend called Steve. Stevie was a poet. Thin, dark, and intense, he filled life with exuberance and vitality. He hungered for love, for adventure and for poetry. Then suddenly, at the age of nineteen, a pain in the knee was diagnosed as a particularly virulent form of cancer. Stevie lost a leg and then, after battling courageously to rehabilitate himself and

regain his independence, he lost his life.

Steve remarked, when he was rehospitalized soon before his death, "The Gods want one of us." In his last year he emphasized to everyone the urgency of life, the error of delaying that which was of real importance. In one of his last poems he wrote:

*When my speck of green
turned the brown
of Job's dunghill
I looked up
to curse...
But then I saw
the reflection in God's eye.
Through his kaleidoscope
all turns are just as beautiful.*

His death was a gut-wrenching shock to his friends and, in retrospect, a gift as well. I am grateful to be able to acknowledge my debt to him.

Now, many years later, I am familiar with the rationalizations and evasions with which we run away from our mortality. That person was too fat, another didn't eat the right foods or didn't get enough exercise. Anything to differentiate their case from our own. However, at nineteen, one's defences were not in order, one swallowed one's experience raw. At that time there was no sense in which this young man was different than me. I couldn't succeed in distancing myself from the event and I couldn't make heads or tails of it. I went around asking everyone I respected; parents, older friends and relatives, "What does this mean? How can this happen?"

Pain and shock. These are therapies that can awaken one from the dream which one believes to be one's life.

Or else one can run away. This was the path that I chose. I chose to run to California. It was so far away, it had the ocean and blue skies. Maybe I hoped that they had abolished death in California. So I ran away from reality, but, of course, reality ran with me.

Authenticity

Many koans begin with the question, "What is Buddha?" This question is a formula for getting at that which can never be articulated: our deepest need, our deepest reality which is always there and always pushing its way up to the surface. Zen Master Hakuin's answer is that we are all Buddha, that we are Buddha "from the beginning." This "from the beginning" is not in the past, it is **right now**. Those who are caught up by practice, have a deep confidence in this perspective, the perspective of this precise moment. This precise moment contains everything that we need. It enfolds the past and the future. Unfortunately every conscious impulse that

we have, every hope, every plan, leads us away from this moment. (Yes, even the desire for enlightenment!) Yet in the honesty of pain, in the honesty of the consuming fire of our own nature, this moment is all that we really have.

Our job is so simple and yet so difficult: to look into our own minds, now, without blocking, without turning away. This is the way, and it is the way to the way.

And what do we see when we look inwards? What do we have to guide us over this terrain which is simultaneously so familiar and so mysterious? Since we are constantly reminded by teachers that we “know,” the answer cannot be far away. We do, in fact, possess an unerring sense of the authentic. This sense of authenticity is an inner beacon, a turning towards that which is real. Thus the Buddha counselled his followers to test all teachings against this inner sense when he said, “Be a lamp unto yourselves.”

On the other hand we may turn away from what we know to be real. This turning away, this inner flinching, leaves us with a negative residue. Suppose, for example, that we are doing some everyday task like washing the dishes. If we value the task and involve ourselves in it with energy and respect, we are left with a feeling of accomplishment, of satisfaction. If, however, we have prejudged it as inconsequential, as something to be done as quickly as possible so that we can rush off to something of greater importance, then the whole experience takes on a negative hue. The time spent on it seems to be wasted.

What is Real?

It is no wonder that we often feel confused, disoriented, unreal. We are bombarded every day by television, movies, and newspapers. Each one trying to arouse in us some emotion which is not our own, a false hysteria which will help some advertiser sell some product to us that we probably do not need. Surrounded by lies and manipulations we learn to distrust much of our environment. We even learn to distrust ourselves. What is there to believe in, what is real?

We have an intuition that the real exists and that it will set us free. So, we begin our search. We may start the search with books because books sometimes seem to be a window on reality. Some books give a temporary sense of satisfaction; a novel, for example, creates a coherent world. It contains an inner wholeness and we sometimes sense that wholeness to be very close to us. But we put down the book and the coherence fades. Similarly a book about psychology or about spiritual matters. It makes sense, it would seem to apply to our lives, that

is, it feels real. We underline a pertinent phrase and try to remember those magical words which resonate with something deep inside us. But we eventually put down the book, the words are forgotten or slip away. We don't have the power to become the person we feel we should be, the one that the book implies we could be, the one that the author of the book may be. In the end books are filled with stories and theories. In themselves, they are not real.

Sometimes, listening to a piece of music or looking at a painting, we suddenly feel joyful. The work of art has touched something real in us, it has evoked something that is real. Is this reality in the music, in the painting? Is it in ourselves? If it is in the music, would it be there if there was no one to hear it? If it is in ourselves, why does it take the music to evoke it? The more we attempt to capture it, the more it eludes us. Yet we spend our lives searching for it. One taste and we are hooked forever. And we have all had this taste...

There are when times it is nice to take a break from our hectic lives and go to the country. Taking a walk in the woods seems so wonderful. The sun is shining, the air is crisp, the birds are singing in the trees. There is an intense tranquility in the air. Everything is so real! A deep joy wells up from everywhere. Ah!

Small Miracles

Sometimes, faced once again with the contradictions of our existence, faced with the battering that the sensitive person must endure in their daily lives, we break down a little. It is a kind of death, but not a permanent one. Faced with inexorable reality, faced with sickness, old age and death, there is a moment at which we give up. We are really too tired of the battle, with its endless cycle that we have repeated, it seems, so many times before. So we give up, something breaks inside us and a little miracle happens.

And what is this small miracle? We remember the light that has always been there. It is like a summer's day. Things may be hard but on a summer's day, early in the morning, when you walk through the grass, everything shimmers. If you stop to analyse it, nothing has changed, all of the madness is still there, but a little removed, in perspective. And the background changes everything. Against this backdrop, against this light, life is good. As Nansen says in the koan, “...it is like vast space. Where then is there room for good and bad in the Tao?” *

*Hundreds of flowers in spring, the moon in autumn,
A cool breeze in summer and snow in winter;
If your mind is not clouded with unnecessary things,
No season is too much for you.*

An Encounter

I spotted that book on somebody's desk in the National Library of Canada where I worked at that time. The orange cover and the title "I am That" struck my eyes. It was there for me. I grabbed it and never let it go.

For me the book was a revelation. It contained the conversations of a Hindu sage with his visitors. His simple and lucid words imparted a most profound wisdom.

In the foreword of the book, the place in Bombay from where the call was coming was pointed out and I felt a compelling urge to respond to it.

It was in November 1979 when I landed in India again, the fascinating India with her many aspects of life, a bewildering variety of colours, sounds and smells - The India I loved.

From my lodging in Bombay I went by bus, local train and finally taxi, through a maze of noisy narrow lanes and by-lanes, by a sheer miracle I found the little house of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. A steep narrow ladder took me to a small garret-room. He was there, facing a group of people, maybe twenty of them, filling the room almost to capacity. I was told to take a seat.

Maharaj noticed a newcomer. Through the interpreter I was asked who I was, where I was from and what brought me here. I introduced myself, told him that I had read "I am That" with my husband who was my guru; as he had passed away four months ago, I came alone.

Had I any questions? None for the moment. I was a bit confused and tired after a long journey and only a few hours of sleep. I was left in peace. Happy and grateful, I was thinking: "I am here!"

The next day I felt rested and at ease. Maharaj recognised "the lady whose husband was her guru" and kindly granted me his time for a longish conversation. Still, there were no questions. Whatever came to my mind didn't seem important enough. I considered that the question had to be my very own and of paramount significance, and its answer - a revelation.

I was looking and listening. Around me were faces of Indian and European people. Maharaj was clad in a white dhoti and a white shirt. An interpreter was seated to his left. On the wall above his head hung portraits of Ramana Maharshi among others. To his right was a fan and a small oval-shaped table with flowers, incense sticks, cigarettes and a lighter on it. Further to the left, on the wall facing the street, were more pictures of Indian sages and a small open window. Outside, the smelly hot air resounded with shouts, bugles and horns of various Indian vehicles. Somehow neither the noise nor the heat affected the pleasant atmosphere of the room filled with sweet fragrance of the incense sticks.

Maharaj spoke his native tongue, Marathi. His lively face was full of expression and his gesticulations intensified his words.

At the beginning of the session, Maharaj surveying his audience, asked a young Canadian boy to leave; he seemed to come out of sheer curiosity. "The place is too small for people like you", he said. I was sorry for the boy, but I knew that if he were serious enough, he would be coming back again and again.

Once I noticed Maharaj slightly annoyed by an American girl obstinately returning to the question of three gunas. "Do you know what you are talking about?", he said.

I recognised among the visitors a Sri Rajneesh's disciple. On his sannyasi robe was a picture of his guru. The long conversation was mostly in Marathi but the visitor switched sometimes to perfect English so the foreigners could participate in the discussion. "Is Maharaj provoked by my dress?", he asked. "Oh, no" answered Maharaj laughing, "the ochre robe has a great reputation among Indian people." Maharaj then asked: "Who are you?" "I am a man", was the answer, and this greatly amused Maharaj. The rest of the conversation was in Marathi, however, it was obvious that both enjoyed it.

Sannyasi looked rather serious, but Maharaj was often slapping his knees and laughing. Oh, how wonderfully he was laughing!

The visits became more of a routine. The streets seemed more familiar. By now, I was covering the last stretch on foot.

On that particular day, I brought a bunch of roses, and with Maharaj's king consent I took his picture.

He talked to me again and suddenly asked whether I noticed any change in myself. I answered that I was different every day. "And who knows the change?", he asked. When I couldn't think of any answer, he gave it to me: "The changeless sees the changes."

Those words sent a shock into my whole being. It was a revelation! I burst into tears and couldn't stop sobbing. Then the message came to me through the interpreter: "Maharaj said you may go home", and the most beautiful message it was. I had a feeling that that moment was a fulfilment of my whole life.

When I was leaving, I bowed down before Maharaj and kissed his foot. I felt a touch of his hand on my head. His hand was heavy. I looked up and met the gaze of his piercing eyes.

The time of my departure was approaching. It was my last visit. There was no need for questions. I was just sitting quietly, relishing the atmosphere of timelessness, the touching beauty and mystery of this tiny room, similar to the beauties and mysteries surrounding the Bethlehem manger and the Bodhi tree of Bodhi Gaya.

I didn't feel any sadness in parting. There was no parting after all...

I couldn't imagine Maharaj in any other place than that humble loft. Some people, however, mostly Westerners, suffered and had a sense of guilt seeing him in such indigent surroundings. They resolved to move him to a commodious and comfortable apartment that would accommodate as well the growing number of visitors.

An appeal was sent out for donations and I gladly mailed my contribution. However, before the plan could be realized, Maharaj left his mortal body on the 8th of September 1981.

Soon after, I received a letter from a Belgian devotee annoyed and broken-hearted. "Something has to be done about Maharaj's dwelling. They are using the loft for drying linen!"

I could not help laughing. And I heard him laughing too. ❀

La Voix de la pensée cachée

Pour qui s'intéresse à l'histoire, peu en importe l'époque, il y a toujours des franges du tissu historique qui demeurent inextricablement mêlées, de ces phénomènes apparemment marginaux mais dont les racines semblent tenir de la terre elle-même. Ces voix discrètes, subtiles mais combien assurées, nous interpellent directement.

J'ai effleuré de ces franges de l'histoire en touchant bien involontairement au gnosticisme, à plusieurs détours du chemin. J'avais beaucoup lu les romantiques allemands, puis français, qui avaient eu un réel engouement pour ce qui découlait de l'alchimie, de la Kabbale, du manichéisme; ce mythe de l'homme déchu, la mise en évidence des tensions insupportables entre opposés, qu'il s'agisse ultimement de la vie et de la mort. Puis, un peu plus tard, en lisant entre autres, certains passages des écrivains de la "beat generation" aux E.U. ou Lawrence Durrell dans le Quatuor d'Alexandrie, ces échos sans cesse revenaient et invitaient à une lecture des textes ou des "écritures" gnostiques. Par ailleurs, mes études en littérature médiévale ont touché à la vie religieuse de l'époque et ma curiosité fut évidemment piquée par ce chapelet d'hérésies violemment réprimées, légitimant ce faisant leur importance.

À m'y intéresser un peu plus directement, j'ai été attiré par les descriptions des communautés ascétiques de la période qui précède et suit de 200 ou 300 ans la venue du Christ. La rigueur monastique de communautés entières - telles celles de Qumran, où furent trouvés les manuscrits de la Mer Morte - ne peut qu'évoquer la force intérieure autour de laquelle elles s'étaient rassemblées, peu importe leur dénomination, pour trouver réponse à la question qui nous habite tous. Les écritures gnostiques "chrétiennes" représentent pour leurs rédacteurs une continuation "normale" de la pensée articulée autour de l'interprétation des textes bibliques. De fait, à ressentir la profondeur de certains appels à la libération dans les textes gnostiques, on pourrait prétendre que les gnostiques chrétiens se voyaient comme les ardents défenseurs de la pensée même du Christ. Alors que dans le premier siècle qui suivit la parole du Christ les premiers disciple "organisèrent" la religion officielle selon des normes sociales structurelles, les gnostiques s'attachèrent sans compromis au message de libération de l'homme. Ainsi, puisque l'homme en son essence propre ne se réduit pas à ce monde absurde dans lequel il se trouve captif, il doit chercher sans répit, à l'intérieur de lui-même, sa nature ultime, sans limite, qui l'unit à l'ensemble de l'univers. Cette vision révolutionnaire pour laquelle le Christ a été crucifié, les gnostiques la poursuivront, au même prix en se heurtant à l'organisation sociale de l'Église. Prenez-en pour témoins ces assemblées cathares ou autres hérétiques purifiés par le feu au cours du Moyen-âge. Manifestement, quelque chose dérangeait.

Et un jour, après m'être gavé des images romantiques de la chose, je suis allé voir aux textes mêmes. Quelle surprise m'attendait! Tenez, laissez-vous prendre par une situation toute simple: vous pratiquez le zen depuis quelques années (vous récitez même les quatre nobles vérités dans l'ordre), vous lisez à l'occasion quelques témoignages puisés à des sources de traditions diverses. Et bien voyez, un jour, en lisant, le système suivant, que je résume un peu, vous est présenté:

1. tout de ce monde mène à l'insatisfaction
2. cette insatisfaction vient de l'organisation même du monde
3. il y a moyen d'améliorer ce sort et de se libérer de cette duperie
4. la connaissance (gnose) est la clé de ce changement

Tient, il me semble avoir déjà senti ce parfum quelque part, dites-vous...

À l'époque de la transcription ou peut-être pour certains, de la rédaction des principaux textes gnostiques (les manuscrits de Nag Hammadi ou ceux de la route de la soie, dits manuscrits de Turfan, au nord du désert du Taklamakan) la chrétienté en était à peine à ses premiers efforts d'articulation des dogmes principaux. En un sens, toute interprétation était permise, particulièrement au sein de ces communautés qui s'étaient inspirées profondément des textes sacrés des traditions entre autres hébraïques et de la chrétienté naissante. Ces communautés ont donc élaboré à même le terreau de cette chrétienté, une explication conférant un sens et une

issue à ce sentiment profond de l'insatisfaction du monde et de son organisation matérielle.

Cette insatisfaction se trouvait aussi exprimée, semble-t-il, face à cette propension de la religion officielle qui deviendrait le dogme fixe de l'église chrétienne, de ne se fonder que sur une perspective du bien pour annihiler la dimension du mal et la reléguer ou la cristalliser dans un no-man's land sombre personnifié par un satan dont les pouvoirs abstraits ne se situaient plus dans la dynamique créatrice du monde. Pour ceux qui s'étaient donné comme mission la recherche de la Vérité, ce dogme manquait sans doute de profondeur ou de richesse et plus important encore, ne rencontrait pas le besoin d'exprimer la tension créatrice de la vie qui ne peut naître seule de la lumière mais qui doit se fonder dans la nuit. Les écritures des "apôtres" du gnosticisme font donc le récit de cette pensée salvatrice qui descend sur le monde pour restaurer l'homme dans sa nature première. Cette pensée est donc articulée autour de la connaissance mais celle-ci se présente à plusieurs niveaux: d'abord la connaissance première de la situation réelle de l'homme. C'est la connaissance de l'état de l'homme et du monde, de la déchéance, et de la duperie qui nous y attache. L'autre niveau de connaissance, la connaissance première ou ultime, en quelque sorte, est atteinte par la recherche de la Vérité; il s'agit d'une connaissance immanente et ineffable que chacun possède en soi, pour sa libération des entraves de la déchéance. La gnose est cette connaissance directe de Dieu.

En quelques mots, ces communautés poursuivies par les représentants de l'église officielle, par le glaive romain ou le bûcher chrétien, se sont vues confinées à une réclusion ou une marginalisation immédiate, dès les deuxième et troisième siècles et leurs traces se sont dissipées, géographiquement aussi, en marge de l'empire romain. Ainsi les écritures découvertes à Nag Hammadi, en Égypte datent déjà de la fin de ces communautés qu'on ne retrouve dès lors que dans des reformulations cathares ou encore dans des communautés dispersées sur la route de la soie jusqu'en Mongolie, enrichies ce faisant des contacts avec les mysticismes de la Perse orientale et aussi, marginalement du bouddhisme. Les échanges commerciaux transitant par les portes de Babylone permirent en effet l'éclosion de la religion de Mani qui adapte son enseignement à partir de son interprétation du gnosticisme, de la déchéance et de la salvation, tant pour les cultures taoïste de la Chine, bouddhiste de l'Asie centrale, chrétienne et zoroastrienne. Ce système connu sous le nom de manichéisme (le nom qui chapeautera au cours des siècles les systèmes issus du gnosticisme) deviendra pour les églises officielles, l'ennemi à abattre. Ce manichéisme, religion officielle de certaines régions de l'Asie, a survécu par près d'un millénaire, aux persécutions de son lointain cousin d'Occident.

Ceci étant dit, on peut aisément se perdre dans les méandres d'exégèses qui rivalisent de complexités et demanderaient sans doute une connaissance que je n'oserais feindre; laissons donc tout cela pour voir ce que nous disent les textes. Je propose quelques extraits des écritures retrouvées à Nag Hammadi en 1945. Curieusement, jusqu'à ce moment, on ne connaissait des écritures gnostiques que ce qu'en avaient dits leurs détracteurs. Les extraits de textes que je propose ici touchent à deux aspects de ceux-ci: d'une part, l'identification de cette connaissance ou "cette voix de l'esprit premier" de l'homme, deuxièmement les conditions d'émergence de cette Vérité première.

Le texte de la Prôtennoïa Trimorphe, m'a semblé au départ le plus attachant et vous est donc offert comme entrée en matière; on pourrait dire qu'il s'agit ici de 3 variations sur le thème de la pensée première. Pièce en trois actes donc, où la voix première descend pour donner forme aux êtres déchus. Le deuxième acte, pour emprunter au langage du théâtre, se déroule dans le même esprit où la Prôtennoïa habilite l'homme en lui insufflant l'esprit premier; enfin, dans le troisième volet, l'homme se voit restauré dans le règne de la lumière. Or cet esprit ou cette voix s'annonce comme suit:

..je suis la Voix réelle,
donnant voix en tout être; et ils
le savent, un germe étant en [eux].
Je suis la Pensée du Père; et de
moi est d'abord sortie la Voix,
c'est-à-dire la connaissance de ceux qui n'ont pas de
fin;
étant (moi) Pensée du Tout, uni
à la pensée inconnaissable et in-
accessible, je me suis manifestée en tous
ceux qui m'ont connue; car c'est moi
en effet qui suis unie en tout être, dans
la Pensée cachée

... I am the real Voice.
I cry out in everyone, and they recognize
it, since a seed indwells [them].
I am the thought of the Father and through
me proceeded [the] Voice,
that is, the knowledge of the everlasting things.
I exist as thought for the [All] - being joined-
to the unknowable and the incomprehensible Thought
- I revealed myself - yes, I-among
all those who recognize me. For it is I
who am joined with everyone by virtue of the hidden
Thought...

Il s'agit ici de la voix de la pensée première, se manifestant à l'homme afin de lui insuffler la force de recouvrer sa liberté, en lui conférant en quelque sorte le souffle de vie intérieure qui à son tour permettra de restaurer l'homme au règne de la lumière. L'intervention comme nous le verrons plus loin n'est pas extérieure pour autant et chacun le sait qui de son zafu pèse ces dimensions: chacun possède en soi cette liberté, mais le cheminement doit suivre son cours, pour s'affranchir des illusions qui brouillent la pensée. Ces illusions d'ailleurs ne sont pas étrangères à celles dont le zen nous met en garde:

(...) Et je
me suis manifesté sous l'aspect de leur image.
Et j'ai porté le vêtement de chacun d'eux, et
je me suis caché moi-même en eux. Et [ils] n'ont
pas connu celui qui me donne puissance. Car je suis
dans
toutes les principautés et les puissances, et dans
les anges et en chaque mouvement existant dans
toute matière. Et je me suis caché en
eux, jusqu'à ce que je me manifeste à mes frères.
Et personne d'entre eux ne m'a connue, bien que
ce soit moi qui agisse en eux. Mais ils ont pen-]
sé que le Tout avait été créé par eux
étant ignorants et ne connaissant pas [leur]
racine d'où ils ont germé. Je
suis la lumière qui illumine le Tout.

(...) and I
revealed myself in the likeness of their shape. And
I wore everyone's garment and
I hid myself within them and [they] did not
know the one who empowers me. For I dwell within
all the Sovereignities and powers and within
the Angels and in every movement [that] exists
in all matter. And I hid myself within
them until I revealed myself to my [brethren].
and none of them knew me, [although] it is I who
work in them. Rather [they thought] that the All was
created [by them]
since they are ignorant, not knowing [their]
root, the place in which they grew.
I am the light that illuminates the All.

Un peu comme on nous le rappelle à certains moments lors de sesshins, ils ne s'agit pas uniquement de rester assis en contemplation dans l'espoir de voir un jour jaillir la lumière des ténèbres et bénéficier d'une libération du simple fait d'être disciple choisi - la "formule loto" ne sied guère à la formulation mystique. On y trouve au contraire la composante travail. Dans la récupération du gnosticisme par la littérature (chez Durrell dans le Quatuor d'Alexandrie par exemple), on nous offre à l'occasion l'image d'une pratique élitiste, légèrement arrogante, entourée de rites initiatiques secrets, d'êtres maniérés sur le plan intellectuel. Mais au-delà de l'image romantique reconstruite hors de son contexte historique, reste dans l'esprit du texte, une consonnance particulière en ce moment où je reviens d'une sesshin de 7 jours:

Discernez l'étendue
de l'eau, qu'elle est immensurable
[et] incompréhensible, à la fois en son début
et en sa fin. Elle soutient la terre; elle souffle dans
l'air où
sont les dieux et les anges.
Mais en celui qui est exalté
au-dessus de tout il y la crainte
et la lumière, et en lui mes écritures sont révélées.
(...)
C'est lui qui possède
ce qui est en lui en le discernant dans la pureté

Discern what size
the water is, that it is immeasurable
[and] incomprehensible, both its beginning
and its end. It supports the earth; it blows in the air
where
the gods and the angels are.
But in him who is exalted
above all these there is the fear
and the light, and in him are my writings revealed.
(...)
It is he who possesses
what is in him by discerning [it] in purity.

Et puis des profondeurs du temps soudain surgit l'écho de notre pratique, dans ces franges de textes qui ont donné la couleur à ces époques où personne de ces pratiquants ne cherchait la controverse ou la gloire du martyr. L'admonestation de rester présent à chaque instant semble se situer hors du temps, cet appel sans frontière qui nous interpelle:

Je suis issu de la puissance,
et je suis venu à ceux qui réfléchissent à moi
et j'ai été trouvée parmi ceux qui me
cherchent
Regarde moi, toi qui tourne ta pensée vers moi,
et vous, entendants, écoutez-moi.
Toi qui m'attends, prends moi pour toi-
même.

Et ne me bannit pas de ta vue.
Et fais en sorte que ta voix ne me hâisse pas, ni ton
écoute.
Ne m'ignore pas, en aucun lieu, en aucun
temps. Sois sur tes gardes!
Ne m'ignore pas.

Cette richesse que nous retrouvons en nous et qu'évoquent les textes de sources diverses, chrétiennes, islamiques, gnostiques, fait appel à l'âme humaine qui est la même, d'une dénomination à l'autre. On entend déjà vibrer le gong, la voix du maître. Sois sur tes gardes!

Or, j'ai existé dès le commencement, parcourant tous
les chemins.
Or c'est moi qui suis le trésor de la lumière;
c'est moi qui suis la mémoire de la plénitude.
Et j'ai voyagé dans l'immensité de la nuit,
Et j'ai continué jusqu'au coeur de la prison.
Et les fondements même du chaos furent ébranlés.
Et pour ma part, je me suis caché d'eux à cause de
leur méchanceté;
Et ils ne m'ont pas reconnue.
(...)
"Suis tes racines, qui sont moi-même, le
compatissant;
"Sois sur tes gardes contre les anges de la pauvreté et les
démons du chaos et tous ceux qui s'entremêlent à
toi;
"Et sois éveillé, [maintenant que tu émerges] du
lourd
sommeil et hors du vêtement de l'intérieur de
l'Hadès.

I was sent forth from [the] power,
and I have come to those who reflect upon
me,
and I have been found among those who
seek after me.
Look upon me, you who reflect upon me,
and you hearers, hear me.
You who are waiting for me, take me to
yourselves.
And do not banish me from your sight.
And do not make your voice hate me, nor your
hearing.
Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or any
time. Be on your guard!
Do not be ignorant of me.

For, I have existed in the beginning, travelling in
every path of travel.
For it is I who am the riches of light;
It is I who am the memory of the fullness.
And I traveled in the greatness of the darkness,
And I continued until I entered the midst of the
prison.
And the foundations of chaos moved.
And for my part, I hid from them because of their
evil;
and they did not recognize me.
(...)
"Follow your root, which is myself, the
compassionate;
"Be on your guard against the angels of poverty and
the
demons of chaos and all those who are entwined
with you;
"And be wakeful, [now that you have come] out of
heavy
sleep and out of the garment in the interior of
Hades.

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Sitting Long and Getting Old

Jean Low

Somebody said to me the other day, "When you were listening to that music, you looked like a young woman. I replied, "John, I am a young woman!"

Everyone who lives long enough learns this secret. I remember asking my mother what it was like being old; she must have been at that time not much older than I am now. She was a tiny woman, not reaching my shoulder, with a humped back; she had lost most of her voice from shock during a bombing incident in World War 2; and she was very deaf. She looked up at me and said, "I don't feel old, I feel like I have always felt."

Of course, one gets all sort of aches and pains, and can't do many of the things one used to be able to do - I look back with wonder on all the things I used to be able to get through in a day, in an hour. Nevertheless, when one sees that reflection in the mirror, it is always somehow a surprise. Some people try to identify with what they see there, become what they see. Others take a paint brush and indignantly paint over it.

I remember when I first discovered I could walk through walls - what an amazing discovery. What freedom. Well of course, not literally through walls, but that was the best way I could describe it. All those insurmountable barriers, like solid brick walls - I could just walk through them! Like all these things, it is not something one discovers, uncovers, and then "has" - each wall calls for a new discovery, a new uncovering. And sometimes one just can't do it. But one knows it is possible - that is its own freedom. "Old aged" is just another wall to walk through. Dharma gates without

number, I vow to penetrate. To me it has always felt more like walking through walls than walking through gates. The image of going through a gate does not give the miraculous quality of this ability we have.

I remember when I was pregnant I didn't look forward to "having a baby". I looked forward to the arrival of another being. It was so clear to me: a being just like me, except it would have a tiny, helpless body for a while. It is so easy in life to lose sight of the fact that behind the pout, behind the grumpiness, behind the whines and behind the wrinkles; there is that miracle, another being. Or, if you like, buddha nature.

What is so wonderful about going to dokusan? Each time you sit in front of a real teacher, that teacher passes through those dharma gates, walks through all the barriers, direct to you. And thereby gives you the possibility to do the same. Somebody said to me once, "I love to come to sesshin; I can just be myself." Not, I can just be an old woman, young woman, pretty woman, ugly woman - I can just be myself. People get all sorts of ideas about what they have to do to be themselves, to realise or fulfil themselves. At sesshin, in dokusan, one has the opportunity to get a real taste of what this means.

Louis read a beautiful piece on gratitude during the 20th anniversary sitting. How fortunate we have been to have these years and the opportunities they have given. ▼

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Gratitude

Texte lu lors de la journée de célébration du 20e anniversaire du Centre le 19 septembre dernier.

Louis Bricault

On dit de la gratitude qu'elle est une humilité joyeuse. Devant cette vie, si précieuse et si fragile, impétueuse pourtant comme un torrent qui, d'instant en instant, rugit sous notre peau et vient s'apaiser au bord de nos gestes et en chacune de nos respirations...

Pour tout l'amour aussi que nous avons reçu dans notre vie: lorsque nous étions faibles et désespérés, qui tenait alors notre main et marchait à nos côtés pour nous soutenir?

Pour tous ceux qui nous ont accompagnés dans nos souffrances et avec qui nous avons partagé nos joies et nos rires...

Pour tout cela qui nous a été donné, laissons cette humilité joyeuse prendre place parmi nous.

Frères et soeurs, soyons également reconnaissants d'avoir trouvé en cette vie même une pratique spirituelle et rendons grâce à tous ceux et celles qui, jour après jour, au-travers des temps passés, ont gardé vivants les enseignements du Bouddha et nous les ont confiés. Devant nos maîtres et devant tous ceux qui nous ont précédés sur cette grande voie, joignons les mains en gassho et laissons notre cœur exprimer sa gratitude.

N'oublions pas à quel point nous sommes bénis d'avoir soif de vérité.

Oui, on dit de la gratitude qu'elle est une humilité joyeuse. Laissons-la aujourd'hui prendre place parmi nous et nous rappeler comme il est merveilleux d'être vivants. ▼

Brothers and sisters... Today is a fine day to be grateful.

Louis Bricault

Let us bow to this life, so precious and frail. Hands in gassho, let us remember all those who have loved us, cared for us, all those who have walked by our side when we were weak, holding our hand in times of suffering and rejoicing with us in times of joy. May our hearts be open to all those who have helped us to be alive today and may we enter into each moment of our life with newfound wonder.

Let us also wholeheartedly be grateful to have a spiritual practice in this life and bow to all those who have carried the Buddha's teaching to this present day. Let us rejoice that we are able to practice. We came into this world naked and helpless, and yet today we are healthy and strong enough to be here, sitting in zazen.

Let us be grateful to have companions on the Way with whom we can share and practice. And let us never forget how blessed we are to feel so profoundly this thirst for truth in our existence. How mysterious is this unappeased longing in our lives! It compels us to release our hearts in gratitude for all that we have been given so abundantly!

Yes, brothers and sisters...
Today is a fine day to be grateful.
It is the only day in our life.
How fortunate we are to be alive. ▼

This text was inspired by the book *A Lotus in the fire* by Jim Bedard, Shambala Publications, 1999.



A Visitor to the Zendo

David Booth



The zendo in this coastal town is not easy to find. Even if you do find the back street, the Chinese elms and the unimposing house, the door is hidden. At the back of the house, a short path of flagstones leads you along a cedar hedge to a meagre pine tree. There a doorway descends to what was once a cellar. The door latch is of the type that you have to press with your thumb and the door is so short that you must lower your head to pass. The first impression for some may be that nothing of worth can be found within. Indeed there is little sign of spiritual practice. But if you do enter and become accustomed to the low cramped ceiling, small windows and dim light, you will find the zendo; a bare plywood floor, a wall of old furnace tiles, bamboo partitions and a row of mats and cushions. A simple altar is set into an opaque window. For some, this is little better than a cave. For those that practice here however, this is a precious place.

It is not often that someone comes searching. Rarer still is that person who enters and despite the apparent dullness of the place asks, in essence, “tell me, what it’s all about”. For an instant there arises within me a sensation that replies “ah no, I’ve practice to do, I don’t need disturbance”. This is but a fleeting sensation. It is overtaken by the acknowledgement that this person is as myself, in search of something, anything, that might ease the sense of ill being. What now is the practice?

Some years ago I would have answered the inquiry without hesitation, explaining this and that, all in my then opinion necessary for a rigorous and upright sitting. But I would have been oblivious to much. Now, I admit, I face this questioning visitor with hesitation and trepidation. What can one say?

One might be tempted to describe one’s own practice; long hours of sitting in a cramped position, a feeling of being lost and abandoned by life, a sensation of hopelessness and despair or the urge to continue in spite of all. This might discourage the faint hearted and filter out those likely to persevere. Or one could present hopes and aspirations, hinting at the possibility of a freedom beyond the binds of condi-

tioning and conceptualisation. This might encourage the visitor to try sitting as a means to continue the search that brought him. One could also simply show the person how to sit with a solid base, a low centre of gravity and a straight back. Perhaps, one could refer him to the writings of our teacher, or better still encourage him to contact a master. None of this musing however touches the heart of the problem. The visitor is here and needs a word. Who else can offer it but the other who is with him. There is no escape.

This other is himself a student of the practice. His understanding is very partial, so partial that he would prefer to keep his mouth shut rather than pronounce a single word. Maybe this is all that can be done. There is nevertheless an urge to be, to embrace this occasion of life, to participate, to contribute, to live the moment in complete fullness. Now what?

This is not unlike the situation that I find myself at this very moment, attempting to write a text about the practice for Zen Gong, all the while conscious that there are others who are so able, so skilled in the use of words to indicate the direction. But a word has been requested and no one else is here to write it. I hesitate though. What good is a word or indeed a string of words? There are already so many collections of words captured in symbols of numerous types. Some collections are revered, others are hoarded and stored in high security. There are those that are studied and examined word by word. Many collect dust and are lost. The vast majority are discarded with little attention. Does any one of these touch the heart of the matter? I am tempted to abandon this text once and for all as a hopeless endeavour. It simply cannot succeed, for with every word that appears on the screen, there is a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. Another word has to be added, another sentence, another paragraph, and the text still does not express that which is trying to be expressed. Nevertheless, I continue. There is an urge to be, to let be, to allow it be. If writing for Zen Gong be it, so be it. Partial understanding and lack of clarity may obstruct the flow of words and allow doubt to dominate, but they are as they are and remove



nothing from this moment. And even with full clarity, if I dare so aspire, what then? Would that change what is now?

The visitor at the door still waits. Do I respond? What good is any word that I might say? I can try however. I could call up all the memories of experience, all the intuitions as to what the visitor might need, all the aspirations under the sun. I know though that this is not enough. Perhaps it is too much. Perhaps one needs to return to the beginning. Who then is this inquirer? From where did he come? In the very acknowledging of his presence, I face him. I am then he who is called on to respond. I feel in the instant as someone, as something. Is this a lack of clarity?

Is it possible for a moment to imagine that the visitor is not a visitor, that there is no need for any boundary? What then? What word? Is there indeed any response?

A hunger to know.

So much of what I do is born out of effort. In attempting to achieve almost anything, there is effort. There is effort in cycling against the wind, in digging the vegetable patch and in getting up early up to sit. There is effort too in trying to respond to an inquiry. This effort, it seems to me, has in general the effect of separating you and me. So habitual is it that I take it as normal. There appears to be effort not only in the initial separation but also in the maintenance of this separation. Establishing myself and keeping it there requires continual work.

There is however another kind of effort. This is the effort that cleans the bathroom and prepares the evening meal. It walks just as it sits. It cycles too. It has a different feel. It does not create you and me. It doesn't throw up boundaries. It is an absorbing effort. But can this effort answer the visitor's question? Can it point the way? And what is this effort? What effort creates no duality? ❀

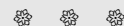
Chers amis de la Sangha,

Depuis quatorze mois, nous sommes en négociations avec la Ville de Montréal pour légaliser l'utilisation de la maison et du zendo. Il semblerait que les représentants de la Ville n'avait pas pensé nous en parler il y a vingt-deux ans lorsque nous avons fait nos demandes d'exemption de taxes. Tout d'abord, en janvier une loi de permission spéciale a été adoptée. Elle nous autorise à utiliser le zendo et la maison dans une zone résidentielle. Finalement, mardi le 25 juin, nous avons obtenu le dernier document légal nécessaire, un certificat d'occupation. Nous pouvons maintenant légalement continuer notre pratique telle que nous l'avons fait au cours des vingt-deux dernières années, sans avoir à modifier les bâtiments de quelque façon que ce soit. Les Boddhisattvas ont travaillé très fort pour nous tous, soyons reconnaissants.



Dear friends of the Sangha,

During the last fourteen months, we have been negotiating with the City of Montreal for the legalization of our use of the house and the zendo. It seems that twenty-two years ago, when we asked for our tax exemption status, the City's representatives had not thought to inform us about it. As a first step, last January, a law was passed giving us a special permission to use the zendo and the house in a residential area. Then finally on Tuesday the 25th of June, we obtained the last legal document we required, a certificate of occupancy. We will now be able to legally continue our practice as we have done for the last twenty-two years without having to modify our buildings in any way. The Boddhisattvas worked very hard for all of us, let us be grateful.



Writing for the Zen Gong

Andrejs Skaburskis



Have you ever been asked to write for the Zen Gong, a short piece, a page that should take no more than an hour or two? After a sesshin last winter Louis asked if I would write about my home practice, my own essay in the Zen Gong, not an ordinary journal and not at all in my field. Of course I answered, “yes” in part because the request was flattering, a welcome boost after struggling in the dark. Though writing has always been difficult, a page should be finished before breakfast. Because this did not at all turn out to be the case, Monique asked me to write again, but about writing for the Zen Gong.

The first draft, like that for any think-piece, spreads quickly across lined paper and, after being put on the screen, some editing should make it presentable. Nothing unusual here, but this is the Zen Gong and, of course, a page about home practice should reflect the practice as well as its setting and here starts the slide into this endless spiral of contemplation and reflection and revision. Actions on all open systems create unending streams of side- and after-effects, with each bringing its own unending flow of consequence. And more, the consequences change the valuations of the conditions that inspired the actions with their never-endings. Writing the essay changes the essay to be written just as sitting changes sitting. Unending mountains of squishiness here. Unending boundaries to cross. Unending revisions to come.

But revisions build on revisions and I have work to do that should stop the need for even more revisions. But then, do these words convey the practice or point insightfully to its lack? Does the page reflect me well? Does it let me boast to me; is it subtle also clever, elegant and direct, is it rich while staying honest, is it complete and still much more. Or, is it just the love of self and the need for its expression? Not narcissism here, not at all: perhaps it’s just not willing to accept the limits; perhaps it’s wishing to be more. Try to keep this essay simple; work is work and nothing more. Keep away the foil of ego. Keep the essay on its subject. But the need for self-delusion is so entrenched to keep the page for years enticing. Will revisions move us forward? Can revisions quell the need for more revision?

And then again the essay beckons with a word to make you think again about its meaning. What nuances are showing, what is the word reflecting or evoking? Is the sound right? Is the edge close? Think again, turn it over and fit another in its place. Is it closer? Is it needed? This is not unpleasant work but even after this revision, the shadow remains as a far off vision, so try again to bring it back and here again is need for yet another revision. Is it ending? Is it over? Is the shadow coming home? Enough for now! There is work to do. Send it in, get it out; it’s just a page, no glory here, no peer review. Be done with this that’s forever changing, challenging and alluring.

So how do you spend your time when you alone can set its task? You can start another page or churn some numbers for some other paper. Why come back for more revisions to this same but changing tack?

The novelty could be the pull. The challenge, the draw. The darkness is enthralling and the shadows should be blending. The subject is attracting and may be motivating the revisions that keep the essay’s meaning turning. Like a Koan with its facets does the quest for extra meaning make this work so never-ending? Or is it the need for more than meaning? What do you think? Are the reasons themselves changing? Is the meaning itself shifting? Stop the edit; go to work. But the text remains awaiting.

There is balancing of life and practice, practicing and the thoughts of practice. Obligations and commitments limit time for more revisions. There is work to do, end the paper bring it home. But the text remains, quietly awaiting.

You may never have this problem and may finish before breakfast. No matter, for excessive thinking may be just what’s done instead of doing. Here again is food for another revision on top of that last revision that was always ending, always searching, always changing and attracting. But still the text remains, quietly awaiting. ❁

In the Graveyard of the Self

Sarah Webb



A longstanding practice in Buddhism is to look into one's fear of death by sitting in a graveyard. Many modern Buddhists face and investigate death by volunteering in hospices, sitting with the dying, or helping care for people who are gravely ill.

The time near death is very charged, very vivid. When we think of the deaths we have participated in - the times at the hospital, nursing our relatives, final conversations, funerals - these times are powerful in our minds. Someone is passing from this world to the next. We feel our desire to keep them, and our loss and fear. We also feel the mystery. When the gate between life and death opens, we can sense something sacred. So when my father died, I kissed his cheek and bowed to him, slipping into ceremony instinctively.

My father had a good death, a stroke at ninety-two. For a day he could communicate with us by squeezing our hands, stroking them to tell us his love, reacting to our words. He slipped deeper then, past us. In four days he was gone.

When my daughter was born, I used to puzzle over the mystery of it. There was no one there, and then there was. With my father, it was similar. He was there, so much himself, and then he wasn't. How could that be possible ?

I do not know what happens after we die - if we continue in some part still ourselves. If we melt into something greater, if we are reborn, if we are with those we love. There seems to be a self that dies. Is there such a self ? And is there anything that lives on past the death of the personality ? Sometimes it troubles me not to know these things.

My mother is dying too, but in a much different way, and I am learning from her also, though what I am learning raises more questions than it settles. Mother's death may take her years. She has dementia, probably from Alzheimer's.

With dementia the brain is losing the ability to process and remember. The cause may be

Alzheimer's, decreased oxygen to the brain, strokes, or other problems. Some of these causes are reversible ; some, like Alzheimer or stroke, are not. Someone with dementia has more and more trouble with memory, usually first with short term memory and finding words, later with deeper processes such as reasoning, long term memory, motor skills. Some kinds of dementia progress to coma and death. Restlessness or apathetic inactivity may come with dementia. Social skills are forgotten too, so the person may do inappropriate things such as swear or hit. Some people, like my mother, become delusional. Personality changes take place.

Like an engine sputtering and misfiring and suddenly catching, someone with dementia may suddenly remember things forgotten ; they have good days when more of their functions are available and downswings when they lose those gains. Medicine can slow the decline but not stop it. But, though the person is greatly changed, something of them remains.

In my mother's case, month by month I see her going. In the beginning it was memories, skills, words that left and an apathy that sent her to her bed. Now she seems to be struggling to keep her personality from breaking up.

No permanent self is one of the ideas we are exposed to in Buddhism. I have tended to interpret those words to mean that our personality does not survive death, though some deeper aspect of ourselves may. And that we are not one integrated personality but a braid of temporary selves that emerge along with circumstances. My self at three in the tub sucking the water from the washcloth is not the self of fifty-seven writing these words on the plane nor the self who rushed through airport corridors to begin this journey. I believe there is some continuity between these states. But what is that continuity ? Old mental and emotional habits, self concept, memories ? That sense of seeing, hearing, tasting, knowing - is that a self ? Does it continue, even after death ?

One thing that is obvious from this time with

my mother is that memory is a vital component of the self we think we are. Like so many people with dementia, my mother does not have enough memory left to play the roles that sustained her through the years. She struggles to retain the sense she had of an ongoing self. « I'm Doris Webb, » she tells me, telling herself so she can hold onto this center. But the memory trace is evaporating. What she has of twenty-five years of retirement at the lake with her husband is a handful of words : « Did we live at Silver Creek ? Was there a Sunday House ? » Photos bring back the immediate family - her three children, and, yes, her son has died, the new great grandbaby, her husband Holmes. « I graduated from Texas Tech, » she tells me, in a sudden access of memory. « I have three degrees. » Then she rolls over. « It doesn't matter, » she says. « Nothing matters at all. »

She takes her fragments of memory and tries to make sense of them. Many words are gone and the concepts that go with them. There are holes in her reasoning, in her associations. She adds the facts up in weird ways, lacking the ability to sort out what could be true from what is fantasy. « We died in a car wreck, » she tells me. « I was fifty-three, Holmes was sixty-three. You say I am an old woman but that's ridiculous. We died together. I am dead - get a stretcher. » I take her pulse, try to dissuade her from this delusion, but she continues, satisfied at having put the pieces of her memory together in a way that makes sense of them.

She scratches, she bites, she kicks. She takes off her clothes and tosses them and the pictures in a pile in the center of the room. She also holds my hand, pets my hair (« You have curly dark hair, » she always says when she sees me. Then, « You're my daughter. » The hair is a pathway to remembering me.) « We love each other, » she says, and her eyes shine.

Some things go deep, so my mother, who was always the one in charge, the powerful one in our family, resorts to hitting like a two year old to feel some sense of power in a chaotic world. The love goes deep too. Some days she forgets that her husband has died, but she always smiles when she sees his face in the photo. She rubs her finger over his mouth. « I liked to kiss him, » she says. She beams when she sees my sister or me, sometimes asks about our children, sits photos of the family on her bed and works at remembering our names. « We all have blue eyes, » she says. « We have been very fortunate because we love each other. » Does love come out when so much has gone because this was the most important thing

in her life ? Or because it is a bedrock of reality ? Sitting in the graveyard shows the monk that death will come, lets the monk turn toward it, despite resistance. Sitting with my mother shows me that the personality is not permanent, makes me ask, do we have a self that does last ?

Day by day my mother reaches for the scraps of her memory, tries to reconstruct a self and a world. This week she is fifty-three and dead. And this week I am fifty-seven and living alone on the lake. I am only vaguely a college professor and a mother - for both job and daughter have been left behind me for these eight months of leave from my job. I live in my mother's old house and visit her each day in the nursing home. Our relationship has greatly changed. I am no longer rebelling against a mother I love and fear. I am mothering an eighty-six year old child. I return to the lake house and am surrounded by the accumulated furniture, pictures, crockery of a sixty-four year marriage - objects to dust, mend, crate - mementos of a past that neither I nor my mother now remember - all we gather to ourselves to remind who we are.

I spend most of my time here alone - researching, walking, cooking. I call home, but my daughter, a new college student, is often out. Often I feel down, anxious. I look at the lake gleaming and moving out the window. I fill two garbage bags with food too old to safely eat, box up paperbacks for the Library Thrift Store, sort my mother's dresses into a back closet.

Is my sense of self breaking up like my mother's ? No, not really, just some crumbling at the edges. But it is very like sitting in the graveyard. I am sitting with old age, disease, and death, with the impermanence of the self, with the way I too may go when I die.

I notice things about how my sister and I interact with my mother. For one thing, we try to pull her back to the social reality, a fight she also is engaged in. We supply her with pictures, read her the letters our father wrote when he was alive, tell her stories of her life, advise her to speak politely to the aides and not hit them. To her anxious questions we reply again and again, « You are eighty-seven. You lived at the lake. You have two daughters. » Is this what is best for her ? It seems so.

We have our agenda for what's good for her. She should eat her supper, take her medicine, get out of bed, look out the window. But our mother has her own way, and resists our efforts to control her.



So long old friend

Recently I came in no mood for a struggle. I made no suggestion to go out on the patio. If my mother asked for her milk, I handed it to her, but I didn't ask her if she wanted to eat. I held her hand. We were quiet together and the afternoon stretched on, happy and calm. It could have been just a good day, and my sister and I have some concerns - as my mother has lain in bed for weeks she has been weakening. But we have to keep in mind that this is her process, that there is no one way of handling being ill or dying.

When my mother has a good day - a day when she is happier or a memory comes back to her of an old friend and a trip they took, some fragment of her life - we tend to grab onto that improvement, to tell ourselves (though we know it isn't true) that Mother is getting better. The myth of progress dies hard. Mother's level goes up and down, at times dramatically, but she will not get cured. It is that basic tendency to hold to what is perceived as good, to push away what is perceived as bad, and to hope for something better. When we relax from that, just take her as she is, she and we are happier.

Early on when my mother began to clearly decline, I listened to a tape by Victoria Howard, called « Your Aging Parents. » She said that people think of the sacrifice of caregiving but they don't understand the reward. I was encouraged by what she said, that caregiving can deepen your relationship with your parent, can be a chance to heal old wounds. There were times of anger that lay between my mother and me and made me wary of her. Though we've both worked hard to forgive, a distance had remained. The distance is very little now. ❀



Purring softly in our lap
And eyes closed in perfect sleep
With a deep and sweet content
She dwells in our hearts

Pouncing gladly in a dream
And catching the elusive mouse
With only a twitch to show it all
She dwells in our hearts

Roger Brouillette ❀

Babillard

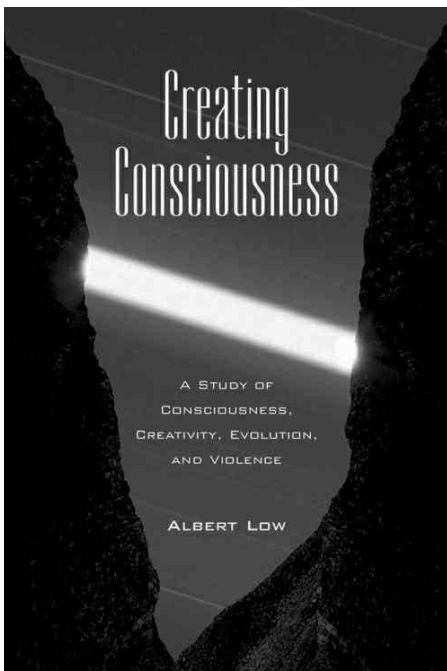
Les matinées du dimanche

Les matinées de méditation du dimanche matin se continueront en septembre. Rappelons qu'elles ont lieu de 9hres à midi ; nous faisons trois périodes de zazen et nous écoutons un teisho enregistré. Tous les membres peuvent y participer. Voici les dates

SEPTEMBRE : 15, 22, 29
OCTOBRE : 6, 20
NOVEMBRE : 3, 24
DÉCEMBRE : 1, 15, 22

Sunday mornings

Sunday morning meditations will continue in September. These will start at 9 o'clock and as usual there will be 3 periods of zazen and a recorded teisho. All members are welcome. The dates are as above.



CREATING CONSCIOUSNESS

You will at last have the opportunity to read Albert's magnificent book. It will be published in the first weeks of July.



Le Zen Gong en disque compact

Pour marquer notre dixième anniversaire, Jacques Lespérance a converti tous les anciens numéros du Zen Gong en format PDF lisible à la fois sur les plateformes Mac et PC. Si vous désirez vous procurer ce disque compact, s.v.p. adressez-vous à Jacques. Pour la modique somme de 25\$, vous aurez la possibilité de lire tous les articles déjà parus depuis dix ans - et de les faire lire à vos enfants et petits-enfants !

Jacques Lespérance: (514) 844-6092
courriel : jacqueslesperance@videotron.ca

The Zen Gong CD

To mark the Zen Gong's tenth anniversary Jacques Lespérance has converted all the past issues of Zen Gong to PDF files which can be read on the Mac and PC platforms. If you are interested to have this CD, please contact Jacques at the addresses below. For \$25 you will have all the articles ever published since the beginning and the possibility to share them with your children and grand-children !

Jacques Lespérance: (514) 844-6092
email: jacqueslesperance@videotron.ca

A Bow of Gratitude

In Zen it is said that people work and come to awakening, other people come to awakening and then they work. But whatever either way work has to be done. People sometimes say « Why do I have to add to the work that has to be done with all of this sitting and pains in the legs and uncomfortable sleeping conditions and so on during sesshin ? »

Yasutani roshi used to say : « The work that one does during a sesshin is a thousand times more valuable than work that one can do anywhere else outside sesshin. » It is the very concentrated nature of the practice itself that enables us to get to depths in our practice during a sesshin that are just impossible to get outside. And furthermore it seems, for most of us anyway, it is essential that we have the support of other people to enable us to maintain the discipline necessary in order to reach those depths.

This, let me remind you, is why we do the bows when we stand up after a round of sitting - we stand up, the inkin bell rings and we bow to one another. And this bow is a recognition that we are making to the strenght and support that others had provided for us during that round of sitting. And that bow therefore is a bow of gratitude. ❁

Albert Low



(extract from teisno May/2002)



Calendrier 2003

Le Centre Zen de Montréal : 824, rue Parc Stanley, H2C 1A2

Téléphone : (514) 388-4518 Internet : <http://www.zenmontreal.ca/>

Janvier / January

Vendredi / Friday 10-12 - - - - - Sesshin de deux jours / Two day sesshin
Dimanche / Sunday 19, 26 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Février / February

Samedi / Saturday 1- - - - - Atelier / Workshop
Dimanche / Sunday 2- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sesshin
Jeudi / Thursday 6, 20, 27 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Vendredi / Friday 7-14 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin
Dimanche / Sunday 16, 23 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Mars / March

Dimanche / Sunday 2, 23, 30 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Jeudi / Thursday 6, 20, 27- - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Samedi / Saturday 8- - - - - Atelier / Workshop
Dimanche / Sunday 9- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sesshin
Jeudi / Thursday 13-16 - - - - - Sesshin de trois jours / Three day sesshin

Avril / April

Jeudi / Thursday 3, 10, 24 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Dimanche / Sunday 6, 13 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Samedi / Saturday 12 - - - - - Atelier / Beginner's course
Jeudi / Thursday 17-21 - - - - - Sesshin de quatre jours / Four day sesshin
Samedi 26 - - - - - Journée de travail et Assemblée annuelle
Saturday 26 - - - - - Workday and annual meeting
Dimanche / Sunday 27- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sesshin

Mai / May

Jeudi / Thursday 1, 8, 15- - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Dimanche / Sunday 4, 11, 25 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Vendredi / Friday 16-23 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin

Juin / June

Dimanche / Sunday 1- - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Vendredi / Friday 6-8 - - - - - Sesshin de deux jours / Two day sesshin
Jeudi / Thursday 19-22 - - - - - Sesshin de trois jours / Three day sesshin

Août / August

Jeudi / Thursday 28-Sept.1 - - - - - Sesshin de quatre jours / Four day sesshin

Septembre / September

Samedi / Saturday 6- - - - - Atelier / Workshop
Dimanche / Sunday 7- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting
Jeudi / Thursday 11, 18, 25 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Dimanche / Sunday 14, 21, 28 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen

Octobre / October

Jeudi / Thursday 2, 9, 23, 30 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Samedi / Saturday 4- - - - - Atelier / Workshop
Dimanche / Sunday 5, 19 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Vendredi / Friday 10-17 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin
Samedi / Saturday 25 - - - - - Journée de travail / Workday
Dimanche / Sunday 26- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting

Novembre / November

Dimanche / Sunday 2, 23, 30 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Jeudi / Thursday 6, 20, 27- - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Samedi / Saturday 8 - - - - - Atelier / Workshop
Dimanche / Sunday 9- - - - - Séance d'une journée / One day sitting
Jeudi / Thursday 13-16 - - - - - Sesshin de trois jours / Three day sesshin

Décembre / December

Jeudi / Thursday 4, 18 - - - - - Cours pour les débutants / Beginner's course
Vendredi / Friday 5-12 - - - - - Sesshin de sept jours / Seven day sesshin
Dimanche / Sunday 14, 21 - - - - - Avant-midi de zazen / Morning zazen
Mardi 31 (20h00 à minuit) - - - - - Cérémonie du Nouvel An
Tuesday 31 (8PM-Midnight) - - - - - New Year's Eve Ceremony

Friend, hope for the Guest while you are alive.
Jump into experience while you are alive !
Think... and think... while you are alive.
What you call « salvation » belongs to the time
before death.

If you don't break your ropes while you're alive,
do you think
ghosts will do it after ?

The idea that the soul will join with the ecstatic
just because the body is rotten -
that is all fantasy.
What is found now is found then.
If you find nothing now,
you will simply end up with an apartment in the
City of Death.

If you make love with the divine now, in the next life
you will have the face of the satisfied desire.

So plunge into the truth, find out who the Teacher is,
Believe in the Great Sound !

Kabir says this : When the Guest is being searched for, it is
the intensity of the longing for the Guest that
does all the work.

Look at me, and you will see a slave of that intensity.

Kabir ❁
